Rough Beginnings

by tothevision

Summary

Quinn decides she needs to end this obsession once and for all, but life doesn't always work out the way we want it to. Sometimes it's so much better.

Notes

Takes place after 2x09 and goes AU from there! (Also, this first chapter is more of a prologue because of how short it is. The rest of the chapters will be significantly longer.)
The First Time Quinn Kissed Rachel Berry

The first time Quinn kissed Rachel Berry was in third grade. She had fallen off the monkey bars and started crying. A tiny brunette nearby saw and ran over to console her. This girl was so sweet and reassuring, bubbling over with promises that everything would be alright. As Quinn watched in disbelief, the brunette pressed a small finger to her lips before touching it to her elbow where Quinn had banged it then repeated the same action for every other place she had injured herself. When the girl was done, she looked at her with big brown eyes and flashed one of the most brilliant smiles Quinn had ever seen. A real one. Not at all like the fake ones her mother had when company came over after she'd just had a bad fight with her father.

"Better?" she asked shyly.

So taken aback by the rare kindness this girl had shown her, kindness she was so unaccustomed to, Quinn couldn't help herself. When she realized what she did, she punched Rachel in the nose and ran away.

The second time she kissed Rachel Berry was after the diva had outed Quinn's secret to Finn about Puck being the father. Rachel apologized, offered the chance to punch her again, "just not the nose", but she just sent her away. After school when she was walking through the parking lot to her car, Rachel ran up to her to apologize again. Quinn's mouth silenced her and this time she didn't punch her after.

The third time she kissed Rachel Berry was after Finn had broken up with her in the hallway for everyone to see, including Quinn. She found the crying girl in the auditorium, hiding in the wings.

After that, she stopped keeping track.

It's not like she really wanted to admit why she would ever kiss Rachel. At least not out loud. It became a mental block in her head. She was quite good at that. She'd had experience after all - it was the only way she made it through a day without being plagued by thoughts of the child she had lost.

But she couldn't get herself to stop kissing Rachel either. With each one, the desire for more increased exponentially. After the auditorium, Quinn realized that she was actually craving Rachel Berry. And this had nothing to do with baby hormones (as she had excused the last time).

Okay, fine, so she wasn't thinking about it, but she sure as hell was doing it.
Quinn avoided her for a few days after that, focused on spending time with Sam, which only made it worse because her boyfriend was just a constant reminder of what she didn't want. Rachel would avert her eyes when they passed in the hallway and did everything she could to avoid her in Glee. At first Quinn thought that would be a good thing, but then she realized how much it actually hurt to see the other girl turn away.

If she wanted to kiss Rachel, then she'd damn well get what she wanted. She was Quinn Fabray and the Fabrays always got what they wanted. It didn't matter why or how or anything else.

This was just a phase really. She just needed to get the girl out of her system. That's what it was. The sooner the better and then she could get her life back on track.

With that in mind, she pursued any chance she had of getting Rachel alone and used it to her full advantage.

What Quinn had never forgotten, could never forget, the only thing that truly managed to escape her mental block, was that in all those kisses, even back in third grade, Rachel had always kissed her back.
Home Invasion

Rachel was striving valiantly to finish her homework, but her attention was determined to wander. It was a Friday night though; she really didn't need to be doing it right this second, did she? Well, it wasn't like she had any better plans. Even her fathers were engaging in a more active social life than she was right now, at their friend's house for the evening.

When her attention wandered, it usually went to making plans for when she left Lima for New York, or adding to her extensive song list that would make for spectacular performances in Glee club, or finding ways to keep Mr. Schuester from ruining her life, or even about the either hurtful/kind comment Finn had made that day - those bounced back and forth more than a ping pong ball.

Lately though, it always wandered to just one person, one very beautiful, blonde, at times frightening, person. Rachel never knew what to make of her relationship with Quinn Fabray. 99.9% of the time she was certain that girl hated her with every fiber of her being, but then she would do something that shook Rachel to the core. She would kiss her. Afterwards, it was as if it never happened and they went back to the normal hatred/torment.

But after Finn had broken up with her for the terribly thoughtless mistake she had made with Noah, things were different somehow. Quinn didn't go back to the 99.9%. Instead it was more like 30% and that was only around Santana and the others. And it wasn't just one kiss now; it was a lot of them, to the point where if Rachel found herself alone, she half expected Quinn to jump her from some shadowed corner. Yet, in all the kisses they shared, sometimes passionate and brutal, sometimes unaccountably sweet, sometimes lazy, sometimes chaste and reassuring, they never spoke about it. Quinn would leave as soon as they broke apart, never giving Rachel the chance to say anything.

And she had no idea what to make of it.

What really mattered, though, was why she continued to let the girl do it. Why did she always let Quinn kiss her? Why did she always kiss her back? How was it possible that this girl, Quinn Fabray of all people, was able to make her feel these things? How did Quinn manage to set her body on fire in a way that even her most heated and intimate of make out sessions with previous boyfriends never achieved?

Rachel always knew she harbored some attraction to women, but it never seemed enough to make her question her sexuality further. Quinn changed all that. After their second kiss in the parking lot, Rachel was pretty sure she was at least bisexual. After she had found her in the auditorium, Rachel knew for certain she was gay, with a somewhat mild attraction to boys.

At least, she was certainly gay for Quinn Fabray.

But the way the blonde seemed to want things between them was frustrating as all get out. She couldn't get a word in edgewise before Quinn vanished, always leaving her shaky and breathless. Rachel was terrified that if she actually did manage the chance to speak one of these days, Quinn would stop.

And she couldn't bear that.

Quinn's actions made it very clear that she considered this a purely physical arrangement and was in no way interested in pursuing anything further with Rachel. So it was either take what she could get, and that was some of the most mind-blowing kisses she had ever experienced, or end it and return to their previous ways where Quinn made a point to cut her down at every turn, essentially making her
life at McKinley High a living hell.

Well, she was going to take what she could get, with the slim hope that someday Quinn would be more receptive to opening up their…this…to something more.

Good lord, this could not actually be happening. She wanted more? She wanted… This wasn't happening! She was actually falling for Quinn Fabray. If she were in her right mind, she would be laughing her head off at even the mere idea of such lunacy. As it was…she was not in her right mind and this was all likely to turn out to be some oddly linear, realistic dream she was having.

Licking her lips, Rachel recalled their most recent encounter earlier that day in the choir room after everyone had left. She had stayed behind to collect some sheet music when Quinn whirled her around and pinned her against the piano. Rachel hadn't even realized how far they were going until some random shouts from students passing by broke them out of the haze. She gulped as Quinn's hand came out from underneath her skirt. How had she let that happen? Finn had never even gotten anywhere remotely near that level of intimacy and suddenly Quinn was making her lose all sense?

As always, the blonde removed herself and took off without a word. Rachel had to sit on the piano bench for several minutes just to recover.

Just thinking about it now had her feeling flushed all over, just as she had been in the choir room. Rachel could swear she still tasted her.

The doorbell rang, shaking her from her reverie, and she frowned. Who would be showing up at her house at this hour? She looked at the clock. It was 10PM! Only takeout deliverymen and axe murderers would be arriving at this hour.

Not caring that she was in her pajamas, she padded downstairs. First, she peeked through the side window, just to be sure, and saw who was there. Eyes wide as saucers, she threw the door open, feeling like she'd just gotten the wind knocked out of her.

Quinn was standing on her doorstep ever still in her ever-present Cheerios uniform, hair pulled back into a flawless high ponytail, with a gym bag thrown over her shoulder, and an almost bored expression.

"Are your Dads home?"

Rachel was too stunned to answer, merely gaping.

Sighing impatiently, she shifted, and repeated the question.

"N-no," Rachel managed to stammer. "Quinn, what are yo-"

But the cheerleader just pushed her back into the house, kicking the door closed behind them.

"We're having a sleepover," she informed her curtly. "Where's your room?"

"Sleepover?" Rachel squeaked. "We are not-!"

She didn't get to finish because Quinn was already halfway up the stairs in search of Rachel's bedroom, forcing her to follow.

Oh, now this was just going too far! Rachel wasn't about to let that girl bully her way into her own home and demand…whatever she was demanding! No! She was putting her foot down.
Storming into her room, which Quinn had undoubtedly discovered thanks to the big pink door with
gold stars bordering it, Rachel opened her mouth to give her a stern talking to as to how this…
apportionment…was going to have to have certain rules placed upon it and Quinn was going to
listen now whether she liked it or not!

But Quinn wasn't there. Bewildered, Rachel saw her bag on the floor, so she knew she had at least
been in there… The door shut behind her and she whirled around. Soft lips attacked hers hungrily
and she responded purely out of instinct.

That whole 'stern talking to' speech flew right out of her mind.

Quinn kissed her fiercely, holding Rachel so their bodies were flush against each other. She moaned
helplessly into her mouth as she felt the other girl pressed against her. Rachel felt the air sucked out
of her lungs. It was so forceful, so bruising; it was almost too much.

Then it changed.

Just when she thought she wouldn't be able to handle the intensity with which the blonde had come
after her…Quinn slowed. The kiss morphed. It became different from what they had shared before,
in any previous encounter. There had always been some sort of purpose behind it, a need to prove
something, a desire to be met, but as Quinn kissed her slowly, languidly, their tongues meeting in
such a lazy, stroking fashion, it was like she was licking the fire in her belly to life.

This time it felt like Quinn was kissing her just to kiss her. That proved to elicit a more explosive
reaction than anything else she had experienced. Rachel could feel herself melting into the other girl's
embrace, holding on desperately now as she couldn't fathom standing on her own. Quinn sucked on
her bottom lip gently before delving further into the recesses of her mouth. A startling warmth curled
through Rachel's body so fast, her hands seized fistfuls of silky soft blonde hair.

Quinn took her hair down?

That was the only thought that registered because by then she found herself falling over the edge of
her bed with another's weight stretched out on top of her. That is until…

God, that feels so good…

Quinn buried her face in her neck, leaving hot open-mouthed kisses down it until she reached a
certain special spot that caused Rachel to gasp and squeeze the other girl's hips between her thighs.

"There, hm?" she said in a low, throaty chuckle and Rachel almost lost it altogether.

It didn't escape her that, starting with the door, this was the most Quinn had spoken to her in months.

She tugged the blonde back to her mouth. Quinn shifted on top of her and all of a sudden there was a
firm thigh pressed between her legs. Rachel yelped into her mouth in surprise at all the new
sensations it brought.

She knew this was wrong, she knew she should be stopping her, forcing them to talk about this, but
all she could think about was how badly she wanted to touch Quinn.

The other girl seemed to have a similar line of thought as her hands dragged down Rachel's sides
before sliding under her pajama top to make contact with her bare skin. As Quinn's elegant fingers
swept over her stomach, Rachel knew this was going to go too far. How was she going to stop
herself when her body was begging for it with everything it had?
Now that Quinn's hands had grown bolder, so had Rachel's. Breathing hard, heart hammering against her ribcage, she yanked on the Cheerios top hard, and with Quinn's help, it was disposed of in seconds. Rachel felt the wetness pooling between her thighs at the sight of Quinn Fabray in her athletic bra. It wasn't lacy. It wasn't designed for sex appeal. It was a bright red that matched her uniform and it was the sexiest thing Rachel had ever seen. Her pale, perfect breasts heaved with every ragged breath and it wasn't until she heard Quinn moan that Rachel realized she had flipped them over, her mouth and tongue laving over the exposed flesh with greedy abandon. She used her fingers to toy with the straining, hard nipples that poked through the fabric.

Quinn was letting her touch her! Quinn was enjoying letting her touch her!

The realization hit her so hard that Rachel paused for the slightest second. It was all the blonde needed to regain control again as she rolled them back over, thrusting her hips against the other girl.

Quinn's hands were everywhere. Quinn's mouth was everywhere. Oh, God! That was her tongue!

Warning bells like never before were going off in Rachel's head through the lust induced fog.

W-when had she taken off her own top?

Quinn's warm mouth covered one of her nipples, swirling her tongue round, before sucking lightly. Rachel whimpered, involuntarily grinding down on Quinn's flexed thigh between her legs. A tight, delicious feeling was coiling low in her belly as Quinn switched to the other side. It was building so quickly and her body was demanding release.

It felt so good, she didn't want it to stop, but oh God! She wasn't ready for this! It was too much! Too soon!

"Q-Quinn, stop!" she managed to stutter out in a panic.

Either the blonde didn't hear her or didn't listen, because she rubbed her thigh against Rachel's aching core and palmed her breasts before taking her mouth back again.

For a split second, Rachel considered just giving in to this, but no! She wouldn't let it be this way, not her first time, not like this, no matter how good it felt.

With a grunt of effort, she pushed Quinn off her and stumbled off the bed.

"I can't do this! I can't. I'm not…"

Her nakedness only added to her embarrassment. Keeping her back to her, Rachel covered her exposed chest with her arms as best she could, and tried to hold back the tears.

"Quinn you must understand that while I am undeniably attracted to you and very much enjoy our explorations of a sexual nature, I am not prepared in the least to be this intimate with you. You can't just barge in here like that and demand such things of me. I was okay with you using me when we stayed within set boundaries that I was comfortable with because I obviously received pleasure from it as well, but I won't allow you to use me like this. I'm not ready and I won't have you push me into it."

There…she'd made the right decision, but she was going to lose Quinn for it. There was no way the other girl was ever going to come within ten feet of her now. She'd broken the rules. She'd talked. She'd refused her advances. Rachel was in for hell to come, since Quinn would undoubtedly revert to her former ways with a renewed vengeance.
"I understand that you would very much like to leave now as I am obviously not going to allow you to achieve your previously set goal. So just go. You don't have to worry about me telling anyone, so you needn't bother with any heavy handed threats. This is between us. Just like always. So you can go now, okay?"

She waited, her body rigid with anxiety, as she heard some rustling noises behind her. Quinn had taken her advice and was getting her things together to leave without a word, as she always did.

Rachel decided to give her more time than necessary before turning around, because she really couldn't bring herself to look back and see the room empty once more. It was going to break her heart. The door closed and Rachel shut her eyes tightly, tears leaking out in spite of herself, and she stifled a sob.

Then she heard water running.

Turning around in confusion, she saw that her room was indeed empty, but Quinn's bag was still on the floor, as was her cheerleader top. Surely she hadn't been so pissed off that she stormed out without her things? She was topless for goodness sake!

The running water was coming from her bathroom, Rachel realized, seeing that the door was closed.

With a groan, she realized she had to wait for an even more uncomfortable departure as the blonde had not taken the easy out Rachel had offered.

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Quinn stared hard at herself in the mirror. For the first time in her life, she swore she couldn't recognize the person looking back at her. Her grip on the edge of the marble countertop tightened until her knuckles turned stark white.

It wasn't supposed to happen like this.

After weeks of this back and forth, her craving for Rachel was worse than ever. She couldn't get the girl out of her mind. She could hardly go for five minutes in the day without thinking of her. It was driving Quinn utterly out of her mind. These goddamn feelings she had were supposed to be dissipating by now! She should be getting bored! If this had been any boy, she would have lost interest ages ago, but Rachel was different. The more Quinn had, the more she wanted. It was never enough. It was so damned infuriating that she'd even reached the point where she kicked a hole in her wall. It was the same afternoon she'd pinned Rachel against the piano in the choir room.

Finally, Quinn decided she needed to get over this once and for all. This stupid fixation had to end and her efforts had only made it worse. She needed release. That was sure to be the answer. If she would just have sex with Rachel, then she'd satisfy her craving for good. You didn't want another gallon of Cherry Garcia after you finished the first one, right? No. You get sick and never look at it the same way again. That's what she needed to do.

Of course, she expected some initial resistance from Rachel, who was still a virgin, but the girl had been so obliging in every other way, embarrassingly easy actually, Quinn didn't think it would take much convincing. As she walked up the steps to the Berry house, she was certain that this night would finally be the end of her torment.

She'd brought her overnight bag with her as a pretense in case Rachel's Dads were home. She always had one packed for the constant weekend swaps when she would stay over at Brittany's or Santana's.
But when Rachel opened the door, that doe-eyed look of pure shock on her face…Quinn felt herself falter.

What was she doing?

Instead, she strengthened her resolve and pushed through. It had to be done or she'd never be free of this.

It worked for all of three minutes. When Rachel came running after her into the bedroom and Quinn kissed her, she could feel that resolve weakening more than ever. Then it was like she didn't have control over herself anymore; she'd just…given in.

The face staring back at her in the mirror now, flushed cheeks and mussed hair, was not the face she'd made herself see for seventeen years. This was someone else now, not the Head of the Cheerios, not the most popular girl in school, not the ex-president of the Celibacy Club, not the devout Christian, not Russell Fabray's baby girl, not even the girl who had gotten herself knocked up at sixteen.

Whoever this was, Quinn was terrified of her.

She had been so wholly unprepared for Rachel shoving her away like that. It hadn't physically hurt, but for how it felt, she might as well have been punched in the stomach. As she stared at the trembling girl's back, she could see the muscles clenching beneath an expanse of smooth, tanned skin. It took all she had to listen to what the other girl was saying because her own mind was reeling so violently.

Did this actually just happen? Had she honestly forced her way into Rachel's house and proceeded to ravage the girl with hardly a word of consent? Had she gone so far that she'd made Rachel afraid enough to push her away?

Who was this person?

Listening to Rachel explain and offer her the chance to leave without further embarrassment, Quinn couldn't help but be overwhelmed by the need to stay. She wanted to stay there. She didn't want Rachel to think she was using her.

God, that's what she'd been doing all along though!

And Rachel knew it! Why had it never occurred to her before now?

Oh, that's right, because she didn't think about this. She refused to.

For this reason, even though she didn't fully understand it, Quinn decided she wasn't going to leave. Instead, she got off the bed, got her pajamas and a toothbrush, and walked into the bathroom without a word. Running the faucet, she splashed her face with icy cold water, and prayed that would be enough to snap her out of this.

She was staying? No. She wasn't staying! She was not about to have an actual sleepover with Rachel Berry because that was not what this was about. This was about some twisted need she had to have satisfied before she could move on with her life. She would rule McKinley, win Prom Queen with her boyfriend as Prom King, leave Lima for college on a cheerleading scholarship where she would join and soon dominate the sorority of her choice, be envied and known by all on campus. She'd find the perfect job and marry the perfect guy and have the perfect two children, a boy and a girl, and she would never return to Lima except for the one high school reunion where she would take the chance to show off how absolutely fabulous her life had turned out.
And yet here she was, staring at a stranger in Rachel Berry's bathroom after she'd all but forced herself on the girl.

She didn't want to go.

That ever so powerful mind block she'd perfected? Complete failure…happened pretty much the second she'd kissed Rachel when she stormed into that ridiculously pink and girly room.

Thoughts were flooding in like never before, a tidal wave crashing over her, and she held on for dear life, things like how beautiful Rachel was, how she really didn't mind her eagerness and intensely obsessive behavior in Glee. It was actually kind of adorable. She thought about how much it turned her on to hear her moan when Quinn touched her, how magnificent her voice was, the way it slipped inside her so effortlessly, and made her want to cry/laugh/sleep/make love all at the same time, how she loved the way her lips fit so perfectly with hers, how talented she was, how strong she was, how she amazing it felt when Rachel touched her, how amazing it felt when she'd touched her in return.

How guilty she felt for hurting her, for so many years…and just now.

Nearly all the blood had drained from her hands as she clenched the now warm and sticky marble.

Just brush your freaking teeth, Quinn.

So she did. She changed out of what remained of her uniform and into her pajamas.

Whatever she'd just done – she was going to make it up to Rachel somehow. She wasn't going to walk out and make this worse. If she left now, she'd never forgive herself.

Quinn realized at that very moment that she'd left behind whatever semblance of self preservation she'd had. Rachel wasn't just a craving. She wasn't just a twisted fixation. She was someone Quinn really…really wanted to know better, someone Quinn actually…kind of…completely…cared about.

How messed up was that?

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Using the time she had while the blonde was in the bathroom, Rachel speedily grabbed her pajama top and pulled it back on, buttoning in a flurry with a deep blush on her cheeks the whole time.

Quinn had actually seen her naked – half-naked, but still very naked – and she'd had her mouth on her breasts! Either the world was coming to an end or, as she thought before, it was just a dream, a very vivid, imaginative, sexual dream. Those were the only two explanations. She was sure of it. Otherwise it meant that…

She had not been that close to having sex with Quinn Fabray! No!

The door opened and Rachel steeled herself for the surely fearsome glare that she would receive from the head cheerleader. Instead, she found nothing of the kind.

Quinn had changed into a tank top and pajama shorts, her hair flowing loosely round her shoulders. She threw what looked like a toothbrush into her bag and made her way to Rachel's bed, pulling back the covers as though it were the most natural thing in the world.

Rachel struggled to remember how to breathe.

"W-w- just what do you think you're doing?" she gasped out.
"Well, if we're not fooling around, I guess we can just go to sleep right?" Quinn explained casually. "Close your mouth, Berry, geez. I said we were having a sleepover, didn't I? In case you didn't know, this would be the sleep part."

Rachel felt like she was about to faint. She was pretty certain now that this was all a dream cause this sort of thing didn't happen in real life. Quinn Fabray did not come over to her house for heavy makeout sessions and then get into her bed intending to stay the night. It just didn't happen!

She tried blinking and rubbed her eyes to see if this was indeed just some trick of the mind, but Quinn was still lying there, looking up at her with a questioning eyebrow.

"Okay," was all she could manage.

What was happening? Quinn had been so very clear that their encounters would remain simple, without ever turning into something deeper. Now she wanted to spend the night in Rachel's bed with the full understanding that they would just sleep, nothing more? Was this a trick? Was she planning to try something again once Rachel had her guard down?

Swallowing thickly, she made her way into the bathroom, shutting the door quickly, and slid down to the cool tiled floor.

This was really just too much to take.

After a few minutes of utilizing the deep, meditative breathing techniques her therapist had taught her, Rachel managed to pull herself together enough to stand. Looking into the mirror, she gasped seeing a dark spot that formed high on her neck.

There was no denying what just happened, not with evidence like that. Touching it gingerly, Rachel marveled at the sheer incredibility that she was sporting a hickey from none other than Quinn Fabray.

Splashing some cold water across her face, hoping it would jolt her from this daze, Rachel went through her usual nightly routine, took a deep breath, and went back into her room.

Quinn had settled herself in even more comfortably beneath the covers, her golden locks splayed out against the pink of Rachel's pillows. The shock of having her there hit Rachel all over again as she had half expected to walk out to see an empty room once more. The first time had to have just been a mistake.

No. Quinn looked like she had no intention of taking off as she lay there with her eyes focused on the ceiling.

At a loss for what else to do, Rachel merely turned off the lights and climbed into the bed on the other side, lying down beside her.

They stayed like that for a few minutes that felt more like hours with only their shared quiet breathing to fill the room. Neither one was ready to sleep just yet.

"I don't know what I'm doing, alright?" Quinn murmured through the darkness.

Rachel took a shaky breath at hearing the sound of her voice. It was so soft, so vulnerable. The only time she'd ever heard her like this was after Finn found out Puck was the father…

"It's…" She shook her head. "Just…just don't think that if we're not… that I won't…"

Quinn wasn't really making much sense and Rachel could tell it was frustrating her that she couldn't
properly voice her feelings. Somehow she understood what the other girl was trying to say anyway. She knew that however Quinn was struggling to find the words, it was really the part where she had to say all these things out loud that was the terrifying part stopping her. If she did say it, well there was no going back.

"I'm sorry I pushed you," she whispered so quietly, Rachel had to strain to hear, but heard all the same. "I-I didn't mean…"

Her heart raced, nearly bursting with joy, to hear such wonderful things come from her lips. Quinn apologized? Quinn cared enough to apologize?

"It's okay," she replied, attempting to control her voice to ensure that she sounded calm, whereas the truth was that she was anything but.

There were so many things she wanted to ask, so many questions, too many questions that even her own mind couldn't organize them. She knew they couldn't talk about it all right now; Quinn had already admitted more than she ever thought she would. It must have taken a great deal of effort on her part to say what she did so Rachel resolved to leave it alone for the time being.

Quinn wanted to stay with her tonight, without any sexual expectations whatsoever, and that was enough.

"Thank you," Rachel told her, hoping she understood the full meaning of her words.

She heard the other girl sigh and the bed shifted as she turned over to go to sleep.

Rachel soon followed.
Rude Awakening

Rachel woke that morning on the far edge of her bed to sunlight streaming through the window because of the curtains she'd forgotten to close because of her so very unexpected visitor. Blinking in the bright light, she tried to move, and her heart skipped a few beats. Sometime during the night, Quinn had made her way over to Rachel's side of the bed and wrapped herself securely around her. The blonde had almost half her body on top of Rachel, clutching her tightly even in sleep, with her face burrowed in the crook of Rachel's neck, their legs entwined.

Rachel was sure that never in her life before had she woken so blissfully.

Quinn was even snoring softly against her ear and she stifled the giggle that threatened to bubble up in her throat. She couldn't bear to ruin this oh so perfect moment by waking her. So she subtly shut off her alarm clock that had been set for the usual 6AM, before snuggling back further and let herself drift off again, peaceful and loved in Quinn's arms.

So what if she wanted to pretend for a little while longer?

A few hours later, she felt the warm body behind her stirring, Quinn gave a sleepy sort of moan and Rachel couldn't resist a huge smile. She'd stayed in bed long past her usual routine and was perfectly content to do so. Quinn's arms tightened round her for a moment then went slack.

With a sigh, she closed her eyes, knowing what was coming and wishing it didn't have to.

Quinn yanked her arms back and slid away as far as she could on the bed in a flash. Rachel mourned the loss but simply turned over trying to remain as impassive as she could about the surely awkward situation they both felt themselves placed in. She hoped the blonde wouldn't overreact.

Quinn didn't overreact. She didn't yell or snarl or glare at her like she usually did in a way that seemed to be so second nature. Instead, she just seemed embarrassed, her cheeks a rosy color as she tried to blink away the sleep.

Rachel gazed at her in sheer wonder. Quinn was so beautiful. Her hair was adorably bed mussed, her eyes still a bit unfocused, and she had the most adorable expression on her face as she tried to wake herself. Yawning, she stretched in an almost catlike manner, her back arching off the bed, and fell back with a sigh, her hand resting against her cheek.

"Sorry," she mumbled, ducking her gaze. "I-I'm not usually like that. I don't... I'm usually a personal space person. Sorry."

Rachel just shook her head.

"I didn't mind," she said softly. "Good morning."

Quinn looked at her for what seemed the longest time, a hard stare, as though she were trying to figure out some sort of puzzle in her head. There was something else she wanted to say, something that Rachel could feel dying to spill from her lips, but then Quinn's eyes landed on something behind her.

"WHAT THE FUCK!"

They shot up at the same time, Rachel in disbelief and Quinn in a rage.
"What is it? What's wrong? And honestly, is that kind of language necessary?"

But she wasn't listening. She'd jumped out of bed and was running around the room like a mad woman, stripping as she swore under her breath.

"Damn it, Rachel!" she snarled. "I thought you always set your alarm for six! Isn't that what you said? You wake up every day at six! Even on weekends! What the hell? Today of all days you chose to not be your freakishly anal self?"

She was a tad speechless as she watched Quinn rip off her clothes leaving her shamelessly nude while she tore apart her bag looking for her clothes. All the while, the blonde was still ranting at her. Rachel had no idea what to make of it. Why would Quinn be so upset about sleeping in? She would have thought the girl would appreciate her turning off the alarm and allowing her more time to sleep in. Isn't that what people usually liked? She was sure of it. Her fathers never liked waking before nine at the latest on the weekends.

"I-I turned it off earlier. I didn't want to wake you."

"Son of a bitch!" the blonde growled as she accidentally stubbed her toe on Rachel's dresser.

"Quinn!" she exclaimed worriedly. "Would you just calm down? Tell me what's wrong."

She ignored her, zipping up the back of her Cheerios skirt, and dove to the floor to find her top.

"Hey…"

Rachel crawled to the foot of the bed, reaching out a reassuring hand to touch her shoulder, only to have it slapped away. She swallowed hard.

"I can't believe this," Quinn muttered, "cannot fucking believe this!"

She didn't even slow down enough to put on her top before she grabbed her bag, shoes, and went tearing out the door. Rachel listened as she heard footsteps scurry down the stairs and the front door slam. Within moments, she heard the screech of tires as Quinn roared out the driveway.

The brunette could only sit there.

What had been the closest to perfect of mornings she'd ever had was utterly demolished by cruel reality, as it life had always done to her and would likely always continue to do.

She'd ruined it. Quinn wasn't going anywhere near her now.

She had barely zipped up her uniform top as she sprinted across the field to the squad already well into their routine.

The Cheerios were required to attend all-day Saturday practices, starting at 7AM sharp. Quinn was nearly two hours late. She had counted on Rachel's alarm to wake her in time and this morning was a disaster. She knew exactly what she was in for now.

Breathless, she tightened her ponytail, and tried to sneak into the routine without Coach Sylvester noticing but it was useless.

"Q!" a demonic-sounding magnified voice echoed across the field.

She'd had her megaphone personally modified with a voice changer just to make it sound that much
Wincing, Quinn stepped out in front, seeing Brittany's worried gaze and Santana's 'what-the-hell-is-wrong-with-you' face.

"Yes, Coach?"

"YOU'RE LATE!"

"I know, Coach, but my Mom is really sick and I was with her at the hospital just now. The doctors told me she might not make it through the day, and they begged me to stay, but I said I had to go to practice."

"YOU ALLOWED SOMETHING AS ABSURDLY INSIGNIFICANT AS A DYING PARENT MAKE YOU TWO HOURS LATE FOR MY MANDATORY SATURDAY TRAINING?"

"Yes?"

"GET YOUR HIDEOUSLY STRETCH MARK RIDDEN THIGHS BACK OUT THERE AND DO YOUR JOB!"

Quinn nodded and ran back to take her place.

"CONSIDER YOURSELF LUCKY THAT MY ACTIONS ARE RESTRICTED BY THE 'UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION AGAINST TORTURE' –THE MEMBERS OF WHICH HAVE A PERSONAL VENDETTA AGAINST ME AFTER A FEW STRONGLY WORDED LETTERS PROPOSING THAT CERTAIN ACTIONS BE CONSIDERED JUST FAIR GAME. THOSE VINDICTIVE SONS OF CANARIES HAVE PROHIBITED ME FROM USING EVERY SINGLE ONE OF THE MEDIEVAL TORTURE TECHNIQUES, IN WHICH I AM SO MAGNIFICENTLY WELL VERSED, WITH THREATS OF LIFETIME IMPRISONMENT AND VERY POSSIBLY A DEATH SENTENCE TEXAS WOULD BE ENVIOUS OF!"

"Damn, Q, do you realize what you've done to yourself?" Santana muttered as discreetly as she could. "If all she does is murder you today, you'll have gotten off easy."

"I'm sorry about your Mom, Quinn," Brittany whispered and patted her back sadly.

The blonde took a deep breath and steeled herself as she listened to the Coach rattle off the number of torture methods she considered personal favorites and describe each one in explicit detail.

"AS I ALWAYS SAY, ONE MAN'S 'SADISTIC' IS JUST ANOTHER WOMAN'S 'FUN TIME'."

Santana couldn't have been more right. By the end of practice, Quinn was praying the Coach would just kill her already and be done with it. Sue Sylvester never let anyone get away with being late for practice, not even one minute, without some form of punishment. As Captain, Quinn not only had to suffer the consequences of her tardiness, but she also had to serve as an example to the others, so she had to meet the highest standard.

Which meant she got wrecked.

It was half past six when she finally started for home. Quinn could hardly keep her eyes open as she drove down the sparsely populated streets of Lima. Honestly, she was just glad to be seeing straight again. She'd had to wait a while before her vision corrected itself and she could start the car.
Sue forced Quinn to do double everything the squad did, double the usual laps, double the suicides, double the crunches, double the pushups, and so on. That was only the beginning though. She had the coveted spot at the top of the pyramid and Sue decided that, as part of her punishment, the Cheerios holding her would be ordered to dump her off, not just once, but twice. Quinn landed on the ground brutally both times, having trouble standing after the second.

Then after everyone was dismissed, she had to stay an extra hour running drills with Sue screaming at her through the megaphone. She made Quinn go so hard, she ended up vomiting on the grass, but Sue told her to untwist her panties and keep running. So she wiped her mouth and moved her legs.

Yet, through the whole nightmare, all Quinn could think about was when she would get to see Rachel again. The very image of the brunette's face as she had woken to her that morning filled her head and refused to leave. Even as her lungs burned, her body ached, her muscles trembled, all she could think about was how much she wanted to be with Rachel right then.

Her mother was still away visiting her sister so that meant Quinn would be going home to an empty house. Just the thought of being alone right now was more than she could stand. It wasn't so much a decision as instinct that led her to where she wanted to go.

With tremendous effort, driving slower than she ever normally would, she managed to make it to the Berry household, which thankfully was closer to the school than her own house.

Limping her way up to the door - it had taken her some time to find the energy to lift herself out of the car - she dragged her bag along the ground, and knocked on the door.

A tall, rather attractive, dark skinned man answered, and Quinn would have given just about anything for the chance to run away.

She'd forgotten about Rachel's Dads.

Unfortunately, there was no opportunity to escape as the man took one look at her and ushered her inside.

"You must be one of Rachel's friends from the Glee club! Come in! Dear girl, you look exhausted. Are you alright? Can I get you anything?"

Quinn politely rebuffed his worries. "Just a long day of training, sir."

"Call me Leroy," he said and clasped her smaller hand in his warmly.

"Leroy," she said with a nod. "I'm, um, I'm Quinn Fabray."

If she hadn't been so exhausted, she would have seen the wary look of recognition cross his face.

"Is Rachel here?"

He hesitated, his demeanor suddenly warping into something not nearly as welcoming as before. If Quinn had been in a better state of mind, she would have attempted to do something to rectify it, offer some kind of olive branch, but as it was, she just didn't care. She saw him looking up the stairs nervously.

"Ah, yes, she is. If you'll just wait here, I'll go-"

The blonde ignored him entirely, already halfway up the stairs by the time he realized she wasn't going to wait around. With her muscles protesting every step of the way, by the time Quinn reached
the top she was without a doubt convinced that stairs were the devil's work.

Not bothering to knock, or even thinking to, Quinn walked in to see Rachel lying on her stomach on her bed. She had her iPod on singing along with the music softly and didn't hear her come in. Without a hint of pretense, Quinn simply walked up to her and dropped her duffel bag with great relief. Rachel looked up in shock for a moment and then yanked out the earbuds.

"Quinn! Y-you came back?"

Then her surprise gave way to sincere concern.

Quinn was sure she must look a sight, what with Leroy's reaction and now Rachel's. Well, no matter what they were seeing, she knew she was feeling a thousand times worse. Really, she felt like she might pass out at any moment now. Just standing was proving to be the most difficult of tasks.

Leroy knocked on the door with a stern look, not pleased at all that the cheerleader had so rudely disregarded him. "Baby girl, is everything…"

"It's okay, Dad!" she replied quickly. "Everything's fine. Could we have some privacy please?"

"Are you sur-"

"Yes, Dad, please!"

Though extremely reluctant, he nodded, and closed the door behind him.

"What happened?" Rachel gasped quietly, stepping in closer to the blonde. "You look terrible. Are you alright?"

"Just…rough practice," she muttered. "We have all day Saturday practices and I was late so I had to do some extra drills and stuff. I was – um – really tired and your house is closest so…I didn't want to risk driving further in this condition…dangerous and all…"

Quinn could have kicked herself for not admitting the truth.

"Oh, of course!" Rachel nodded as though that were absolutely the most wonderful explanation she could have heard. "Wow, it must have been pretty brutal, I don't think I've ever seen you so-"

"Can I use your shower?" she blurted.

"Yes! I mean, yes, of course you can. Anything you need… I- well…" she trailed off nervously and then said, "Maybe you should take a bath instead?"

"A bath?"

"Yes," she nodded firmly, seemingly more confident in her decision. "From the way you look, I don't think you'll be able to stand long enough for a shower. I'll go draw you one right now."

She went straight into the bathroom and turned on the faucet.

Quinn listened to the water run and slowly started on the excruciating task of getting out of her cheerleading uniform. Her muscles were so sore that added with her exhaustion and the injuries she suffered, she almost cried trying to struggle with the form fitting clothes.

Rachel came back, looking on sympathetically. Quinn had no choice.
"Can you help?" she asked wearily, beyond any semblance of pride at the moment.

Rachel, of course, obliged and moved in closer. Quinn tried not to let the nearness affect her. Rachel's fingers curled beneath the top and she tugged it off as gently as she could. She had to grit her teeth to keep from crying out in pain. Rachel was frowning deeply. When the miserable thing finally came off, the other girl gasped.

"Quinn!"

"Oh, it's showing already?" she muttered absently.

Quinn knew what her shoulder probably looked like - a mass of ugly purple and black. She knew it had been bad when she found herself struggling to move it afterwards.

"What happened?" Rachel asked in a near whisper.

"It's nothing," she brushed off her concern. "Coach just had it in for me today. She told them to dump me off the pyramid. I landed pretty hard on my shoulder."

"That's…that's…that is abominable," she hissed. She had a crazy dark rage in her eyes usually reserved for peak moments when she had to fight for a solo. "How can that monster even be allowed to-"

"I'm fine," she said tiredly and shimmied out of her skirt, leaving her in just her bra and matching red spanx.

Quinn was of no mind to deal with Rachel Berry's high-strung intensity, and seeing that, the girl reeled back, but the fire in her eyes didn't change.

She glanced longingly towards the bathroom where the tub of deliciously hot water was waiting for her. "I can't…" She blushed, looking down at the floor before screwing up the nerve. "I can't get out of this." She motioned to the bra. "My shoulder…"

Rachel swallowed thickly, but didn't say a word. With her gaze firmly fixed on Quinn's face, to allow a semblance of modesty, her nimble fingers went to help her lift it over her head. Quinn knew she was going as slowly and gently as she could, but it still hurt like hell.

Rachel looked near tears.

"This is why you were so freaked out this morning…" she murmured almost to herself, "Because you knew you'd be punished for being so late. It's my fault you-"

"No." Quinn shook her head. "You didn't know. Don't blame yourself. I'm fine. Just bath then sleep and I'll be good as new."

"Quinn…"

"I'm fine, Berry," she said pointedly. "Now I'm getting in the tub."

She nodded, biting her lip to keep herself from saying more. Quinn went into the bathroom, closing the door behind her, and pulled off the last remaining item of clothing, her spanx. In the mirror, she saw that not only was her shoulder turning a nasty color, but a large bruise spanning from her hip to below her butt cheek was forming as well.

Fucking Sue Sylvester.
Sliding into the hot water, Quinn bit back a moan at the relief it offered to her abused body. Rachel had even placed a folded towel on the end so that she could rest her head back comfortably. After she managed to wash herself up a bit, she fell back with a sigh. The next thing Quinn knew, she was waking up to Rachel kneeling beside her.

"What are yo-!"

"I knocked," she explained hurriedly. "Three times! And called for you, but you didn't answer and I got worried. With how exhausted you are, you could have fallen asleep, slipped under the water, and drowned! Statistics show that such unfortunate accidents in the home happen far more often than we would believe."

"Oh." She yawned. The water was uncomfortably cool now. Her fingers had pruned. "Hand me a towel?"

Rachel held one out for her as she struggled to get up. It took some effort, her hands braced against the sides to lift herself, but she managed to stand and Rachel modestly held the towel up. Quinn wrapped it around herself and held the other girl's shoulder for support as she stepped out.

As she moved in closer, their noses a mere inch apart, Quinn gulped. Even in this state, she still felt the surge of desire; her heartbeat picked up. Rachel looked at her with those big, dark brown eyes, and Quinn wanted to melt. She was so close, those perfect lips were right there, she could just lean in and…

"My Daddies are making dinner; it should be ready soon. You must be famished."

Though Rachel had spoken with casual ease, Quinn could hear the slight edge in her voice that told her that the other girl had been thinking the same thing.

Quinn wanted nothing more than to fall into bed right now, but she hadn't eaten all day and knew that if she didn't get something into her stomach, she would feel even sicker.

"Okay." She nodded.

"Are you staying over again tonight?" she blurted all of a sudden.

Quinn wrapped the towel around her securely, avoiding the brunette's intensely fixated gaze.

"I-If you don't mind…"

She heard Rachel breathe in sharply and looked back to see an overjoyed smile on the other girl's face. Quinn couldn't help but smile too…just a little bit.

She changed into the same thing she had worn the night before, since it was all she had with her, but was glad to see that she had a pair of her Cheerios sweatpants in her bag. Her tank top, however, left her more exposed than she liked for dinner with parents. Also, she was going to have to deal with the men's questions about her black and blue shoulder. Whatever…she was too tired to care.

Rachel came in, informing her that dinner was ready, but instead of looking at Quinn's face, her gaze kept drifting down to the exposed shoulder. Quinn knew she felt guilty, but didn't know how to further reassure her that it really hadn't been her fault. Just being here with her again, Rachel fussing over her every move, was more than worth it.

Of course, she would never admit to such a thing. She was only here for convenience, right, safety and all that? Forget the part where she hadn't been able to stop thinking about her all day. Forget that
she was the only person she actually wanted for company. Forget that she could never stop freaking kissing her.

Yawning, she blithely went to follow her downstairs for dinner, but the girl stopped all of a sudden, causing Quinn to bump into her. Before she could question it, Rachel spun around, stood on her tip toes, and pressed her lips to hers sweetly.

Pulling away all too quickly, the brunette blushed, ducking her head shyly to look at the floor before turning back up to meet Quinn's eyes. She did so with such wariness, like a rabbit about to bolt, as if Quinn would reprimand or chastise her in some way. Rachel had stuck her hand in the cookie jar and she was waiting for Quinn to smack it away.

Licking her lips cautiously, the blonde wasn't sure at first how to respond. Her head said one thing, while another part of her demanded something else entirely. At her lack of reaction, Rachel looked like she was about to backtrack, and try to cover it up, Quinn wasn't about to let that happen. She leaned in and kissed her deeply. Her hands went to Rachel's neck, cupping her there as she stroked her cheek, lips and tongue melding ever further.

Never breaking the kiss, they stumbled back towards the door, Rachel letting out a gasp when her back met the wood. Quinn pressed her body into her, using the solidity to her advantage to feel Rachel against her. The brunette's hands had been hovering lightly over Quinn's back, but when she hit the door, she dropped her arms to wrap around her waist tightly, wanting them even closer. Grunting at the pain from Rachel pressing against the bruised flesh at her hip, Quinn yanked away, panting hard.

"W-what happened? Did I do something wrong? Did I bite you? I've been told I-

"It's nothing," Quinn replied through gritted teeth, as she waited for the shooting pains to subside once more. "We should go eat."

Without giving Rachel the chance to inquire further, Quinn left the room, and headed downstairs. She didn't want Rachel to know about the other injury if she could help it. The girl already was beating herself up over seeing her shoulder there was no need to add to it. For crying out loud!

Since when did Quinn care about not hurting Rachel Berry? Hadn't she made it a very clear mission in life to do precisely the opposite?

Oh, right, since last night.

At least, that's what she was telling herself.

Dinner with Rachel's Dads was surprisingly not horrible. Leroy was an avid volleyball player and accustomed to such sports injuries so as soon as she came down, he was already prepared and wrapped her shoulder with an ice pack in an expert fashion, handing her two ibuprofen as well.

Apparently, Rachel had already talked them down from wanting to interrogate the infamous cheerleader who had made their baby girl's life hell for so many years. Hiram watched her like a hawk, while Leroy was still annoyed about her previous rude behavior, but both men soon backed off when they realized just how exhausted and beaten the poor girl was. Quinn was barely able to keep her head up at the table, nodding off once or twice, until Rachel would gently squeeze her thigh to rouse her. For the little that she was conscious during that dinner, she actually found herself enjoying the conversation.
After Quinn thanked them both for the meal, and stifled the hundredth yawn of the night, Rachel automatically offered her a shoulder to help her trudge back up the stairs (still the devil's work!). She couldn't have been more relieved to collapse face first onto Rachel's bed and crawled her way up to the pillows with a heavy sigh.

Quinn didn't realize that in doing so, her sweatpants slid down a bit, revealing a glimpse of the bruised flesh at her hip. Rachel gasped and, without bothering to ask for permission, pulled her pants down further to see the full extent of it. Quinn stifled a groan into the pillow.

"Oh, Quinn…" she murmured sadly.

"Don't apologize again," she warned and fumbled for her hand before grasping it and tugged her upwards so they were face to face. "Just let me sleep, okay?"

"Sleep." She nodded in agreement.
Rachel woke up yet again to Quinn nearly on top of her and had to stifle yet another giggle. For someone who claimed to crave personal space, Quinn was the epitome of a clingy sleeper. Not that Rachel minded in the slightest. She was on her back and the blonde was so deeply snuggled into the crook of Rachel's neck that her lips brushed against the base of her throat. The warm, even little puffs of breath against Rachel's bare skin had her tingling all over with pleasure. Trying not to jostle the girl, which proved difficult since Quinn had her hips thrown over her and an arm furled round her waist, Rachel looked up at the clock. It was half past six.

Pure terror seized her.

Unthinkingly, she hadn't set her alarm last night, not needing to wake up at her usual time.

"QUINN!" she screeched and shook the girl.

She bolted upright, looking round in a panic. "W-w-what? Where? S'there a fire?"

"It's past six!"

Oh, how could she have let this happen again? If Quinn didn't hate her before, she would surely hate her now.

Still half asleep, the blonde turned on her with a fearsome glower.

"Rachel..." she said tersely, "you are honestly screaming at me at six o'clock on a Sunday morning? Give me one good reason why I shouldn't kick your teeth in right now."

Looking at Quinn's angry, but bleary face, the mistake dawned on her.

"There's no Cheerios practice on Sunday, is there?"

Quinn shook her head.

"I-I-I am so sorry, I thought..."

Quinn rolled her eyes and fell back onto the bed, pulling the covers over her. "Just shut up."

Mentally chastising herself, Rachel laid back down on her side, staring at the wall. Quinn had her back to her as well. After having her so close before, the distance seemed even more pronounced.

Tears prickled in her eyes.

Could she never get anything right?

Then the bed shifted and she gasped when Quinn sidled up behind her, wrapping her arm around her waist, and nuzzled at her shoulder. Rachel tensed at first to have Quinn hold her so intimately, not knowing what to make of it, but soon relaxed, giving in to the warm embrace.

"I'm not mad," she murmured drowsily, slipping a bare leg between hers, "It's just Sunday and I'm tired and I'm in bed with you. So be quiet and sleep like every other normal person in the world."

"You're not mad?"

"I will be if you keep talking."
"Stopping now."

Quinn woke a few hours later to an empty bed, at first confused about where she was, and then realized she hadn't had some post-traumatic hallucination courtesy of Sue Sylvester. She actually had slept at Rachel's again.

In her bed.

In her arms!

Suddenly, the walls were closing in.

Water was running and she heard Rachel running scales. Of course she would sing in the shower too. She sang everywhere else, didn't she?

Quinn needed to get out of there.

Dressing as quickly as she could, she tried to ignore the fiercely aching protests of her body that were even worse than yesterday, grabbed her things and snuck downstairs, hoping to avoid the Berry men in time to make it to the door.

No such luck.

They were in the kitchen and caught her passing by.

"Hello there, Quinn!" Leroy called out to her.

Swearing up a storm in her head, she took a deep breath, plastered the charming smile on her face that her parents had ingrained in her at so young an age, and went into the kitchen.

"Good morning," Hiram greeted her with a nod.

Both men still looked extremely dubious about the young girl standing in their kitchen.

"Good morning," she replied politely.

"Hungry? Want something to eat?" Hiram offered, gesturing to the stove. "We made-"

"Oh, no, thank you, but I have to get going."

"How's the shoulder?" Leroy asked.

"Killing me," she answered honestly with a sigh. "So is every other part of my body, but it's nothing I haven't dealt with before."

"Can I get you some more ibuprofen? It'll help keep the swelling down."

"No, that's alright, I really have to go. I'll take some when I get home. Um, thank you very much for having me and I apologize for being so out of it last night."

"No apology necessary, dear," Hiram said. "At least not for that."

What he was referring to hardly went unnoticed. The harshness in the man's tone should have at least had her flinching, cowering, or even turning away in shame, like it would have affected most people.

Quinn Fabray wasn't most people.
Instead of backing down, she just lifted her chin and stared him straight in the eye.

"We all have things we regret. Human nature, right?"

He blinked and stood back a bit, obviously not expecting that sort of response. Leroy was standing closer to her as she backed up to walk out.

"Thanks for wrapping my shoulder."

She looked between them and nodded with only a hint of a smile. "It was lovely meeting you both. Have a wonderful day."

When she stepped out the door, a blast of cool fresh air hitting her face, Quinn felt like she could breathe again. She hadn't realized how hard it'd been for her to face Rachel's Dads until her lungs were greedily sucking in oxygen while her heart thudded against her chest. If she hadn't been so sore, she probably would have run to her car just to get away that much faster.

She had just turned the ignition when a flash of purple caught the corner of her eye. To her utter disbelief, Rachel flew down the pathway barefoot, barelegged, in just an oversized lavender t-shirt that reached mid-thigh.

She had jumped in the passenger side before Quinn could say a word. Her hair was soaking wet, messy and dripping, since she didn't seem to have time to even wring it out before running to catch her.

"Where are you going?" she asked breathlessly, staring at her with wide eyes.

Quinn barely heard, her attention, focused entirely on the smooth, tan legs that were stretched out beside her. Rachel's shirt had ridden up when she sat down and was a torturous less than an inch away from revealing everything.

"Are you even wearing underwear?" she yelped.

Rachel blushed and tried to pull her shirt down more.

"That's beside the point! Where do you think you're going? Why did you just leave like that?"

Quinn was still fixated on the sight laid out before her before she finally snapped back to focus with a growl. Rummaging around the backseat, she found her Cheerios jacket and thrust it at Rachel.

"Cover yourself up."

"Why?" she replied innocuously.

Her eyes nearly bugged out of her head.

WHY? I'LL TELL YOU WHY! BECAUSE YOU CAN'T LOOK THAT GOOD! YOU CAN'T MAKE ME WANT YOU LIKE THIS! IT'S NOT RIGHT! THAT'S WHY!

"Um, b-because it's cold out."

"I'm not cold."

"I don't care, just do it!" she screeched. "You're practically naked!"

"Nothing is showing, Quinn," she said, bewildered. "Why is your face so red?"
She honestly thought for a second there that she might have a coronary, but then caught the ghost of a smile playing on Rachel's lips.

That *tease*! She knew exactly what she was doing!

"Put-the-damn-jacket-on," she said through gritted teeth, conveying the clear message that she was not kidding around.

Rachel bit her bottom lip, desperately trying not to appear as amused as she was, and covered her lap. With the temptation safely hidden away, Quinn did everything she could not to look at her.

"I'll repeat, for the third time, where are you going?"

"Home," she snapped.

"So this isn't you running away?"

"Running away from what?" she all but growled, eyes firmly fixed on the garage door ahead of her.

"You tell me," Rachel replied curtly.

"Get out of my car."

"Not until you tell me why you're taking off like this."

"In case you didn't realize, I do have a life, Berry! I have other things to do."

"Like what?"

Quinn felt like hitting the steering wheel. Why did this girl have to be such a mule all the time? Couldn't she just let her be?

"My Mom will be home soon. She wants me to go to church with her."

Yes, that was a boldfaced lie, and she didn't care. She just wanted to leave. Leave Rachel and her panty-less, impossibly long legged, gorgeously frustrating self behind.

"And you couldn't spare a minute to say goodbye?"

"You were in the shower," she said tersely.

"My shower isn't soundproof."

Clearly, she had no intention of letting this go. Quinn should have known better. It was Rachel after all.

"What do you want from me?" she huffed.

"For starters, you could try making eye contact at some point here."

She adamantly refused and Rachel just scoffed.

Quinn began to wonder who was being more of the mule between them.

"Fine. Look, I just don't want you to leave without having come to an understanding about us."

"There is no *us*!"
She silently cursed herself for sounding so panicky.

"You just spent two consecutive nights in my home, Quinn, sharing my bed, sharing more than my bed. I'm sorry, but you don't get to take the denial route anymore."

At that her shoulders slumped. She really just didn't have it in her to fight Rachel anymore. She was right. There was no going back from this. Sighing, she propped her head up on the door with her arm and finally let herself look at the brunette again.

Quinn sucked in a breath.

She was utterly unprepared for how ridiculously sexy Rachel looked right now. Her dark, wet hair clung to her face in curls, her shirt was soaked at the shoulders, the only thing she had on, and she had this look in her eyes…this knowing, lustful gaze that fired something low in her belly, causing her to squeeze her thighs together at the sensations.

"I need to know what to expect tomorrow," Rachel said, unaware of the effect she was having on the other girl, "in school, I mean."

Quinn stared at her blankly.

She wasn't actually going to suggest they go public or something was she? Like admit to what they were doing? What were they even doing?

"Are we friends now or do you plan on reverting to your old ways and ignoring my existence unless I say or do something that is particularly to your disliking and you make some sort of cutting remark?"

No. She didn't want that. She really…really didn't want that.

"I deserve to be prepared for however it is you choose to behave."

"I guess…we're friends," Quinn replied carefully, gripping the wheel. "We could try that."

Rachel swallowed thickly and she could tell how hard the girl was trying to contain her happiness.

It was strange how good it felt to be making Rachel happy for once.

"So…we could…talk…in public, such as in the hallway or during class?"

Quinn lifted her eyebrow. "You're going to talk during class?"

She conceded. "Okay, so not during class. Before, and after, or if our teachers give us an allotted time for group discussions and the like."

"Yes," Quinn said thickly. "We can talk."

A full-fledged smile lit up Rachel's face.

"See you tomorrow then!"

She opened the door halfway before shutting it again. Quinn looked at her, befuddled.

"Oh, one more thing?"

Give me strength...
"What is it?"

"I would greatly appreciate it if you could cease and desist with your sneak attacks."

Her chest clenched so painfully, Quinn had to struggle just to keep breathing evenly. There were tears in her eyes before she even realized it and hastily looked away from her so the other girl didn't see. Who knew it could hurt that bad to hear that Rachel Berry had no interest in kissing you?

"Fine," she said much more harshly than she intended to. "Like I would want to do that again anyway. I must be suffering from a head injury or something to have ever even let it happen in the first place. Get out of my car already!"

"Quinn," Rachel said gently and touched her arm. She flinched away. "I only meant I would prefer that if we were to engage in such actions, we could come to a mutual agreement on a specified time and place. It's not that I don't enjoy kissing you," she said shyly, tucking some wet hair behind her ear. "Far from it actually, another universe even, but I'm growing so accustomed that I'm concerned one day it's not going to be you sneaking up on me, but a crazy person trying to murder me, and I'll have my tongue halfway down their throat before knowing the difference."

Quinn stared at her in wide-eyed disbelief for a long moment and then burst out laughing.

"Well, if that didn't scare them off, nothing would."

Rachel rolled her eyes. "Be serious!"

"No." She shook her head. "That is so ridiculous."

"It is a perfectly valid."

"It's really not."

"Quinn!"

"Rachel!" she shot back mockingly.

They looked at each for a moment and then they both laughed. The brunette smiled at her again so breathtakingly that she couldn't help but return it in full. As Rachel got out of the car, after handing back the jacket, Quinn caught a glimpse of just how much that girl was not wearing underwear.

She skipped back into her house quickly to escape the cold while Quinn rolled down every window in the car and laid her head against the steering wheel to wait for her body to cool down.
Rachel went into school that Monday morning practically walking on air. The past weekend was so unbelievably surreal. Not only had Quinn made progress in actually agreeing to be friends with her in public, but what they shared in the last three days went far deeper than anything they’d experienced with each other before.

Rachel knew what she wanted. She wanted Quinn…and not just in the physical sense. She wanted that of course, but with dates and hand holding, and romance too. She wanted them as a couple. She wanted to announce to the world that Quinn Fabray was her girlfriend.

However, as certain as she was of her own feelings, she understood that it was going to be a far more arduous journey to acceptance for Quinn, not only because of her religious background, but just simply because of who she was. If Rachel were honest, she never expected to make as much progress as they had already (if ever).

Before, she had thought Quinn would never be able to come to terms with her sexuality in a concrete, rational way, but after seeing this other side of the indifferent HBIC that so effortlessly ruled McKinley's halls, Rachel had a genuine reason to hope. She just needed to be patient and take her time. Patience was a virtue! Admittedly, it was not one of her better abilities, but it would be prudent to improve upon it for this very reason. She couldn't throw herself into this so blindly and desperately as she had done with her previous romantic interests. That would almost certainly give Quinn license to run so far so fast she'd be across state lines before Rachel could even blink.

Take it slow. Help her. Be her friend, first and foremost. The rest would happen with time.

Still, she was praying that their recent agreement to be friends did not exclude certain amorous activities. She had been clear with the girl on that front, right? In the car, she'd tried to make it plain that she had a vested interest in the kissing. As in, she definitely wanted more of it. From the way Quinn had reacted so violently to her request for less of the 'kissing by ambush' method, she was absolutely positive they were on the same page there.

Quinn desired her physically. Rachel was aware of that. She wasn't quite sure she believed it at times, but the more Quinn would just look at her in that way…the more she allowed herself to accept it and started feeling secretly special for it.

Quinn Fabray, the most beautiful girl in school, wanted her.

Now, she just needed to make sure that it didn't end at a superficial chemical attraction. This weekend had clued her in to the idea that Quinn might be feeling something more for her in return. Why else would she have come back after that disastrous morning and hellish day instead of just going home to be left in peace? It meant something that she wanted to be there with her. Didn't it?

Of course it did.

Now, just take it slow, Berry.

She had to curb herself when she realized she started to skip down the hall to where Quinn’s locker was. She couldn't wait to see her. Waking up alone that morning had felt foreign and empty somehow, even though she'd woken that way all her life. Just two mornings with Quinn wrapped around her and she was already so spoiled. She wanted her there every morning now.

He was heads above the crowd and Rachel lurched to a halt. Finn walked down the hall in her
She hadn't even thought about the boy once in over three days. If told that even just a couple weeks ago, she would have said such a thing was impossible. Rachel always thought about Finn, obsessively so. Everything she did or planned always had him factored in somehow. She'd been doing it ever since early sophomore year.

Finn had broken her heart. Right about now she would usually be running up to him, trying to apologize yet again and begging him to take her back.

But she hadn't even thought about him in days. It was refreshing somehow, as if she was finally getting to breathe clean air once again. She felt free.

Shoot. He was coming her way. The last thing she wanted was to have an encounter with her ex right now. Turning on her heel, Rachel ducked round the corner and collided with another body.

"COFFEE! WATCH THE COFFEE!" Quinn barked, holding away the paper cup carefully. "Walk much, freak?"

All optimism drained out of her body in a single second. She should have known better. It was Quinn after all. How could she have been so naïve as to think-

"Rachel!" she said in surprise and her voice softened at once. "Sorry. Didn't see it was you. Look, I know what we agreed to, but being friends does not mean you get to run me over. I don't know what your personal definition is, but in the world where everybody else lives, it's generally frowned upon."

She couldn't believe her ears. Was Quinn actually being playful with her?

Just like that, her heart was doing flip flops all over the place again. Perhaps she hadn't been so naïve after all.

"Very funny, Quinn." She tossed her hair back with a smile. "I do apologize. I wasn't paying attention enough to where I was going. I just needed to get away from…"

She trailed off when Finn's voice boomed nearby as he laughed and, thankfully, went in the opposite direction. Rachel breathed a sigh of relief.

"I see," Quinn replied coolly.

It was then that she noticed the blonde was wearing sunglasses…indoors…when it was overcast outside.

"What's with the…" She gestured to the shades.

Quinn didn't bother to answer and simply kept on walking to her locker, causing Rachel to follow. She couldn't help the nerves that took over as she stood next to the cool blonde and held her books to her chest tightly as if they were protection somehow. Quinn opened it and started digging around for what she needed.

"Hold this." She handed Rachel her coffee.

"Is everything alright?"
"Fine," she muttered. "I didn't sleep at all last night, some freak attack of insomnia. My eyes are bloodshot so I'm wearing the glasses so Coach doesn't see and accuse me of being on drugs or whatever. She put Santana through hell last year when she saw a needle mark on her arm, ranting that one of her best cheerleaders was shooting up in crack houses. Really, it was just from a routine blood test. Her Dad had to come down to the school to sign an affidavit attesting to the fact."

"Let me see," Rachel said, gently moving the shades down her nose before Quinn could do anything to stop her.

Indeed, she had a pair of dark, purple circles and a few broken blood vessels. Rachel wondered just what it was that kept her up all night.

"I have some drops that could help. I usually keep it on hand for when I don't shut my eyes fast enough before a slushie facial. Always soothes the sting pretty quickly. It should clear that up for you."

She almost missed the frown that formed on Quinn's lips before it vanished. Instead, the blonde just pushed the sunglasses back into place.

"Sure. I'll try anything."

Rachel handed her back the cup.

"I think this is going quite well so far, don't you?"

"What is?"

"This. The friends thing. We're in school, surrounded by our many peers, engaging in casual conversation, and you haven't snapped at me in a record total of four and half minutes now."

Even though she couldn't see it, Rachel knew Quinn was rolling her eyes.

"You are so pushing this," she groaned and sipped the hot drink.

"Don't be cranky. Not everyone missed out on their beauty sleep like you."

"Just give me the drops, Berry."

Quinn didn't want to admit it, but her previously miserable mood had all but disappeared the moment she realized it was Rachel who ran into her in the hall. She'd been half looking forward to seeing her, half dreading it, leaving her a nervous wreck, but then she saw Rachel, and it just all went away.

Last night had been torturous. Quinn couldn't sleep for the life of her, wide awake and staring at the ceiling as the hours ticked past. She couldn't get Rachel out her mind, couldn't stop worrying about what it was she was getting herself into, what it all meant, what she didn't want to face. Before long, it was time to get up for school.

Talking to Rachel by her locker for those few minutes came so easily. She expected it to be harder. She expected the whole school to gape in astonishment. In reality, no one really noticed them. She had made it out to be so much worse in her head.

Despite the sleep deprivation, just a few minutes with Rachel had considerably lightened her mood. She waited patiently, sipping her coffee (triple shot espresso, thank you very much), as the brunette searched through her purse for the eye drops.
"Hey, babe."

And just like that, her good mood plummeted through the floor, along with her stomach, and would remain there for the rest of the day.

Sam came up from behind them and kissed her on the cheek.

Sam. Her boyfriend. Her sweet, loving, adorable boyfriend. Who was a boy.

"Hey," she choked out.

His arrival obviously threw Rachel, but she tried to recover by feigning nonchalance.

"Sup, Rachel?" he said cheerily, slinging an arm over Quinn's shoulder. She tried not to recoil. It wasn't that she was bothered so much when he did that, she just couldn't stand to have him doing it in front of her. It felt backwards somehow, like he wasn't the one who had that right.

"Hello, Sam," she said politely, but averted her eyes. "Here you go, Quinn." She placed a small bottle in her hand. "Hope it helps. I should get to class. See you."

She rushed off before Quinn had a chance to respond.

"Yeah…see you."

Sam spent the rest of the day interrogating her about where she'd disappeared to that weekend and why she didn't call him or reply to his texts. She simply repeated the same excuses over and over again until she got so fed up, she snapped. He got that dumbfounded/kind of freaked out/whoa look on his face that reminded her of what Finn would look like whenever he called her 'scary Quinn'.

That annoyed her even more.

Rachel avoided her for the rest of the day. She didn't even make eye contact with her when they were in Glee. Cheerios practice was hell as Quinn's injuries hadn't healed, but she had to push through. When she went home, her Mom wasn't there, but there was a note. She'd gone out with her friends for the night and Quinn was on her own for dinner. She heated up some leftover pizza, did her homework, constantly checked her phone, ignored all the messages from Sam, went through her bedtime routine, checked her phone again, got into bed.

What a freaking fabulous day.

Yet she couldn't get her mind off the simple five minutes that morning that had so naturally made it seem like everything was going to be okay.

She checked her phone one last time; no missed calls, no new messages.

What did she expect?

Just as Rachel had forgotten about Finn, she'd forgotten about Sam. When he came up to them at Quinn's locker, it was so unexpected that she had to force herself to remember how to carry on as usual.

How had it never occurred to her before that by doing what she was doing with Quinn, she was helping her cheat on Sam? It had never even crossed her mind until he walked straight into their bubble so unassumingly.
Feeling sick to her stomach, for more reasons than one, she had removed herself from the couple as quickly as possible and spent the rest of the day in a darkly demoralizing spiral. She couldn't even bring herself to look at the girl in question.

Quinn had a boyfriend.

Quinn didn't and wouldn't ever have a girlfriend.

Quinn would never want the same things Rachel wanted.

Quinn wanted the hot jock boyfriend, the exemplary grades, to be at the top of the social food chain, Prom Queen, and everything else that the, decidedly perfect, American as apple pie, high school experience could define.

And Rachel was none of that.

Not for the first time in these last few weeks, she wondered just what in the world she was doing.
Past, Progress, Discovery, and Battleship

It was a decidedly different experience walking into school the next day. Who knew that a Tuesday could be worse than a Monday? Monday morning, she had been happily ensconced in her cozy little delightful world where she and Quinn were in the beginning stages of a new relationship, and this morning Rachel found herself locked in a miserable nightmare.

She hoped she could avoid the other girl well enough as she had been able to do yesterday. All hope of that vanished when it appeared Quinn wasn't about to let that happen. Still, Rachel couldn't deny the wild fluttering of her heart when she saw a certain blonde waiting by her locker. Then she remembered just what couldn't be and whatever elation she felt was dampened once more.

With that in mind, a sickening knot formed in her stomach, and she steeled herself for whatever it was Quinn was waiting there for.

She had to be strong.

"Hello," she greeted in simple acknowledgement and opened her locker.

"Hey."

The simple, soft utterance had Rachel feeling weak in the knees. How did Quinn manage to have this effect on her? How did she do that? Just hearing her voice was enough to…

"Is there something I can help you with, Quinn?"

Good. That sounded strong, nothing like what she was feeling.

"Uh, no," she said, her surprise evident. "I mean, I just thought I should give this back to you."

She handed Rachel the bottle of eye drops, which she took from her with a shaking hand and put in her locker without a word.

"It really helped a lot. Thank you."

"I'm pleased to hear that," she said shortly and retrieved the rest of her books before shutting the metal door. "Now, if there's nothing else, I really need to get to class. Have a good day."

She turned and tried to walk off quickly, but when Quinn grabbed her arm, she wasn't surprised.

"What is your problem?"

Rachel was amazed at how familiar that fury in hazel eyes was. This was the Quinn she knew so well.

"I don't know what you're talking about," she replied calmly and moved out of her reach. "I'm going to be late."

She started walking again but Quinn had glued herself to her side. How often had they performed this dance?

"You're avoiding me."

"Yes."
"Why?"

"Because we were wrong to do what we did."

Quinn stepped in front her, forcing Rachel to stop.

"Don't even try to pull that!" She bowed her head closer in a fierce whisper. "You've been all over me from the start. What's this sudden bout of moral conscience?"

She could feel her neck starting to get hot as anger started flooding in. Quinn had no right to speak to her like this. It was hard enough already!

"Sam. Your boyfriend. Remember him?"

She moved around her and kept walking. Quinn's harsh voice in her ear startled her.

"What does he have to do with anything?"

"You're kidding me, right?"

"Who cares about him? He means nothing."

"I care! He's your boyfriend and I won't be a part of something as contemptible as cheating!"

"He never bothered you before," she said silkily. Her tone had dropped to a quiet, deadly undertone, reminding her of a predator toying with its prey just because it made it that more satisfying when it went in for the kill. "Just like kissing Finn when I was still with him didn't bother you or when you made out with Puckerman to get back at your precious boyfriend for screwing Santana."

Rachel whirled around, this time getting in Quinn's face.

"That is exactly the point!" she hissed furiously. "You and I have both experienced firsthand the fallout that comes from these actions. I don't want to be that person, Quinn. I refuse to be."

They were moving again.

"So you're saying you don't want this anymore?"

"I'm saying I won't be participating in those activities with you anymore, yes."

"No."

"No?"

"You can't help yourself around me, Rachel. You want it. I don't care what you say right now because the moment we're alone, you'll be all over me in a second, begging for more. If you think I'm going to let you get away with this just because you think Sam will get his stupid feelings hurt then you're dead wrong. You don't have a choice, you're not calling this off, I won't let you."

Don't listen. Don't listen. Don't listen.

"You can't make me do anything I don't want to do."

They were going up the stairs now.

"But it's exactly what you want or you wouldn't have waited weeks before trying this crap."
"Stop it, Quinn. Just accept that I'm done and we can go back to the way things were before."

"Why are you so damn worried about Sam all of a sudden? You don't even talk to him! I'm surprised you even know his name!"

"He's a human being! That's enough for me to care. Not all of us are as selfish and heartless as you are. I care when others people's feelings get hurt because God knows I've been there enough. You, however, are more than content to do or say whatever it is you want without a single thought for how it might affect someone else. And I'm sick of it!"

All of a sudden, Quinn had a painful grip on her arm, and she forcefully threw Rachel into the girl's bathroom, so much that she stumbled over her own feet. There were a few sophomore girls hanging about that looked surprised, but one glare from the Head Cheerleader had them scrambling for the door.

"Don't you manhandle me, Quinn Fabray!" she cried. "What has gotten into you?"

Quinn walked up the row of stalls, throwing each door open with a crashing bang each time, to ensure that they were alone before she turned on her again.

"Do you want me to break up with him?" she exclaimed. "Is that it? Is that what this is about?"

Rachel was taken aback. The blonde didn't seem quite so vicious anymore, just bewildered…and lost.

"Would you?" she asked quietly.

Quinn looked away, shaking her head furiously. "Why would I do that?"

"If you're not even willing to answer then I guess there's no point in discussing it."

"You do want me to break up with him!" she said accusingly.

The door opened and two girls were about to walk in.

"GET OUT!"

They squeaked at the enraged HBIC and promptly ran away.

"It doesn't matter what I want. You obviously do not possess the moral capacity to do the right thing, so I'll do it for you. I won't be party to something that would hurt someone else. That's just the end of it."

"No, we're not done here."

"There's nothing more to say! You've made your position clear, as have I. We both know where we stand."

The door swung open again. It was a freshman Cheerio. Quinn was so fed up at that point that she just shoved the girl back and slammed the door without a word. There was a chair off to the right and she dragged it over, wedging it under the handle to ensure that they wouldn't be interrupted anymore.

"This has nothing to do with hurting anyone! You're just jealous of him, Rachel. You're jealous and hiding behind the pathetic excuse of morals, when really it's just about your own selfishness. It's laughable that you think you're so much better than me. I'm the selfish one? You don't make a single move without thinking about what's in it for you! Whether it's a solo or a guy you're interested in or
Rachel struggled not to let Quinn's vicious attack get the best of her. "You're right," she said and lifted her chin determinedly. "I've made mistakes and I'm trying to learn from them. It's all anyone can do. But at least I know what I want and I'm not ashamed of trying to make it happen. You are so terrified of what you want that you're doing everything you can to deny it, trying to make yourself want different things, what you think you're supposed to have. But it's not working is it?"

"And what would you know about what I want?" she spat.

"Because you want me."

For a moment there, she wasn't sure if Quinn was going to hit her or just storm out. It felt like the longest time that they stood there, locked in anger with tension fueling the space between them.

Then the other girl just simply relented. Her shoulders slumped and she moved towards the sinks, avoiding looking at herself in the mirror.

"This isn't fair, Rachel," she said hoarsely. "You didn't care about him before. Why now? Why can't you just leave it alone?"

The brunette approached her cautiously. Quinn clenched the sides of the sink so tightly that her arms trembled.

"I admit…his presence in all this didn't even occur to me until yesterday. You've had me in a tailspin these past few weeks, Quinn. I can hardly think straight. I've just been going through this in a daze. First Finn broke things off and then you came in… I wasn't thinking properly. You have that effect on me, you know."

She could see the blonde's grip relaxing. Her arms weren't shaking anymore.

"It's okay to be scared," she whispered. "I'm scared too."

Quinn glanced at her for a moment, as if debating something, and then turned her body so that they were facing each other now.

"I don't want this to stop," she said quietly.

"I don't want it to either."

"So why are you being like this?"

"Quinn…" she trailed off at the pleading gaze in the blonde's eyes.

All the resolve she told herself she was going to have? Didn't happen.

Quinn cupped her cheek and Rachel instinctively touched her waist as they leaned in closer. When those soft, pink lips pressed against hers, Rachel knew she lost the battle. Hell, she was going to lose the war too. Quinn was right, she didn't have the means to resist her, not because she couldn't, but because she didn't want to. The cheating was only a contributing factor. Jealousy had been the true driving force. She wanted Quinn. But Sam was the one who had her. In the end, Quinn would never choose her and Rachel was going to get her heart broken.

Yet, none of those things mattered when Quinn kissed her. Just as every other time - logic, reason, and the rest of the world flew out the door. It was just about them.
Furious pounding on the door shocked them both out of the haze.

"Quinn! Quinn, don't do it girl!" Mercedes shouted from the other side. "We heard you barricaded yourself in there with Rachel, but just calm down!"

"It's not worth it!" Kurt yelled.

"We know what she's like, but if you kill her you're going to spend the best years of your life in the Ohio State Penitentiary!"

"You'll be an old crone by the time they let you out! Wrinkles and all!"

Rachel huffed. "Some friends," she muttered. "You're apparently in here murdering me and it's your life they're concerned about?"

She didn't even crack a smile, never taking her eyes off her.

"QUINN!"

More banging.

"I don't hear anything. What if she killed her already and escaped out the window?"

"No, Coach Sylvester had the windows nailed shut and booby trapped it with a taser last year when she caught some of the Cheerios smoking," Mercedes replied.

"So why aren't they answering?"

The blonde didn't seem to hear a word of what was going on outside that door. Instead, she reached out and brushed some hair back from Rachel's face. She breathed in sharply at the touch of Quinn's fingertips against her cheek. She could feel herself getting lost again in the intensity of those beautiful hazel eyes.

"Please?" Quinn begged. She sounded so vulnerable...so desperate. "Can we just wait and see if this is...if this is...you know. Please, just say yes. Say okay. That's all."

Rachel wanted to say no, knew she should say no...had to say no.

"Okay," she whispered.

"WHITE GIRL, YOU BETTER OPEN THIS DOOR NOW BEFORE I BREAK IT DOWN!"

Mercedes bellowed.

Quinn's face set into a dark glower. She knocked away the chair and tore the door open to see a frantic looking Kurt and Mercedes.

"Finally!" they said in unison.

"What the hell is wrong with you?" she snapped. "Are you two insane, beating on the door like that? If I were going to actually murder someone, it's not going to be in the school bathroom before first period!"

"Well...not murder..." Kurt said awkwardly.

"More like beat the daylights out of..." Mercedes finished.
"You two need to get a life. Don't ever do that again."

With that, Quinn stalked off, leaving Kurt and Mercedes befuddled and faced with an entirely unamused Rachel.

She immediately regretted her decision to give in to Quinn. Then, for a few minutes, she didn't regret it only to regret it again. It was quite the tennis match for Rachel's brain as she flew back and forth between the two.

The week passed by, then another one. They were friends. Quinn was still with Sam, but spent almost all her time with Rachel. The members of the Glee club were suspicious of their newfound friendship, but the rest of the school reacted a bit more severely. Seeing Quinn and Rachel arguing? That was as typical and anticipated as the bell in between periods. Seeing Quinn exchange clipped but civil words with Rachel? Nothing to bat an eye at. But to see Quinn and Rachel walk down the halls smiling and giggling with each other? Even the teachers were on red alert!

With the whole school now taking a vested interest in every single move they made, waiting for Armageddon, the girls knew they had to be extra careful with how it looked. Though it hardly stopped them from finding ways to escape to some secluded corner to enjoy a brief few minutes in each other's arms - the auditorium rapidly became a preferred place of refuge.

Still, as much as Rachel enjoyed being on good terms with Quinn, however precarious and undoubtedly complex their fledgling relationship was, she knew they had to step it up soon. Making out in the wings of the auditorium was all well and good, but it wasn't getting them anywhere. Quinn was still too afraid to make the break with Sam and Rachel logically understood that it was a way of protecting herself and not having to accept the full weight of her actions. It didn't mean it hurt any less when she saw them walking down the halls hand in hand. Quinn swore that she didn't want Sam that way, but whenever Rachel even casually hinted at her ending things with him, the blonde shut down.

Of course, she believed that Quinn didn't have real feelings for him.

Of course, she would always harbor doubts about it.

Rachel was at her locker when Quinn walked up and asked to have lunch together.

"Really?" she squeaked.

Though they were friends, the two remained separated at lunch, Quinn sitting with Santana, Brittany, and some other Cheerios, while Rachel was at her usual table with Kurt, Mercedes, Mike, and Tina. They hadn't crossed that line yet, especially with the scrutiny they were under. Sitting together at lunch just might send everyone overboard and they were trying to be as low key as possible.

While this is what they had agreed to, she was more than happy to ignore it altogether because it meant Quinn wanted to sit with her for all to see.

"Meet me in the choir room?" she asked sweetly.

Rachel's face fell. Of course, this wasn't about a cafeteria proclamation. Quinn just wanted to spend their lunch hour making out. It wasn't that she was opposed to the idea, far from it, but she still couldn't help feeling a little disappointed.

"Lunchtime exists for a reason, Quinn." She frowned. "I can't skip an integral meal that fuels my energy for the rest of the day just for some hormonal-"
The other girl started laughing, confusing her so much that she stopped mid-sentence.

"Actually," she explained with a smile, "I just wanted to be alone so we could have the chance to talk more. You know, like you've been asking?"

Rachel's mouth formed an 'o' shape.

She took advantage of the moment and leaned in, whispering seductively against her ear, "But if that's what you had in mind, I wouldn't object…"

The brunette blushed furiously, tucking her hair back as she focused on the floor. Smirking victoriously, Quinn sauntered off with an extra sway in her hips, knowing full well that Rachel was watching her go.

Her cheeks aflame, she closed her locker, sagging against it for some much-needed support. Quinn reached the end of the hall where a group of freshman Cheerios were gathered and promptly slapped one of them upside the head.

"No stains on the uniform. Change. Now."

She yelped and immediately ran off, while Quinn went on her way without a second glance. The other girls watched her go fearfully.

Groaning, Rachel rapped the back of her head against the metal lightly.

What had she gotten herself into?

Later, Quinn was spending her third ever night at the Berry house. The men were extremely suspicious that their daughter was embarking on a friendship with the girl who had previously been the cause of so much pain in her life. Rachel had explained to them that Quinn was different now, so they tolerated her for their baby's sake, but remained ever wary. Rachel was too trusting. It was how she'd ended up with her heart broken so many times. They knew it. Quinn knew it. Only time would tell who was right and who was wrong.

At the moment, the two girls were sitting on the floor playing Battleship.

Quinn was not pleased.

"It's a Friday night and we're playing board games?" she groaned.

"It's good, clean fun, Quinn. A4," she retorted airily.

"Miss. Battleship though? Don't you have anything better? J6."

"Hit. We are in possession of quite an impressive array of games to choose from, particularly party games seeing as how my fathers often like to entertain. I thought we might try Scrabble after this. E2."

"Miss. Scrabble? I thought you'd pull out Candyland or something. J7."

"Miss. I think we're a little old for Candyland, Quinn," she replied, missing the sarcasm entirely. "D9. Are you really not having fun?"

"Hit. No, it's fine," she grumbled, "I just thought, you know, we could…" Her gaze drifted to the bed.
It's not that she didn't like hanging out with Rachel. She really did. In fact, the more time she spent with the girl behind closed doors, the more she realized just how much she really did like her as a person. What had always been so irritating and overbearing about her wasn't there when they spent time alone. Yet, Rachel was the same person she always was. It was Quinn that changed.

The more she found herself enjoying the time spent with the diva, even when not making out, the more Quinn realized that all the things she found so infuriating, were actually things she really loved. Rachel's ambition, her drive, her talent, her determination, her dedication, all of it was part of what made her just so amazing as a person. She could be so fearless, so resilient. Rachel was Quinn always wished she were strong enough to be.

So, of course, she had found her obnoxious, diva-like behavior in Glee infuriating. It was like she was forcing herself into Quinn's life when she'd been doing everything possible to keep her out of it. Of course, she was infuriated by her underhanded attempts to steal her boyfriend (it'd always been fairly easy to convince herself it was because she loved Finn, not that any iota of her anger came from how much it hurt to see Rachel want him). Of course, she had hated how easily Rachel brushed off any slushie or cruel remark that she (and many, many others) would throw her way. It only made her feel worse. Not only was she hurting someone who didn't deserve it (for reasons she was not going to admit at the time), but it also outlined just how weak she herself was by comparison.

Still, no matter how much she enjoyed talking to Rachel, how amused she was by all those little quirks and details of her life and personality she was still discovering, it didn't take away that ever constant desire to be kissing her. So what if she'd hoped their sleepover would be reminiscent of the previous ones? That wasn't a bad thing! And Rachel was certainly not helping by wearing that silk nightgown. She'd changed into that after dinner and then pulled out Battleship? Was she kidding? That was downright cruel!

The brunette just rolled her eyes. "The night is young. If we're going to start down this road to further understand our…this…the only way we'll achieve anything is by talking. I just want to get to know you better." Quinn frowned, not able to dispute that.

"What do you want to talk about?" she asked. "J4."

"Hit. Anything. E9."

"Hit. Well, that's too vague. You're going to have to be more specific. J3."


"Finally!" she exclaimed and tossed the game aside, crossing her legs Indian style. "Okay, so you want to get to know each other and you thought board games were going to help that along?"

"It is a time-honored tradition for friends and family to-"

"Why don't we just ask each other some questions and start that way?"

Direct and to the point…it was the easiest way possible and would save her the time of having to go through anymore pointless board games. If she knew Rachel at all, the girl probably had a succession of at least ten games she intended to push Quinn into which would revolve around a not-so-subtle interrogation (which she had a previously composed list of questions for). Quinn was not about to let their night be wasted like that.

Rachel considered it for a moment, obviously concerned that it meant she was going to have to
abandon her carefully constructed plans, but eventually relented. "Okay. Me first. Favorite color?"

"Yellow. Yours?"

"Fuchsia."

"Vacations?"

"We have a family house in Pennsylvania. Most of my summers are spent there when I'm not a performing arts camp. You?"

"St. Barts was the usual. That won't be happening anymore with the divorce though."

"How are you dealing with that?"

"Life is better without my Dad. We can just leave it at that. Favorite food?"

"Tomatoes. You?"

"Tomatoes? Who answers 'tomatoes' to the favorite food question? It's usually fries or pizza."

Rachel pouted. Quinn was quickly discovering that she really liked it when she did that.

"But I really love tomatoes…"

"So weird."

She narrowed her eyes. "I wasn't aware we were going to be judging each other's answers."

"Fine." She held up her hands in forfeit. "I guess I'll say bacon."

"Oh, Quinn, red meat, really? Do you not understand-"

"What happened to the no judging?" she interrupted pointedly. "Don't even attempt to lecture me on this one. Bacon makes the world go round."

"That is…grossly inaccurate."

She ignored her. "Favorite sleeping position?"

"Um, Quinn…" She shifted in embarrassment, tucking her legs underneath her.

"Actual sleep!"

"Oh. On my side usually. You?"

On top of you.

"Stomach."

"Are we dating?"

Quinn stared at her.

"Sorry," Rachel shrugged helplessly, "I tried to allow for some warm up questions first before we got to the more hard hitting things. I know we're not dating as in, publicly or officially because you yet still retain a boyfriend, my dubious feelings about which you are no doubt aware of, but are we…is
this a relationship?"

"Do you want it to be?"

"You know the answer to that."

Quinn swallowed thickly. She'd thought Rachel's 'getting to know you' scheme would involve just the simple things; favorite movie, morning person/night person, boxers or briefs? Things like that! But here she was…cornered…and there was no getting out of it. She was the one who'd proposed the direct approach after all. It was her own damn fault.

Well, she wasn't going to lie.

Her heart began to beat erratically and she took a deep breath, trying to be strong enough. She could do this. She could admit it.

"I-I think I want it to be too."

"Okay." Rachel nodded. "Most listened to song on your iPod?"

"That's it?" she said dumbly, her lungs expelling air in a whoosh.

The brunette had hardly even blinked in response. Where was the overzealous diva? Where was the obsessive-compulsive behavior that would have her plotting out every single moment spent together for the next ten years? Where were the grand, sweeping romantic gestures that likely included singing ballads on the street for all to hear? Where was the jumping for joy, attacking her with kisses, planning out their wedding theme?

Wedding theme? Whoa. You did not just go there.

Quinn felt lightheaded.

"You answered the question." She shrugged.

"But I thought you'd want to go over every single aspect of what we're doing in agonizing detail, including ultimatums about me dumping Sam."

Why was Rachel being so casual about this? She had just admitted to wanting to be with her, in an actual, I-want-more-than-kissing, way! By Rachel Berry's rules of life, there should be- oh.

Quinn felt like kicking herself. Why would Rachel freak out over something like this when she had given her every reason to need to protect herself? She couldn't even manage to break up with her boyfriend even though she spent her days and nights in Rachel's arms and here she was disappointed that Rachel wasn't over the moon about this, happier about them? Damn, she really was self-absorbed. That was going to have to change.

Still…she'd seen what Rachel was like in her other relationships, with Finn and Jesse. If they'd let her, she would have sewn their clothes together just to never leave their side. When Rachel was in love, she was all out in love, no holds barred, embarrassing, exposed, rip-my-heart-out-and-stomp-on-it—if-you-want-to, love. Maybe what really bothered her about all this was that Rachel didn't seem to feel that way about her. From a practical standpoint, Quinn was grateful for her restraint because an overzealous lovesick Rachel was the last thing she could handle. Yet…she still kind of wanted it. It actually…kind of killed her to think that Rachel wouldn't feel that way about her.

Yep, that was definitely a headache forming between her eyes.
"That can all wait," she replied simply. "I just required a preliminary affirmation to prepare for future discussions on the topic."

"Won't that be fun," she muttered.

"Just tell me the song, Quinn," she said patiently.

Fine. They'd keep playing the game.

"'You Keep Me Hanging On'. Favorite flower?"

"You're not gonna ask me mine?"

"I know it already; 'Defying Gravity'."

Rachel was genuinely surprised. "How?"

"It's your favorite song. I remember." She shrugged. "So, flower?"

"Orchids. You?"

"Yellow roses. Wanna know why?"

"Your favorite color is yellow?" she responded dryly.

Quinn smirked. "It didn't always mean what people look at it as now. In olden times, yellow roses symbolized jealousy between lovers and dying relationships. Now, we see it as happy, bright, hopeful. Its color is linked to the sun, so like each dawn, yellow roses represent new life, new beginnings. But it wasn't always that way. I like it because there's a history to it that people don't stop to consider, how things can change, how meaning can take different forms over time. Also, it's my favorite color."

Rachel smiled serenely at her, her brown eyes shining.

"What? I know things. I'm not going to be class valedictorian for nothing."

She gasped indignantly. "My GPA is only .05 behind you, Fabray, don't get too comfortable! All it takes is one misplaced B+ and I'll be the one giving the speech. It's just as well because we both know I'm an incredibly talented public speaker."

"In your dreams!"

"Just you wait!"

"Anymore questions?"

"Just one. Did you really stab Ben Iverson in the leg with a metal fork in junior high?"

Quinn burst out laughing. "I can't believe you remember that!"

"It was quite the scandal. You were suspended, Quinn!"

"For a week."

"So you did do it?"

"No." She shook her head. "Santana did."
"I KNEW IT!" Rachel exclaimed emphatically, throwing her hands in the air victoriously. "But why? They had to take him to the ER because of how deep it went into his thigh!"

Quinn sobered with a sigh. "He corned Brittany earlier that day, called her a retard, forced his hand up her skirt. She got away and told Santana, so…"

"I never knew…poor Brittany. That's terrible. I don't understand though, why did you take the fall?"

"Santana had gotten into a lot of fights that year, mostly because she was defending Brittany and occasionally because she's just a bitch. She'd already reached the point where if there was one more violent incident, she'd be expelled. Her parents were already researching military schools. So I just said I did it."

"You risked that for Santana?"

"She's my friend and she was just defending Brit."

"Were your parents upset?"

"Furious. They grounded me for two months. You don't know how grateful I was to get back to school after that endless week suspension. I thought I was going to lose my mind."

"Didn't you tell them what he did?"

"Oh, sure, but it didn't mean anything. The Iversons were part of our church group. It was embarrassing for them. It didn't matter what he did, my parents told me I should have just stayed out of it. It wasn't my business anyway."

She frowned disapprovingly. "I'm proud of you, protecting your friends like that. And I totally knew you didn't do it. It had Santana written all over it."

Quinn chuckled.

"So, anymore questions for me?" Rachel asked.

She pursed her lips and thought for a moment. "Did you really slip Crater Face Fulton tongue behind the dumpster freshman year?"

"NO!" she cried. "That pea brained freak spread the rumor after I politely rejected his advances. I was mortified and no one believed that I didn't kiss him!"

She rambled on about the injustices of her situation and how Crater Face Fulton never got the punishment he deserved for trying to destroy what little reputation she had and Quinn listened to it all. She didn't say anything, but guilt weighed her down as she knew full well her part in helping to fuel the rumors that had made Rachel a laughingstock.

Her thoughts drifted back to a certain day on the playground. Where it all began. When Rachel had transformed from the sweet (albeit loud) brunette that she secretly watched from afar, the one who would share her crayons with her and hum during class work, to the annoying freak who Quinn couldn't stand to even look at without feeling irrationally angry.

"Rachel?"

"Hm?" she answered distractedly, obviously still fuming over Crater Face Fulton.

"You were my first kiss."
Obviously not expecting that sudden change of subject, her eyes widened and she peered at her with such scrutiny that Quinn started to feel extremely uncomfortable. The room was far too quiet.

"You were mine too," she whispered at last.

"I'm sorry I hit you afterwards."

She smiled softly. "I forgave you for that a long time ago, Quinn. Even with the subsequent damage to my nose, I wouldn't change that kiss for the world. I'm glad it was you."

"I would," she said bitterly. "I would change it. I would change it so I didn't get so stupid and scared and hurt you like that. You didn't deserve it. I'm so sorry."

Quinn didn't know why she felt this desperate need to apologize. After so many years, did it really matter anymore? Besides, the many crimes she committed against Rachel over the years were far worse and more damaging than any one punch in the face. Yet, she was overwhelmed in that moment by the need to make the girl understand that she truly did regret what she'd done, not just that, but all of it. All of the rumors, all of the slushies, all of the horrible, hurtful, hateful things she'd ever said and done.

If she were going to start making amends then why not start at the beginning? Maybe it was time she started to admit to herself why she'd been so cruel, why Rachel had been the target, obsessively so, for so long. It had all started with that first kiss. Okay, so she wasn't fully ready to wade into the sweeping apologies and begging forgiveness for everything just yet. But this is where she would start, with honesty.

"I want you to know, that even though I did that, I'm really glad you were my first too."

"I can forgive you again if it would make you feel better?" she offered with a shy smile.

"It would, actually."

She leaned towards her and the brunette tilted her head, expecting a kiss, but Quinn pulled out a box from under the bed and settled back.

"So, Scrabble?"

Rachel lit up excitedly, clapping her hands.
Nearing the end of their *Scrabble* game, they were neck and neck, and Rachel was freaking out. *Scrabble* was her game! How did Quinn manage to compete with her like this? She knew the girl was smart, but she would have thought her extensive vocabulary would have far exceeded Quinn's nonetheless. Yet the blonde was more than holding her own.

Of course, she was extremely competitive by nature, but she hadn't cared so much about their *Battleship* game since she hardly paid attention to what she was doing. Instead, she'd spent the time going over her carefully laid plans in her head for how to initiate further conversation with Quinn that would deepen their understanding of each other as well as their...whatever.

*Scrabble*, however, was a different matter entirely! She never lost a game – the undisputed, undefeated Champion of the Berry household starting at the tender age of five. This was one game Quinn would not win.

While Rachel plotted her last word, the blonde grew bored and impatient, meandering over to one of the shelves to look through DVDs.

"You're taking too long! This is not life and death - it's not even chess - it's *Scrabble"!"

"I'm allowed as much time as I need to consider all possibilities, Quinn! Don't rush me!"

"Next time, we're using a timer," she muttered. "Ugh, are these all the movies you have? Isn't there anything that was filmed in the last *thirty* years?"

"They're called classics. Don't be so closed-minded, I happen to believe you would greatly enjoy any one of them."  

"Do your Dads have anything better?" she whined.

"They have their own collection downstairs, below the TV in the den, now shush! I have to focus."

Exasperated, Quinn went off in search of something more suitable for them to watch, returning ten minutes later with several DVDs in her arms.

"Something to be said for their taste," she remarked. "They've got some awesome-"

"Shhh!"

"You haven't gone yet? Rachel!"

"I'm still thinking," she protested.

"Enough is enough. Go or I'm not playing anymore." She dumped the movies on the bed before sitting back down on the floor.

Frowning deeply, Rachel gave in and put her word down with a dissatisfied huff.

_Copulation._

Quinn raised an eyebrow. "I wasn't aware we were playing the dirty version. I could have gotten into that."
Rachel rolled her eyes and added up her score, pleased to see that she had finally surged ahead of Quinn enough to make a difference. She would have to find something worth 30 points to beat her.

"No way are you going to win this one, blondie. You may have defeated me in a game of strategy, but this is about verbosity and we all know that's a talent of mine behind only the performing arts and single-minded ambition."

Quinn narrowed her eyes. "Care to make it interesting?"

"A bet?" Rachel perked up eagerly.

"Winner picks the movie."

"Done! You're going to love An Affair to Remember."

She ignored her, pondering over it for a few seconds and then deftly placed her word on the board. 

_Tantalizing._

The brunette's mouth dropped open.

"So…that's 22, plus the triple word score, plus the points from your words cause I used the 'n' and 't' here, thank you sweetie, which leaves me with 80 points to a grand total of 425, although I should probably get extra for following your 'naughty' theme. Doesn't matter. Devil Wears Prada it is!"

Quinn lifted her eyebrow for that oh-so-familiar HBIC smirk of victory.

Rachel barely resisted the urge to toss the board across the room. She forced Quinn to sit there as she added up the points again just to be sure there was no mistake. It took three separate recalculations and several (twelve) rebuffed demands for a rematch before she had to resign herself to the fact that Quinn did indeed win fair and square.

Then after some (a lot of) reassurance, Quinn managed to pry the dictionary out of girl's hands, while she fiercely protested, insisting that she needed to study as she had obviously grown indolent and complacent if Quinn was able to beat her, which prompted a round of bickering with Quinn wanting to know just what she meant by that.

Finally, they settled in to watch the movie which Rachel really wasn't looking forward to. She thought these kinds of movies were ridiculous. However, about ten minutes later she was the one getting into it, while Quinn was more interested in watching Rachel than the screen.

They were curled up under a blanket on Rachel's bed, resting against pillows and the headboard. There was enough space between them to be considered respectable - only their elbows were grazing - and it was driving Quinn insane. After a few moments of internal debate, she entwined their hands and let them rest on her lap. Rachel smiled but didn't say anything, never taking her eyes off the movie.

Quinn had thought the additional contact would have made it better, but the desire for more only increased. Tracing light circles over the back of her hand, she was mesmerized by the feeling of Rachel's soft skin beneath her fingertips, the butterflies that filled her chest, the way her heart raced, intoxicated by the delicious scent of her shampoo since she was so close, but still much too far. Quinn turned Rachel's hand over and stroked the palm before raking over it lightly with her nails. Rachel bit her lip, but still didn't look her way.

Quinn never thought she could feel like this before, wanting someone so much. She'd felt affection,
inklings of attraction, but nothing like this. She'd never desired.

Sometimes she felt like Rachel wasn't just her first kiss, she was her first everything.

After a few minutes more of innocent handholding exploration, she couldn't take it anymore and shifted closer, bringing her body flush against Rachel's side and kissed the sweet spot just below the brunette's ear.

"Quinn," Rachel said a bit breathlessly, "Need I remind you that you're the one who wanted to watch this?"

"Found something better," she replied simply.

Rachel finally turned to face her and Quinn seized the opportunity. Their mouths fused eagerly and the movie was forgotten.

Another weekend spent with Rachel, another Monday with Sam interrogating her about why she never had time for him anymore, another week of sneaking around, and Quinn was lost. She didn't want anything to change and yet she wanted everything to.

She let Sam talk her into a date on Friday night. It wasn't like she really had a choice anyway. They hadn't gone out in ages and if she really intended to keep dating him, that included going on actual dates, right?

She didn't tell Rachel about her plans. What was the point? It would only needlessly upset her and Quinn was not prepared to broach the subject again after the compromise they'd come to in the bathroom that day…too much, too soon.

Instead, she made up an excuse about having to hang with Santana and Brittany. Rachel didn't protest, only appeared slightly disappointed. Quinn wished she could tell her how disappointed she was too.

Sam took her to Color Me Mine. He chose a plate; she chose a coffee mug. He painted their names together in the center, but refused to let her see until the end when he held it up with a shy, goofy sort of smile that made her feel like the worst person in the world.

Quinn painted gold stars.

He took her to the new Mexican restaurant in a neighboring town and they had a good time. In all honesty, Quinn enjoyed spending time with Sam. It's why she started going out with him in the first place. He was sweet and honest and he made her smile. It didn't hurt that he was attractive, had a solidified top position on the football team, social stature, and making out with him was not a hardship. She considered him a real friend, if nothing else.

But even when laughing at a joke he made or them aimlessly chatting with him about what was going on in school or Glee club, Quinn couldn't keep her mind off a certain brunette. She wasn't miserable being with Sam, she was miserable being without Rachel. There was also that nagging part where the entire basis of her relationship with him was a lie…and she was cheating on him. That didn't help.

Sam brought her home. Her Mom was out, and they settled onto the couch to watch a movie they had picked up on the way back.

"Is everything okay with you?" he asked as they sat next to each other with a good distance between
them, as in not touching in the least.

"Of course," she answered lightly, "Why wouldn't it be?"

"Well, I gotta say I've been trying really hard these last few weeks not to get paranoid."

*Oh, no. Please don't do this. Please don't start.*

"I mean, when we're together, you always seem like you're somewhere else. And you're not even around much anymore. This is the first night we've gone out in weeks. I don't wanna be this whiny, clingy guy who has to beg his girl just to hang with him once in a while…and I feel like you're turning me into that. Did I do something wrong? Are you mad at me? Just tell me and I'll fix it somehow."

She forced a smile. That sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach was getting worse. "No, I'm not mad at you. I swear. I've just been busy, that's all. And we're together right now, aren't we? We had fun tonight."

"Did we? Cause you didn't seem to."

"I like spending time with you, Sam," she said honestly. "I'm sorry if I've made you feel like I don't."

"But there's something going on," he pressed. "You've been acting differently. If it's not me, then what is it?"

"There's nothing," she said firmly. "We're going to watch the movie now."

He grumbled something inaudibly, but sat back and crossed his arms in resignation. Quinn felt guilt mixed with relief as she reached for the remote.

"Turn off the light?" she asked as he moved closer.

He got up to hit the switch, blanketing them in darkness except for the screen's glow. As Quinn went to the menu screen and hit play, she realized that he hadn't returned to his seat. Looking over wonderingly, the lights went back on. Sam was already heading for the coat rack to get his jacket.

"I'm not in the mood for a movie," he said crossly.

"What? Why? I even let you pick it out this time! It's not like I'm dying to see aliens chase the human race into extinction."

"Just not in the mood," he repeated. "I think I'm gonna call it a night. See you later."

"Sam!" she said in disbelief, stumbling off the couch. "Sam, wait, don't go. Why are you so upset?"

"I'm not."

"I'm not." He shrugged, but his body language screamed otherwise. "Night, Quinn."

He was out the door before she could say another word, without so much as a kiss goodbye.

Quinn really had no idea what to do now. She, of course, expected to face some fierce inquiries from the boy about her absentee behavior, but nothing to this extent. Sam was always pretty easy going and entirely too gullible. He usually believed everything she said.

But she might have pushed him too far this time. It was a hole Quinn wasn't sure she could get out of.
Did she even want out of it? Wouldn't she have tried harder to convince him and make him feel better if this relationship were what she really wanted?

Shutting off the TV, she trudged up the stairs to her room and wondered if she should call Rachel. That was something she wanted, whether or not she was going to do it…

Dammit. That girl couldn't have been more right. She was still trying to make herself want all the things that her parents taught her to. Why bother denying it at this point? It wasn't even hidden thoughts and longing anymore. It was real; it was happening, and still she was trying to straddle the nonexistent line - hurting people in the process.

She needed to make this decision once and for all. Rachel didn't understand the full extent of what Quinn was facing, she had it so much easier, but that wasn't an excuse. Even if she couldn't be publically open about…who she is…she could still be honest with herself. The world didn't have to know. Quinn had to know.

She picked up her cell and scrolled to Rachel's name, her thumb hovering over the send button for a moment before she just put it back down.

Not right now.

Deciding it was late enough, and she did have to be up early for Saturday practice tomorrow, she was about to undress for bed, when suddenly her door was thrown open.

"What are you doing?" she cried, looking at an extremely disheveled and angry Sam.

"I've been sitting in my truck for the last ten minutes trying to talk myself out of this, trying to believe you, trying to find any way I can to understand this, but I can't, Quinn!"

"Sam, wha-"

"You're cheating on me," he said flatly.

"No, I'm not."

The answer was so automatic and instinctive that she didn't have to think about it for the words to fly out.

"Yes, you are," he replied determinedly. "The lying's gonna stop right now. I don't deserve this crap! I'm pretty, but I ain't dumb. Tell me the truth. Admit it once and for all! Are you cheating?"

The words weren't coming anymore. She could only stare at him.

He took a shuddering breath and nodded as if she had actually answered, tugging his hands through already messy hair. "Right. Who is it? Does he go to our school? Is it Finn? Puck? Who?"

"It doesn't matter," she said faintly.

"THE HELL IT DOESN'T!"

She flinched. Sam never raised his voice to her. In fact, she didn't think she'd heard him yell ever.

"Tell me who the guy is! I have a right to know. You owe me at least that much!"

"I can't-"
He stormed into the room further, angry, but not out of control. She knew he was upset and it hurt her heart to know that she was the cause. She wasn't afraid of Sam, but she was afraid of what was about to happen.

"Tell-me-who-he-is," he said through gritted teeth. "Fuck, Quinn! You've been playing me for a sap and you don't even have the decency to be honest even now after you've been caught in your lies? TELL ME WHO HE IS!"

Hearing the rage in his voice, the voice of a sweet boy who'd been nothing but kind to her, had Quinn wallowing in despair. She'd brought this out in him. Then there was the pain in his eyes. She'd done that too. She'd taken him in and turned him upside down with no other thought than for her own purposes.

'Who cares about him?' she'd said to Rachel. 'He's nothing.'

As Quinn watched him now, angry, trembling, and so completely devastated, she realized how wrong she was. Who cared about him? She cared. She'd treated him like nothing. But he wasn't nothing.

"Rachel," she whispered.

Sam closed his eyes in exasperation and scrubbed his face hard. "What about Rachel?" he snapped impatiently.

"It's Rachel," she said again, louder this time.

He still wasn't getting it though.

"What is Rachel? What are you talking about?"

Oh for…

"You asked me who it is and I'm telling you! I've been cheating on you with Rachel!"

He stared at her dumbly. "Rachel's a girl's name."

She felt like smacking him.

"Yes, Sam," she replied in a tightly controlled voice, "Rachel Berry."

"Y-you've been cheating on me w-with Rachel Berry?" he stammered. "A girl? Quinn! Are you seriously telling me you're…you're…"

"I'm gay."

And whatever semblance of control she'd been holding on to in the last few minutes, finally gave way. She burst out sobbing in the worst of ways. It was the painful kind, and it hurt her chest and burned her eyes.

She didn't even have the strength to stand anymore and fell against the wall, sliding to the floor. Her body was not her own as she cried violently into her hands. It took her some time to realize that there was someone else sitting beside her, arms around her shoulders, soft whispers of reassurance against her ear.

"I'm so sorry," she sobbed and the arms around her tightened and Quinn threw herself into his embrace, burying her head against his shoulder.
She wasn't sure how long she went on like that. All she knew was that she cried for so long, she didn't have tears anymore. It was just wracking sobs that hurt with each and every expansion of her lungs. He had his arms wrapped so fiercely around her, it was like he was afraid to let go.

Slowly, her breathing began to even out once more. She only shuddered every now and then, and then she wasn't crying anymore. She stayed there like that, quiet, enveloped in Sam's strong arms. Even though every part of her ached, both physically and otherwise, and he'd just witnessed something she never let anyone see before in her life, Quinn was grateful to have him there.

She didn't want to be alone anymore.

"When did you put that hole in your wall?" he asked out of the blue.

It was oddly jarring to hear his voice again after such a prolonged silence. Quinn had to repeat what he said in her head twice before she even understood the question. From where they were sitting, Sam had a direct line of sight to the small hole she'd tried to cover up by putting a waste basket in front of it. He must have knocked it out of the way when he ran in.

"Few weeks ago," she replied hoarsely.

"Hurt your foot?"

"Yeah," she sighed. "How did you know?"

"That you kicked it? I'm a guy. I'm an expert on holes in the wall. We make them often enough."

"What am I gonna do?" she whispered. "God, Sam…"

"You're going to be fine," he whispered back, never letting his hold slacken.

The panic bubbled up in her. FINE? It wasn't going to be FINE! Her life was over! She was ruined! She'd just admitted the one thing she could never be and what would become of her now? She'd lost everything.

"No! I can't be this way!" she shrieked and pushed against him until he let her break away. "I'll… Don't you get what will happen to me? You've met my parents, Sam! You've heard the kind of stuff they say. My mother may have been able to get over the teen pregnancy thing, but this? If she finds out that I'm… I'll be kicked out again! They'll disown me. I'll have nothing. I'll be a waitress at Breadstix, no future to speak of, forever a Lima loser. That is if Daddy doesn't have me run out of town. I can't be like this! It's wrong! Why am I so unbelievably screwed up?"

"Quinn!" he said in disbelief. "There is nothing wrong with you." Sam got on his knees in front of her and put his hands on either side of her face so that she would look at him. "We don't get to choose who we love," he said softly. "Just take me. Apparently, I fell in love with a girl who only likes other girls. You think I would have picked that? You're so amazing, Quinn. You're smart, beautiful, talented, and one of the best people I know. No matter what your parents say, love is love, and you should never be ashamed of that."

If she had tears left, she would have been crying again, but instead she just pulled him back into her arms and let him hold her. Sam sighed and gathered her closer, resting his cheek against the top of her head.

After a minute, he muttered, "You know…I just got dumped by my girlfriend who was cheating on me and yet I'm the one doing the comforting here? Somehow I think we got this backwards."
Her stomach twinged with guilt and she lifted her head up forlornly, only to see teasing eyes looking back.

"I don't know if it's supposed to make me feel better or worse that you're chucking me for a girl…"

It was unsettling to hear him talk about this so casually when it meant just about the end of the world for her. Yet, it somehow felt right too.

"Both?" she replied with a hopeful shrug.

"Yep," he nodded and rubbed her shoulder lightly, "that's pretty much what it feels like. Probably should be better though, right? Cause it means there's nothing I can do. I mean, I can't change into a girl, can I? If it had been another dude…then there's something I could have done to hold on to you, but this way…" He trailed off with a shake of his head.

"I really care about you, Sam. Tell me you know that."

"I know that."

She wasn't sure if she believed him.

"It's gonna be okay, you know."

"I know."

She wasn't sure if she believed herself either.

He heaved a sigh. "Look, since you just dumped me and all, for a chick no less, I'm gonna need some space for a while, just to sort my head out and do some majorly dumb guy-type stuff to boost my totally wrecked self confidence, but…" He looked at her with a sad sort of smile. "I want you to know that I still would like to be your friend – if that's cool."

"Really?" she said in disbelief, sitting up out of his arms. "You'd still want to…even after what I did?"

"After some space," he clarified again, "but yeah. I really care about you. Rather have us be friends than nothing."

And she thought there were no more tears left. She had to wipe away the ones rolling down her cheek at this boy's extraordinary kindness. How could she not have known what she had? How could she have been so blind?

Don't answer that.

Sam was hesitant to leave, but after numerous reassurances from Quinn and an airtight promise from him never to repeat a word of what happened tonight, he reluctantly let himself be led to the door. She was sure she still looked a mess, puffy eyes and all, but it didn't matter. A weight had lifted off her shoulders. She didn't exacty feel better for it, but she did feel lighter. He opened the door, but then turned around to pull her back into his arms for a bear hug.

How did he always know when to hug her at just the right time? He'd always been able to do that. She never realized it before.

"Thank you," she murmured as he let go. "For…everything."

"See you around, Quinn." He gave her a little half smile and went down the front steps. She watched
him get into his truck and drive away before closing the door.

She avoided Rachel for the rest of the weekend.
Duets Competition - Part Deux

It felt like the longest weekend of her life and not in a good way. She'd spent it in her bed, staring at the ceiling, sometimes out the window, sometimes the clock, and for a good half hour, the hole in her wall. Maybe if she just stayed in her room long enough, the world would right itself by the time she left it. No such luck. There was school to contend with.

She should be feeling better. She'd admitted her darkest secret aloud. She'd ended things on an actually decent note with Sam. She was free to be with Rachel without having a boyfriend adding to her guilt. But she didn't feel better.

Rachel had texted exactly once and called exactly once, leaving exactly one voicemail that Quinn listened to more times than she would ever admit. It was stupid how disappointed she was. Why should she expect a barrage of texts, phone calls, emails, even Indian smoke signals, from the girl? Why did she think she might have to turn off her phone for the entire weekend just so that it wouldn't burn out from Rachel's endless onslaught? Why did it hurt that she didn't get any of that at all?

Finn used to complain about how often Rachel would text him throughout the day and call him several times a night. She remembered overhearing him say to the brunette that she was smothering him. At the time, she'd felt kind of bad for her, but also a great deal of satisfaction knowing that their relationship wasn't all sunshine and puppy dogs as they tried to make it seem. She'd convinced herself that the satisfaction, the happiness actually, was because Rachel was getting what she deserved for stealing Finn from her. The reality was something else entirely.

An entire weekend had gone by without Quinn contacting her once and all she got was one missed call? One text message saying 'Hi, Quinn. How was your day?' That was it? THAT WAS IT?

It was that, more than anything else, that weighed on her as she walked into school Monday.

Was she going overboard with this whole thing? Rachel didn't seem nearly as affected by Quinn as Quinn was by her. What if Rachel really didn't feel that much for her? What if she still loved Finn? What if she still wanted Finn and Quinn was just a distraction from her broken heart? She could easily be a rebound, particularly since their whole thing started immediately after he'd broken up with her.

Let's be honest.

She'd preyed on Rachel's vulnerability at the time and used it to her advantage. She hadn't wanted to comfort her - at least it wasn't her direct intention - she'd wanted something and she took it, knowing Rachel would let her.

It really sucked actually caring about these things now. Quinn couldn't count how many times in a day she wished she could go back to what she'd been before that night in Rachel's bedroom. Then she would feel sick at the thought of being that person again, because that person didn't get to cuddle with Rachel on her bed, or beat Rachel at Scrabble, or have Rachel smiling at her so brilliantly she felt she just might melt to nothing.

Why couldn't Rachel feel the way she did? It wasn't fair. It was like their roles had been swapped and no one told her. She was the one head over heels while Rachel was just dragging along. Forget the repercussions of what she'd told Sam. Forget what she'd admitted to. Forget everything. It just hurt so much she could hardly breathe sometimes. She hated it. She really, really hated it.
Quinn had just closed her locker when Sam came up, his backpack slung over one shoulder.

"Hey," he greeted hesitantly, "um...we still on for that friends thing?"

She raised an eyebrow questioningly. "What happened to you needing space and time to do stupid manly type things? Sorry, but a weekend is not enough time to get over me. I'm at least six months, several drunken coyote nights, and a seven pound weight gain around the gut worthy."

Sam chuckled and leaned against the lockers.

"No, it's not enough time, not even close," he admitted, gazing at her meaningfully, "but after thinking about it these past couple days...you need a friend more than I need the space. So, uh, here I am." He held up his hands with a small smile.

Quinn threw herself into his arms without even thinking about it. It had been purely instinctive. She was doing that a lot lately. She'd never been like this before. Every move she made was with precise calculation (the disastrous event with Puck notwithstanding). She just wasn't holding back so much anymore. It was freeing, but at the same time absolutely terrifying. Sam hugged her back tightly and she couldn't help but feel grateful for how safe he could make her feel.

"Why couldn't I have fallen in love with you?" she said, muffled by his shoulder.

He smelled good too. Sam always did. It was another thing she liked about him. He never went overboard with the cologne like Puck or "forget" to shower for a few days in a row like Finn. Sam smelled like Sam, freshly shampooed hair and slightly sweet, like coconut. She liked it, but she liked the way Rachel smelled so much more. The comparison was nonexistent.

"Been asking myself that same question," he groaned and leaned his head against hers affectionately. "But...I guess that means you're in love with a certain someone else then?"

Quinn was stunned. Her heart lurched in her chest as her throat contracted painfully and she stepped away from him with wide eyes. "That's ridiculous."

She sounded strange.

Sam gave her a look. "Why else would you be this crazy, weepy mess?"

"Shut up," she hissed through gritted teeth.

They were not going to talk about that, not now, not ever. Because that just wasn't happening. That wasn't what this was.

He relented and shrugged. "Whatever you need, Quinn. Just let me know."

"Thank you," she sighed, feeling a modicum of guilt for reacting so harshly when all he was trying to do was help. "Because I really do need a friend."

"And you have one. Now, cheer up, Fabray. You're beautiful. You got your back-up support. You're the head cheerleader, not to mention the most popular girl in school. Everything's gonna be just fine. The world is still here." He cupped her cheeks before kissing her chastely on the mouth. "Okay?"

She smiled for the first time since their Friday night encounter. "Sam Evans?"

"Hm?"
"You're the best guy I know."

"Yeah," he shrugged, "it really sucks sometimes."

He wasn't joking and she knew it.

Giving his hand a grateful squeeze, which was all she could do besides thank him again, he walked off, and she sighed in relief. Somehow just knowing that Sam was in her corner, as a friend, something she'd never really considered boys to be before, made her feel better. She felt like she wasn't as alone in this anymore.

Now, she really wanted to see Rachel. They had to talk. She had to know for certain where the brunette was about them because she couldn't take anymore of this if they weren't on the same page. God, she really hoped she was wrong about the other girl's feelings. Because if she wasn't...well...her stomach rolled at the thought. Sam hadn't really been so far from the truth. Actually, if she really let it in, he was entirely spot on.

Of course, Quinn wasn't about to go there just yet.

As she went off to her first class she had no idea that Rachel had been just down the hall the whole time watching them.

Quinn looked for her all day. Rachel wasn't even in the few classes they shared together and she started to get worried. That girl never missed school! She had a perfect attendance record. She once came in with the flu and only went home after school officials physically forced her to for public health reasons. Even then, she'd refused until they agreed to mark down that she'd attended the full day. There's no way she would go so far to avoid Quinn as to skip class, right?

She had to clamp her jaw shut almost painfully when she saw Kurt, Mercedes, and Tina in the hall to refrain from asking them if they knew where Rachel was. She'd been so close to letting it slip...

By the end of the day, Quinn had typed and deleted ten different texts to Rachel, too chicken to send any of them, but swore to herself that if the girl wasn't in Glee, that was it, she was calling her, to hell with it all.

Quinn was antsy sitting in the choir room as everyone slowly started filing in. When Mr. Schuester walked in and there was no Rachel in sight, she started rummaging for her phone. Just a few moments later, however, Rachel slipped in behind Mr. Schuester who was talking about some assignment, but Quinn wasn't listening.

The brunette avoided even the slightest glance in her direction and, in what appeared to be a very calculated move, seated herself on the opposite side of the room, as far away from Quinn as she could possibly get.

Oddly, Quinn was relieved. She was just glad Rachel was okay and not sick or anything. Now she understood. The girl was mad at her for the silent weekend. Good. Okay. That she could handle. Really, she wasn't worried about Rachel being upset. She could explain it away well enough, and knew it would make her happy to know she'd ended things with Sam, particularly when she got to the part where she explained why they had broken up.

So with that distressing mystery finally figured out, Quinn's thoughts reverted back to the events of Friday night. She'd meant it when she thought about how grateful she was to have Sam as a friend, but...there were moments she'd just catch herself and think 'how is this happening to me?' She'd...
broken up with her adoring boyfriend, whom she genuinely liked, not because she wanted another
guy, but because she wanted another girl.

Still, Quinn had fleeting thoughts that it was all just in her head. She wasn't really like this. She didn't
like girls that way. She didn't want Rachel. She was straight as could be and this was only a fleeting
period of confusion. Of course, those thoughts never lasted for more than a millisecond because,
seriously, whom was she fooling? The rest of the world maybe, but not herself, not anymore. And
not Rachel. And not Sam…which could prove to be an enormous mistake on her part.

She cringed at the memory, having come out to her boyfriend in a sobbing, pathetic mess. It's not that
Sam wasn't a good guy, and she was positive he would never tell anyone, she just still felt uneasy
about someone seeing her like that. It didn't fit the image. It didn't fit her. Sure, she'd cried in front of
people before, but that was different. Those were normal tears or crocodile tears if necessary. What
Sam saw…that was something else.

"Ahem, Quinn?" Mr. Schuester said expectantly and she looked up at him blankly.

He seemed to be waiting for something.

Maybe she should have been paying closer attention.

What Quinn had obliviously missed out on was Mr. Schuester's speech about how he was so
impressed by their performances in the duets competition, how it had even given them a pairing that
won Sectionals, that they were going to do it again. However, this time he would be picking names
from a hat and the name picked would get to choose their partner. The only requirement was that it
had to be someone they hadn't partnered with before.

The purpose of this was to experiment with everyone's voices and see if they could produce
unexpectedly good results with different voice pairings. Also, same as last time, the winners got two
coupons to Breadstix. Santana was practically foaming at the mouth, still bitter about having been
beaten out by Barbie and Ken just for the 'charm' factor.

Apparently, Quinn's name was pulled first, which she was completely unaware of as she was lost in
a tumultuous world of her own as she tried to figure out just what the hell she was doing with her
life.

"You're up first. Who do you want to partner with? Remember, it can't be anyone you've paired with
before."

"Rachel," she said absently, still not really paying attention.

Everyone in the club, including Rachel, looked at her in wide-eyed disbelief. Actually, Sam was the
only one who didn't. He stared at the floor.

Finally noticing that something was off, Quinn turned to see all the gawking faces looking back at
her.

"WHAT?" she barked. "I want a free dinner!"

Seeming to accept that excuse, everyone relaxed a bit, though still bewildered, and Mr. Schue went
on calling out names. Rachel turned away again, glancing up at Sam in the back for a fleeting second
and didn't look at her for the rest of Glee.

The brunette was one if the first people to walk out, forcing Quinn to chase after her. She was a little
more than surprised that the diva hadn’t jumped on her to immediately start planning their upcoming performance, even if she was upset, so that made her significantly more wary. Perhaps she shouldn’t have underestimated the depth of Rachel’s anger.

She caught up to her in an empty hallway, calling her name. Rachel never shortened her stride, but Quinn caught up easily with her longer legs. She seemed to have expected it because the moment Quinn fell in beside her, Rachel launched into a rushed speech that conveniently didn’t allow the other girl to get a word in edgewise.

"I'll compose a list of appropriate songs from various genres that will suit as well as exhibit both our vocal ranges and send it to you this evening, from which you will then choose your preference."

She had a look on her face that dared Quinn to argue, which she had no intention of doing even though Rachel was flat out telling her what song they were going to sing.

"We will have to practice more than usual considering we've never performed together and are so unaccustomed. You'll have to do some work on your vocals; you tend to be a bit pitchy at times and need to boost your range."

Quinn tamped down on the hot rush of blood through her veins that would usually have her launch into a fight with the brunette because now was exactly the wrong time to debate her vocal talent. Instead, she just bit the inside of her cheek.

"I'll devise a schedule as well. We'll use the choir room during lunch and the auditorium after your Cheerios practice. We have a week to prepare so that should be enough time if we discipline ourselves."

She meant if Quinn disciplined herself. The blonde bit her bottom lip this time, close to drawing blood.

"Okay."

Not once, in all that time, did Rachel look at her.

"Good," she replied curtly, "Now I have to go. Daddy's picking me up."

"Rachel, I-"

"I can't be late. He gets cranky if I make him wait."

"Rachel…"

"Check your email tonight. I expect a prompt answer so as to have time to prepare and arrange the song accordingly for our first run through tomorrow."

"Rachel…"

"Goodbye, Quinn."

They had just walked down the front steps of the school and Rachel looked both ways before making her way across the parking lot, presumably to the place where she met her Dad to make the pick up easier.

Quinn knew she expected that to be the end of it and to leave her in the dust, but she was hardly about to let that happen. So, she stayed right next to her, which made Rachel look a bit worried, but
still she didn't fully glance in Quinn's direction.

"Are you going to let me talk now?"

She didn't say anything, which Quinn took as a yes.

"I need to tell you something."

"I already know, so there's no need," she replied briskly.

Quinn was, understandably, bewildered. There was no way Rachel could know about what had occurred between her and Sam, unless the boy opened his freakishly large mouth, which she sincerely doubted. Like he said, he was pretty, but he wasn't dumb. So what was she talking about?

"You know about what?"

"You and Sam. Really, Quinn, it's fine, and I would greatly appreciate it if we could just leave it at that. I thank you for the gesture of choosing me to be your partner in this assignment as some sort of conciliatory measure, but it was quite unnecessary."

Quinn was flabbergasted. "Y-you know about Sam? How?" She shook her head. That bottle blonde was a dead man walking. DEAD. "And if you know then why…"

Rachel had apparently reached the meeting spot, on the far side of the parking lot, behind the buses, because she stopped short and finally looked at her.

"On second thought, though I, of course, would like to retain a friendly relationship with you regardless, our situation is rather muddled at the moment so perhaps it would be best for us both if we were to switch partners."

Okay. Quinn was really confused now, not to mention increasingly frightened.

"I don't get it. If you know… I thought that's what you wanted! I thought it would make you happy. Why are you…"

She couldn't say 'breaking up with me' because they weren't dating in the official sense, or any sense, but that's what it felt like.

Rachel chuckled bitterly. "Oh, it's a dream come true. Thank you, Quinn. I wish you all the happiness in the world. Now kindly leave me be!"

She couldn't believe this was happening. It was just too much. She'd just done one of the hardest things she would ever do in her life and now Rachel wanted nothing to do with her? In that moment, Quinn realized she was more afraid of not being able to be with her than she was of being outed to the world.

That was saying something.

"Rachel!" she cried, the panic bubbling over. "I broke up with him! I told him about us! Like you wanted! Is that what you're saying here? Y-you don't want…it?"

Now it was the other girl's turn to look stunned.

"Y-you broke up with Sam?"

"YES!" Quinn said exasperatedly. "I've been trying to find you all day. You weren't even in class."
The brunette looked a bit embarrassed as she lowered her head. "I…had unexpected, debilitating bouts of vertigo and was forced to miss several classes whilst sequestered in the nurse's office…" she muttered.

"I'm sure," she replied dryly, not believing a word of it. "I thought you said you knew about Sam and me."

"When did you break up with him?" Rachel asked all of a sudden with a frown, ignoring her.

She shrugged, not knowing why the specific time mattered. "Friday night."

Such disappointment and hurt washed over the other girl’s face that had Quinn completely at a loss. She didn't know whether to comfort Rachel or protect her own breaking heart. This was not how she thought this would go! There were supposed to be enormous smiles, squeals of joy, ducking away for kisses, and Quinn (painfully) having to remind her that even with this change, going public was out of the question.

Rachel should not be looking angry and near tears as if Quinn had just smashed her beloved pink bedazzled microphone to pieces.

"You're lying," she choked out. "I knew you had a propensity for cruelty, Quinn Fabray, but this has undoubtedly propelled you to a new low."

"What?" she replied hoarsely. "What are y- It's the truth! I wouldn't do that to you."

"You've done plenty to me," she said coldly. "And I think I've had just about enough. I saw you kissing in the hallway this morning. Don't deny it. Save us both the trouble of such futility; you'd only embarrass yourself. I understand that you've recommitted yourself to your boyfriend, which is obviously the reason for your absence this weekend, and have tired of your experimentation with me, but what I cannot fathom is what you wish to gain by perpetuating such obvious falsities that would only serve to mislead and grotesquely hurt my feelings. Is that really what you had in mind all this time? Was it just a joke at my expense? Another opportunity to crush me as you have always been so blindly determined to do?"

"I told him I was gay!"

The words were pouring out before she could even think to stop them. Her mouth and brain had ceased to connect in that moment as she rambled in a dire panic.

"He knew I was cheating on him and he wanted to know who. So I told him. He deserved to know and, yeah, he was really hurt. I sort of had a meltdown afterwards, I-I'd never said that before, and he was… really good to me, even though I just broke his heart. He offered to be my friend even though I was a total bitch to him. Guess I look pathetic enough to need it. That's what you saw in the hallway, Sam offering his friendship. Nothing more. The kiss was just that, between friends."

She took a deep breath, now feeling entirely humiliated by the outburst. She shouldn't have said so much. Had Rachel's lack of filter become contagious somehow? Quinn never talked like that. She looked away awkwardly for a few moments before finally getting up the courage to face the other girl again.

"You're gay?" Rachel whispered in shock.

…Was that a joke? Was she joking? No, she wasn't joking. That was not a joking face.

At first, Quinn didn't have the slightest idea how to respond and just stared at her agape. She
sincerely wondered in that moment if she had made a disastrous mistake of confusing fantasy with reality. Had she just imagined the entire thing with Rachel and now reality was taking over again?

The brunette seemed to recover from her disoriented state, seeing Quinn's complete spiral, and pulled herself together. "Oh, no, no, I didn't mean it like that! It's just...I thought you were," she lowered her voice discreetly, "bisexual...you know, taking into consideration the fact that you've had several relationships with the opposite sex and even engaged in intercourse with a boy."

Quinn grimaced at the memory and even more so at Rachel bringing it up. Her one night stand with Puck was something she never thought about if she could help it, for more reasons than one.

"I just didn't think..."

"Well, I am, okay?" she snapped, her cheeks flaming with embarrassment. She'd come this far. Why stop now? If she thought she was red in the face before...

Quinn had never considered the possibility of her being bisexual. Partly because she always thought it was a crock, a layover on the way to Gayville. Pick a side and stick to it. There was no gray in sexuality. You either liked guys or you liked girls. That's how it worked.

However, the real reason that she never considered it, was that she knew deep down the way Rachel made her feel was so astoundingly beyond anything she'd experienced before, and not just emotionally, but the pure physicality of it.

It finally made sense to her now why it had always been so easy to put off all her old boyfriend's advances for even that extra little 'something something'. It'd never been difficult to stop in the middle of whatever they were doing if she felt they were crossing her definitively placed boundaries into something too handsy for her liking. It was why she always thought boys so radically different from girls in their desire for sex, just plain horndogs as she had always been taught, and that girls simply didn't possess those feelings in their biological makeup. Additionally, it was why she never understood Brittany and Santana's nonexistent self control. Then Rachel happened.

Well, she understood now. She really...really understood.

"What about you?" Quinn asked awkwardly. "Are you...bi?"

She wasn't sure she wanted to know the answer.

"I believe so," Rachel replied matter-of-factly. "I seem to harbor a sincere attraction to both sexes."

Yeah, she definitely didn't want to know that.

Of course Quinn could always count on her to be practical and definitive about this sort of thing. This was the one, after all, who'd come into the Celibacy Club and announced so brazenly that girls wanted sex just as much as boys. She'd been both scandalized and secretly excited by the thought of Rachel Berry wanting sex.

It bothered her much more than she let on that the diva admitted to desiring other people, however vague and indirect it had been. It was absurd, and of course entirely unrealistic, to expect that she wouldn't be attracted to other people, yet the fact remained that she didn't want Rachel desiring anyone else...ever.

"It isn't altogether surprising considering my musical fluidity. It feels only natural to have my openness and confidence to be equally transcendent in sexual desires. It's not the gender, Quinn," she murmured. "It's the person."
There was so much to take in from those few sentences that she didn't have a clue what to deal with first. Her distinct arousal at hearing Rachel talk about sexual desires or the assertion that perhaps there really was only one person she was thinking of. Rachel's pointed underlying tone did not escape her. All she had to do was believe it.

"You really broke up with him?" she asked softly.

Well, it was more of the other way around but it wasn't necessary for Quinn to compound that point at the moment so she just nodded.

Rachel's eyes searched hers for the truth that she really did want to believe.

"I-I thought…"

"You thought wrong," she said coolly.

"Why didn't you call me?"

"I needed space."

The brunette didn't like that answer. "But if you were upset, I could have helped. I-I could have been there for you."

She shook her head and looked over the shorter girl's shoulder to the fence at the back - anything to avoid eye contact.

"I kind of had a mini-breakdown - which you were basically the reason for. You don't call the reason for the breakdown while you're…"

"…breaking down?" she supplied for her with a hint of amusement.

Quinn sighed with a slight roll of her eyes. "Yeah."

"So, what does this mean for us then?"

"I don't know," she answered honestly and took a deep breath. "But…I'm not with Sam anymore."

Rachel didn't say anything for a few long moments, during which Quinn felt like she was assuredly losing her mind.

"Okay," she said at last with a tremulous smile that just bordered on hopeful and nodded. "You're not with Sam."
New Beginnings

True to her word, Rachel put the finishing touches on a list of song choices for them to perform for the duet competition and was just about to send them to Quinn, when her cell rang. Seeing the girl's name on her caller ID brought such an enormous smile to her face it almost hurt. After having been utterly resigned to the worst after the weekend and seeing Quinn with Sam Monday morning, Rachel was still reeling from their conversation in the parking lot earlier.

She knew it wasn't everything she could have hoped for, but it was more than she ever believed she'd get. They were proceeding tentatively for now, but it didn't matter. Quinn broke up with Sam. She openly admitted to her sexuality. She was calling Rachel right now.

Giddy, she held the phone up to her ear.

"Hi! I was just going to send you-"

Quinn interrupted her. "I picked a song, and as an apology for your not so underhanded insults regarding my vocal abilities, you're going to go along with it."

"What? Wait! No! We need to discuss this! What did you have in mind?"

"Nope. Not telling. I'll bring in the music tomorrow and we'll go through it at lunch."

"Quinn," she said warily, "I don't think I can agree to this. What if I don't like the song?"

"I didn't ask if you liked it, I said you were going to do it. Don't be so uptight, Berry. I'm not going to make you rap or anything."

She gasped, horrified. "I didn't even get that far in my thought process!"

"It'll be fine," she reassured her. "Trust me."

"Trust you? With music? You do realize to whom you are speaking? I don't ever allow--"

"I'm going to bed. See you tomorrow."

"QUINN!"

"Don't make me turn off my phone," she warned, knowing that if she hung up, Rachel would blow it up for hours just to try to continue this conversation.

"Fine," she huffed, "but I retain full rights to veto this particular selection if it is not to my taste."

"No rights. Just deal with it. Good night."

Rachel ground her teeth, knowing she had to concede defeat and breathed in deeply a few times before calming herself. She lay down on her bed, eyes on the ceiling.

"Sweet dreams, Quinn," she murmured.

There was a pause before she heard a soft, breathy reply that had her tingling to the very tips of her toes.

"Maybe I'll get to dream about you."
Her heart hammered in her chest at the thought of Quinn actually dreaming about her.

"Be sure to let me know every detail if you do," she said flirtatiously.

"I'll write it down."

The seductive, coy tone in Quinn's voice that had her breathing harder at just the sound of it had vanished and Rachel was more than a little disappointed. "Are you being facetious?"

"I'm sleeping, is what I am."

"You talk in your sleep?"

She heard a yawn. "Apparently."

"Quinn?"

"Hm?"

"Stay with me awhile?"

"Okay."

Quinn walked down the halls the next morning feeling better than she had in a long time.

It was strange.

She was petrified that someone would see her and just know - that it was stamped across her forehead somehow. Soon the whole school would know, then the town. And it would be a thousand times worse than anything she endured during her knocked up period. Her out of wedlock, teen pregnancy was shameful, but this was entirely different. It wasn't some drunken, one-time mistake. It was who she was.

She'd always been this way, Quinn was starting to see that now, but she'd never let herself accept it before. She could deny it back then with the utmost conviction, but not anymore, not when these thoughts consumed her, not when she fell asleep to Rachel's soft breathing on the phone and woke up to her voice in the morning. She'd never done that with anyone before. She'd never wanted to.

Now it was all different. She'd have to be careful. No one else could know. If it ever got out...she couldn't bear to think of it. If she were really smart, she would end this thing with Rachel now before it got any further and then she'd never have to risk being exposed. If there was something Quinn knew how to do, it was to keep a secret.

But she wanted Rachel too much.

So she was going to risk it, praying that they would be careful enough. Her future depended upon it.

Even with all this weighing on her, Quinn still walked through the school feeling good - like she was finally getting something right. It was terrifying. It was wonderful. It was nerve-wracking. It was exciting. It was awful. It was everything. She just had to find a way to deal with it all.

Approaching her locker, she saw something curiously out of place. There was something tucked into the slots of the vent. When she got closer, a smile graced her lips and her heart swelled.

It was a yellow rose.
She drew it out, seeing that it wasn’t entirely yellow, the tips of the petals at the center were tinged with a deep red. Did the girl know what that meant? She scoffed. Of course she did. Knowing Rachel, she had researched it meticulously to an obsessive degree.

When she opened her locker, she found a note, just two words, unsigned, but clearly in Rachel's handwriting.

_New beginnings._

Grinning from ear to ear, Quinn touched the flower to her nose and inhaled the delicate fragrance. She didn't think anyone had ever done something so thoughtful and romantic like that for her before. Actually, she knew that for sure. Sam may have proposed to her, but this was different. This wasn’t some grand gesture - it was just someone showing how well she knew her, how she had listened, how she wanted to show that she listened, how she cared, how she wanted it too. It was _perfect._

Unfortunately, her moment ended when Santana popped up beside her.

"Flower from fish lips?" she snorted in disgust. "Why not just pass me the ipecac and consider it a job well done?"

"And who gave you permission to speak to me?" she snapped, but it was without its usual vigor.

Really, she was hardly paying attention to her. She didn't care. Santana was not registering on the radar right now. Quinn had more important things to deal with.

"Q! I'm hurt! We're friendlies, aren't we? I know we haven't always been on the best of terms, seeing as how you stabbed me in the back to make your own pathetic climb to the top again, but let's let bygones be bygones."

She rummaged through the locker for her books, careful to hide the note from Rachel underneath her things discreetly. "What do you want?"

"The scoop," she replied simply. "Berry. What's your plan? I know you've got some seriously effed up things swirling around in that pretty little blonde head of yours and I wants in on the game."

"I really don't know what you're talking about."

"Don't play dumb, chica, leave that to your boytoy. There's no way in hell you'd be letting yourself get within five feet of that psychotic bumblebee if you didn't have a master plan that involved squashing her beneath your heel, never to fly again."

Quinn lifted a curious eyebrow at that. "Bumblebee?"

Santana merely rolled her eyes and jerked a thumb behind her to where, sure enough, Rachel was at her locker wearing a black and yellow striped sweater with a bee on the front, along with a matching skirt and black tights. Even her headband was yellow.

She looked ridiculously adorable.

Wait a minute.

That was _her_ headband!

The little thief!

Quinn narrowed her eyes and turned back to her locker. She was certainly not going let her get away
with that, even if she was secretly thrilled by the idea of Rachel wearing her things.

"There's no master plan," she said disinterestedly to Santana. "I just don't think she's that bad anymore."

"Q, you're killing me. Come on! You can't expect me to believe for a second that you're actually hanging with manhands cause she ain't 'that bad anymore'? Screw that. I'm so bored with all the lameness going on these days. I freely admit I have nothing better to do. It's either screw with the dwarf or watch Britts slobber all over Wheels McFreak. Yes, I've sunk this low, so you better let me in on this! I needs my entertainment!"

"Sorry, San." She shut her locker, cradling her books in her arms and the rose in her hand. "Find someone else to torture. I think Doughboy brought his briefcase today. Go put the fear of God in him."

"Q!"

But she just walked off, leaving an indignant Santana behind. Quinn had already had a feeling that the rest of the school shared the Latina’s impression of her newfound relationship with Rachel and that's why they hadn't responded with the usual gossip mongering and taunting. They were just waiting for the moment Quinn would reveal the explosive practical joke and watch as Rachel Berry would, once again, be cruelly humiliated. Such was life at William McKinley High.

Eventually they would start to figure out that there was no joke to be played, no one's feelings to be toyed with for the entertainment of the masses, and that's when the real trouble would start. She would have to worry about that later and try to figure out a way to avoid the brunt of the backlash, but for right now, she just wanted to go to class with her yellow rose and think about Rachel.

She sniffed the flower again with a smile and pulled out her cell.

**You are so going to pay for stealing that headband.**

Her phone vibrated a couple minutes later as she walked into class and she sat down at her desk to read the new message.

**Promise?**

Quinn stifled a groan. That girl just didn't play fair.

She found an anxious, pacing Rachel Berry in the choir room and tried coughing to cover her giggle. As weird as it sounded, she actually kind of loved driving the diva crazy. It'd obviously been a pastime of hers for years now for a reason. She'd just never released it could be **pleasant** before, without having to resort to cruelty and hurt feelings. This was by far a better method and she was sure she would be discovering many more with time. There were a few in particular she was rather looking forward to trying when the time came…

Rachel's eyes snapped up when she heard her come in and she ran over in a manic frenzy.

"Okay, enough is enough! Just tell me what we're singing! I can't take this anymore! This isn't good for my heart, Quinn!"

The blonde shrugged casually and put her bag down on the piano, desperately trying not to let her amusement show.
"Do you have the sheet music? You should have just let me know last night so I could arrange it for us. Now we're already behind schedule!"

"I arranged it."

"You...what?"

"Yep." Quinn nodded. "All taken care of."

"But...but..." Rachel spluttered, not knowing how to take this, and Quinn smiled at having been able to render the diva speechless.

Ready to put her out of her agony now, she pulled the papers out from her bag and handed them to Rachel, who took them swiftly, splaying them out across the piano.

As she pored over the sheet music with scholarly scrutiny, Quinn felt the butterflies settle in. She'd been so confident about her choice up until this very moment. Watching Rachel read through it, she suddenly felt very...very nervous. What if she really didn't like it? What if she didn't understand? What if it was stupid? She shouldn't have tried to pick the song. Rachel was better at this sort of thing. She should have just left it up to her. Why was she so insistent on it? It was too much. They couldn't sing this together! Stupid, stupid, stupid...

But then she looked up at her with a soft, shining smile and all Quinn's fears were quieted. Rachel understood.

"We can't be public," Quinn explained quickly.

"I know."

"I can't do dates o-or... or be seen like that. It can't be that way."

"I understand."

"No one can know."

"Okay."

Rachel didn't appear to have a trace of doubt or hesitancy in her. So she could only helplessly prompt one last time, "Are you sure?"

The brunette just looked over the music again and clapped her hands excitedly. "We are so going to win this thing. As if there was any doubt, of course."

Quinn's smile threatened to split her mouth.

Rachel had been dead serious about that schedule, as Quinn would come to find out. Every spare moment she had, they spent rehearsing, even though they had perfected it by day two. The diva just wasn't satisfied. She kept insisting they work out some perceived flaws that Quinn knew were nonexistent. The upside was that however determined Rachel was to practice, that didn't mean she wasn't open to certain methods of distractions, which Quinn proved very skilled at.

They were sitting on the edge of the stage in the auditorium, taking a much needed breather, and Rachel handed her a water bottle. After their first rehearsal, she had apologized for insulting Quinn's talent, admitting that it was borne out of hurt on her part. She amended it by saying that Quinn really
was very good and only pitchy on the rare occasion. It was Rachel's way of giving her a compliment. However, what Quinn was really proud of, though she didn't voice it, was that the brunette never once mentioned her being too sharp. She'd been working hard on that since last year after Rachel slipped it in with one of her veiled compliments. It felt good to know that her efforts were paying off and that Rachel noticed. She would never in a hundred years come close to being as talented as the other girl, but she did want to make her proud anyway.

"Can I come over tonight?"

The brunette's eyes lit up mirthfully. "Oh, so we're asking permission now? My, my, how things have changed."

"If you preferred the other method," she drawled, "I could certainly oblige."

Just then, the two of them blushed simultaneously, remembering just exactly where Quinn's method had them ending up last time. Rachel took back the water bottle, taking a deep sip, before clearing her throat.

"I would love for you to come over, Quinn. It's pasta night. Daddy is a wonderful cook when he makes the time for it."

At the mention of Rachel's Dads, Quinn's heart dropped a bit. How did she always manage to forget their existence? She was imagining an evening alone with Rachel, but a brutally uncomfortable dinner with her fathers was not something she had any mind to endure. The men still hadn't warmed up to her since Quinn first started making her presence known at the Berry house. Leroy was better than Hiram, who was like a stone wall for all she tried with her charm, but not that much better.

Why was she surprised? She never was the kind of girl parents liked.

In theory, she should be the perfect person to bring home to Mom and Dad, pretty, intelligent, upstanding Christian, Captain of the Cheerios, and so on. Of course her reputation had taken a mighty beating in the last year, but her relationships with parents had been bad long before that. Finn's Mom had never liked her, though she knew for a fact the woman adored Rachel. She felt a little stab in the chest at the reminder of Finn and Rachel. She never liked to think about them. She tried to ignore those vicious surges of jealousy whenever the two of them made eye contact. Rachel said she was over him, but...whatever.

The Berry men barely tolerated her in their home. A part of Quinn knew that she deserved it, but another part of her felt indignant. Who were they to judge her? They didn't know anything! Yet, they knew enough. Rachel wouldn't tell her, but Quinn knew she had daily arguments with her fathers over their friendship. If she could, she would just have Rachel over to her house instead, and avoid the tension altogether, but that could never happen. Rachel would never step foot over the Fabray threshold if she could help it.

Parents. Adults. It wasn't just Finn's Mom, Puck's mother hadn't been too welcoming either. Mercedes' mom tried, but it was always forced. Santana's parents thought she was just a white speck on the wall. Brittany's parents...didn't know up from down...so that didn't count. What Quinn had come to realize in her uncomfortable past with parents was that she didn't trust adults. She didn't trust anyone actually. Adults sensed things like that. It made them wary. It made them distrustful of her in return.

Quinn just wished it didn't have to be like that with Rachel's Dads. She wanted them to like her because she knew how important it was to Rachel and how hard it was for her to see them reject Quinn.
Oh, she didn't want to deal with this tonight. She had just wanted a quiet, peaceful evening with the girl. Though she probably would have had to forego the 'quiet' aspect anyway – it was Rachel.

"Right, um, you know, maybe it's not such a good idea after all."

"What?" Rachel pouted, scooting closer so that their thighs pressed against each other. Quinn licked her lips. "Why?"

"I just realized I'm kind of tired. Another time."

"Quinn…tell the truth," she admonished.

She sighed and settled back on her hands. "It's no secret your Dads don't like me."

"They don't know you," she replied hastily. "They don't know that you've changed. Give them time."

"Have I changed?"

They hadn't really talked about this yet…about their past…about the way Quinn used to treat her. To be honest, she wasn't sure if she was ready to.

"Of course you have! You don't think so?"

She just shrugged.


"Well…" Rachel thought about it. "For one, you've stopped calling me terrible nicknames."


The brunette pursed her lips, trying to figure out just where Quinn was going with this.

"I haven't been slushied in months," she tried again.

"Happenstance. They got bored. They'll be back."

No they wouldn't. Quinn had put a permanent 'off limits' label on her.

Rachel shook her head and looked at her knowingly before bringing in the big guns. "Not ten minutes ago, you gave me what I know is a glaring hickey by now."

"Accident," she replied with a perfectly straight face.

Rachel frowned as she tried to discern whether or not Quinn was actually being sincere with this. The blonde put an end to the mystery by smirking at her and she got a light shove.

"You're being silly, Quinn."

"Yes." She nodded. "So I guess that means I have changed."

"Only a little," Rachel teased. "Come to dinner."

Quinn groaned.

"Please?" She pouted. "For me? It won't be that bad, I promise."
How had she figured out so quickly what Quinn would do for that pout?

"Pasta night? As in actual pasta, not the vegan kind?"

"Both will be provided, but I wish you would try it. It's not as bad as you think."

"If it's as bad as that sorry excuse for ice cream you made me try…"

"That was delicious!" Rachel protested.

"That was disgusting."

She was pouting again and Quinn had to force herself to look away.

"Okay," she relented. "I'll come over."

Rachel beamed and pecked her on the cheek impulsively. "Now, just how bad is this one?" she said in a business-like tone, sweeping her hair back and pointed to the spot on her neck where there was indeed a dark spot Quinn had made.

"Not bad," she lied, biting her lip at the exposed throat, the smooth skin that tasted so good, that dip of her collarbone…

*Back to earth, Fabray!*

"You really must break this habit. I bruise so easily! It's becoming increasingly difficult to cover them up."

"Then don't cover them up," she retorted.

It thrilled Quinn's possessive streak to see Rachel walk through school with a mark she had essentially branded her with. So they couldn't be public. So she couldn't scare off any boys that came near her. So she couldn't hold her hand. But she could have that. Even if no one else knew whom it was from, they knew, and that was all that mattered. It was *real.*

"And just how am I supposed to explain it away? I have no one to blame it on. I refuse for people to be allowed the idea that I'm simply participating in random hookups now. Actually, on second thought, they most likely assume it's from Noah."

That promptly took the wind out of Quinn's sails. It sickened her to think that people would see her mark and automatically assume it was Puck's handiwork. That guy was never going anywhere near her again. She would make sure of it.

"You're right," she said sulkily. "I'll stop. Just wear a scarf tomorrow."

Rachel could hear the disappointment in her voice and put her hand over Quinn's reassuringly.

"You know," she murmured, "that isn't to say you could perhaps just be more discreet with your placement…"

She looked up at her in surprise. Did Rachel Berry actually just suggest that?

"We'll practice more tonight after dinner," she said with a nod and stood up, going to collect her things.

"More?" Quinn exclaimed. "We just spent an hour rehearsing! Rachel, I'm going to lose my voice if
we keep going like this."

She calmly put her things into her bag before turning around with her hands on her hips.

"That wasn't the type of practice to which I was referring, Quinn."

Dinner with the Berrys was every bit as awkward and uncomfortable as Quinn expected. It seemed the more she tried to turn on the charm, the more disaffected they were. She tried. Rachel tried. The men pretended like they tried. It was just exhausting all around. Quinn couldn't wait for the chance to escape upstairs to the confines of Rachel's sunny, comfortable bedroom (conveniently soundproofed) with a lock on the door. That part was key.

Once they finally made it out, Quinn flopped onto the bed face-first with a whine.

"That…was…awful."

"You're exaggerating," she replied mildly, rummaging through her dresser drawer. "I think it went swimmingly!"

"You are such a bad liar."

Rachel gave her a reproving look, but she couldn't deny it.

"It'll get better," she said unconvincingly, yet nodded as though she believed it. Then she slipped into the bathroom, leaving the door cracked open. Quinn sat up on the bed.

"Your Daddy didn't even speak to me directly the entire time except for when he asked me to pass the salad. I swear that little man would give Santana a run for her money in the dirty looks department. And your Dad wasn't much better, but at least he tried to talk to me a bit."

"They just take time to warm up to people," Rachel replied from the bathroom.

Quinn knew she was still lying. Leroy and Hiram were the kind of people who were typically outgoing, friendly, charismatic, and entirely sociable, except, it seemed, when it came to Quinn.

"They're not going to let me keep coming over here," she said forlornly.

Rachel came back into the room now wearing a silk chemise with the tiniest shorts known to man, more like underwear really. Quinn's mouth went dry. She was puzzled by the wardrobe change, but appreciated it all the same since now much more of that flawless, tan skin so unfairly hidden by fuzzy sweaters and leggings was exposed for her eyes to feast on. Her heart was definitely racing now.

"Stop it," Rachel said sternly. "I promise, my Daddies may be experiencing some difficulties in learning to trust you right now, but they will never refuse you in this house as long as I want you here. They might not be able to understand us, yet, Quinn, but they will eventually. So please don't be so concerned about it. Besides, even if they never come around, it won't change anything."

She leaned against the dresser across from her and Quinn couldn't help but think she was much too far away.

"It'd be a lot harder."

"It would be," she admitted, "but I don't care. We'd find a way."
"I don't know why you don't hate me."

"Quinn…" she said reprovingly, looking at her in disbelief. "We've talked about this."

"I know. I still don't get it though. You should hate me for what I was, Rachel."

"I don't. I never did."

"Why?"

She had to know. She had to understand. If the situation were reversed…well, she knew for a fact she would never be as forgiving as Rachel.

"I just…knew it wasn't the real you. I knew there was something far better and more wonderful inside you that you weren't letting people see. I just…"

Quinn felt her cheeks flush with something that was not at all about embarrassment, but perhaps something to do with vulnerability.

"You saw me," she whispered in realization.

"Yeah," Rachel smiled. "I saw you."

"I'm sorry."

"I know."

"It sounds so stupid to say. It's never be enough. I could say it for the rest of our lifetime and it still wouldn't feel like enough."

"It would get a bit tiring after the first six months."

"You've just forgiven me for everything?"

"No." She swallowed thickly. "Not everything. But with time…"

"Tell me what and I'll apologize for it specifically."

Rachel shook her head laughingly. "I don't want you to apologize. Just us being like this," she motioned between them, "is making up in light years for it."

"You sure? Cause if you made a list…"

The brunette laughed and stretched herself out on the bed. The action pulled up her top, revealing a delectable sliver of smooth skin across her trim stomach. Quinn swallowed thickly.

"I don't want to talk about this anymore tonight. You're ruining my plans."

"Plans?" she echoed hoarsely, her attention still very much on the bare stomach.

"We were going to practice, remember? While my throat is off limits for those lovebites you're so very partial to, I think you should experiment with finding other places for them."

The proverbial light bulb went off in Quinn's head. Now she understood the wardrobe change.

"What makes you think I want to do that?" she replied coyly, lying down next to her, and dragged her finger lightly over the silky material at Rachel's side.
"Oh, please. I saw the pouty look on your face when I said you couldn't do it anymore. You're rather transparent when it comes to this sort of thing, Quinn. You like the idea of marking me."

"Do you have to say it like that?" She grimaced. "You make it sound so caveman-like. Like something...ugh...Finn would do!"

"I never allowed him to give me hickeys," she replied simply and pulled Quinn on top of her. "But you..." she whispered huskily, "I like it too."

That was all the blonde needed.

After about an hour of studious practicing, Quinn had successfully managed to find more creative places for her particular method of branding, but was forced to put it to an end since it was getting late and it was a school night. Rachel wanted to walk her to the door, but she insisted she stay right where she was on the comfy bed. Not only did she know the girl was tired, but said that if her fathers caught her looking the way she did right now, Quinn was definitely going to be exiled from the house (and possibly have the cops called on her).

"I would have put something on..." Rachel muttered, but relented all the same and fell back onto the pillows.

Quinn swallowed thickly at the sight. The swollen lips, the disheveled hair, the now carefully placed dark spots spattered across her chest, particularly right where the chemise crested over the curve of her breasts.

She practically stumbled her way down the stairs.

As she was putting on her jacket in the foyer, Quinn couldn't help but hear the loud, angry sounds coming from down the hall. She knew those muffled noises well enough. She'd grown up in the Fabray household after all. If she wasn't hearing that, then it was dead silence. She knew she shouldn't be listening, knew she was opening herself to getting caught, but she couldn't help it. It was as though some force was propelling her down the hallway, having her pause right outside the closed den door. Though they were obviously trying to be discreet with their argument, their raised voices made the door useless - she could hear every word. And it didn't surprise her how often she heard her own name.

"I absolutely refuse to let this continue! I tried to put up with it at first, tried to put on a good front, but I can't anymore. How dare she come into this house the way she does – acting as though it's nothing at all!"

"She's just a child, Hiram! Maybe she doesn't know..."

"Don't even try that. She's not a child. She knows full well what she's doing! I'm ending this charade! She's not to be welcomed here anymore."

"And exactly how well do you think that's going to go over with our daughter?"

"It doesn't matter."

"Rightttt," Leroy drawled skeptically. "You can't ban her, darling. It'll just make Rachel rebel more. She'll try harder than ever to see the girl. Forcing them apart is only going to make matters worse."

"Then what do you suggest?" Hiram shot back harshly.
"We need to give her a chance."

Hiram started to protest, but Leroy overrode him.

"Why shouldn't we allow her the same opportunity we would anyone else, to prove herself? Perhaps she'll rise to the occasion. Rachel certainly believes so. People can change."

"The world doesn't work that way and you know it," Hiram said bitterly.

"Sweetheart, you can't blame Quinn for who she comes from. I know how difficult it is for you, but I think we have to trust Rachel here."

"That girl will hurt her. We're acting as if Rachel never came home sobbing in her room every day for years because of the things that cheerleader did! Are we supposed to forget? People like that don't change. It's in her blood. It's our job to protect our daughter and that's what I'm going to do!"

"This is not the man I know and love speaking. You're letting yourself be blinded by what was done to you. Quinn isn't Russell Fabray. You have to learn to see that. Maybe you should try to see her through Rachel's eyes."

"She's young, Leroy!" he exclaimed. "With the biggest heart we know! Of course she'll try to win her over, but she can't see that Quinn isn't worth her time."

"I don't know if I believe that."

"The apple doesn't fall far from the tree. We agreed on that a long time ago!"

"Things have changed since then. Rachel obviously…"

"Nothing changes," he spat. "Nothing. Never has, never will. There will always be hate in this world and there will always be hateful people to perpetuate it. This girl is no different."

There was a long, pressing silence before she heard the other man whisper, "It breaks my heart to hear you like this."

"I'm going for a walk." He sighed heavily. "Don't wait up."

When Hiram opened the front door, he was just in time to see Quinn's car disappear down the street.
"Nervous?" Rachel asked as they stood outside the door to the choir room.

"Nope," she lied. "You?"

"I never get stage fright. Except for that one unfortunate occurrence when I was four before a dance competition, but I still don't know if it was from butterflies or the three bags of cotton candy I indulged in earlier that day. Since then, there have been no such recurrences, so I'm likely to believe the latter."

"Why would you anyway?" Quinn grumbled, glancing in through the window quickly before moving back out of sight. "You have nothing to worry about."

"Neither do you," she said perplexedly.

"Sure I do. It's a lot harder for me. You sing *effortlessly*."

"It's hardly without effort, Quinn. My years of training-"

"I'm just gonna try not to make a fool of myself singing with you."

"What does that mean?" she asked, looking hurt.

"Just that…" She rolled her eyes and almost stomped her foot. "Fine! I'll admit it. I'm nervous. You're incredible, Rachel, and I just want to keep up. Okay?"

The brunette's eyes misted over with unshed tears. She looked around them carefully to make sure there was no one within hearing distance, before stepping in a little closer, turning their friend bubble to something else.

"I wish we were alone right now so I could kiss you senseless for that," she said huskily.

"Later. Let's just get through this first," Quinn replied tersely and pushed open the door, leaving a still glowing Rachel behind.

Sam/Mercedes, Mike/Artie, Santana/Kurt, and Finn/Brittany had already performed earlier that week. Today it was Puck and Tina then Rachel and Quinn before the final judgment where Miss Pillsbury, Mr. Schuester, and Coach Beiste would name the winners. Mr. Schue said he couldn't leave it up to them again because they had all just voted for themselves last time.

Puck and Tina did much better than expected, considering the two of them had barely engaged in the spoken word with each other before this. They had everyone clapping and singing along. Quinn knew that her duet with Rachel was going to be better though.

"Alright, girls," he clapped his hands together. "Best for last?"

"Need you even ask, Mr. Schue?" Rachel retorted confidently which earned her several nasty under the breath comments and groans.

Quinn vainly tried not to glare at them all for being such whiny brats.
The music started and she felt the butterflies start up even worse than before. She just hoped she could get through this song without screwing up. What was she thinking suggesting it? To sing with Rachel? The whole club was going to know the truth before they were halfway through!

The two of them had agreed beforehand not to look at each other too much during the performance, so as not to accidentally give themselves away. It had actually been Rachel to bring it up.

"I might possibly moon over you, so if we just focus our attention on our audience, everything should be just fine. If not, we can probably pass it off as part of the performance."

"You're going to moon over me?"

"It's a possibility, yes. I'm just being honest. I know myself, Quinn. My feelings tend to be on the surface for all to see during a performance. It's part of what makes me good! I convey a dramatic, but sincere sense of raw emotion. I cry during practically every solo."

"I noticed."

"So just focus on the audience and the judges and we'll be just fine."

"I can't believe you said you were going to moon over me. Who says that? Who admits to that?"

"POSSIBLY! I SAID POSSIBLY!"

The music started, then it was her cue, and there was no going back.

"I'm strong,
But I break."

Thank God! Her voice didn't crack. She could do this. Just focus on the audience, like Rachel said.

"I'm stubborn,
And I make plenty of mistakes.
Yeah, I'm hard,
And life with me is never easy,
To figure out, to love,
I'm jaded but oh so lovely."

She found Sam's gaze up in the back row and smiled at him. Though the offer of friendship still stood solidly, they hadn't really spoken to each other since that morning at her locker. Quinn understood. She wanted to give him space and it was okay because she knew if ever she needed it, there would be someone on her side. It didn't matter that they weren't talking much right now, just knowing that the support was there was enough. If she had to fall, Sam Evans's arms were one of the safest places she knew.

"All you have to do is hold me,
And you'll know and you'll see just how sweet it can be,
If you'll trust me, love me, let me,"

She turned to see the brunette stepping up beside her and her heart slammed into her throat.

"Maybe, yeah maybe."

Rachel tucked her hair behind her ear shyly and kept her eyes purposefully on the people before them. There was a distinct red blush on her cheeks that she couldn't hide though. Quinn stepped aside and listened as the diva opened her mouth to sing flawlessly and beautifully as always.

"Someday,
When we're at the same place,
When we're on the same road,
When it's OK to hold my hand,
Without feeling lost,
Without all the excuses,"

Their agreement not to look at each other was being broken more times than Quinn could count. Rachel ducked her head and smiled at her as she sang the rest of the verses, forgetting the others, forgetting the rules. She was singing to Quinn, and as bad as that could have been for them, Quinn just wanted to hear it.

"When it's just because you love me, you let me, you need me,
Then maybe, maybe."

They sang together:

"All you have to do is hold me,
And you'll know and you'll see just how sweet it can be,
If you'll trust me, love me, let me,
Maybe, maybe."

Quinn took a few steps back as she realized how close they had gotten and looked towards the adults sitting off to the side in the front row.

"I don't want to be tough," she sang, breathing a little harder than she should be.

Rachel's voice came from behind her. "And I don't want to be proud."

"I don't need to be fixed," they harmonized, "and I certainly don't need to be found."

Quinn went back over to the center of the room, looking out at the faces and seeing none of them. There was only one face in her mind right now.

"I'm not lost,
I need to be loved,"
Rachel was beside her again and though there was plenty of distance between them, Quinn could just feel her there, heat radiating off their bodies as if they were just about to touch.

They sang together again.

"I just need to be loved,
I just want to be loved by you and I won't stop 'cause I believe,
That maybe, yeah maybe,
Maybe, yeah maybe."

Each and every time they got to this part in rehearsal, a solo for Rachel, it both thrilled and broke Quinn's heart. There was just something about the way she sang it, so sweet, so perfect, so honest. This time was all those rehearsals, times a thousand.

"I should know better than to touch the fire twice,
But I'm thinking maybe…
Yeah maybe you're mine."

To hell with the rules seemed to be their shared thought as their eyes met and they sang the last verse.

"Maybe, love, maybe."

Everyone applauded and cheered, especially the judges. The brunette bounced up and down happily, knowing they had won for sure. Quinn didn't care about any of it.

All she saw was Rachel.

It was a mistake though, to be as thoughtless as that, because had Quinn been more attentive, she would have seen the dark gleam forming in Santana Lopez's eyes.

Mr. Schuester, Miss Pillsbury, and Coach Beiste left the room to 'deliberate' which Rachel thought was unnecessary and told Quinn as much. What was there to think about? But she checked herself and admitted that of course it was prudent to look as though they considered all the options in the spirit of fairness for the other competitors. She wasn't certain, but Quinn suspiciously looked like she was trying not to laugh.

In truth, Rachel had been nearly out of her mind with worry about the song selection and it took every ounce of willpower she had to let Quinn handle it. If it were anyone else, she never would have tolerated such a thing, but it was so out of the ordinary for the other girl to make such a demand that she had to find a way to deal with it. Quinn was the powerhouse cheerleader that ruled the school with an iron fist, but in Glee, she seemed much more content to sit back and let others take the wheel. That is, she didn't protest it anyway.

Quinn had always been surprisingly accepting of Rachel's assumed position of hierarchy in the club and was, for the most part, at ease with sitting back and allowing others to lead the way. She never had much to say when it came to their song selections or performances, she mostly just went along with everything.

Which was so unlike her! Then again, when in Glee, almost all of them changed. They weren't the same people outside of that choir room - different talents were respected and valued – which changed
the status quo. Rachel was the leader in Glee while Quinn was the leader in school. She'd loved the opportunity to stand up and make herself heard, even if the reception was lukewarm at best, because this was something she truly excelled in and none of them could deny it.

It was the one thing Quinn had never insulted or taunted her about over the years. She talked about Rachel's clothes, her looks, her personality, and just about every other possible part of her, but she never said a thing about Rachel's talent. Even back then, Quinn recognized it enough to know that she could never take that away.

So naturally, Rachel assumed that Quinn would sit back and allow her to lead their partnership in the competition and she was utterly taken aback by the blonde's sudden insistency in choosing a song. She couldn't fathom the reasoning for it at first, but as soon as she saw what Quinn had chosen, it all came together. Hope came bursting through like never before. She'd truly wanted to cry, but it wasn't the right time, or place, and she was sure it would freak the other girl out to see such a powerful reaction.

That song was Quinn's way of telling her what she wanted and that meant more to Rachel than anything. Especially that she was so willing to get up there in front of everyone and sing it with her. It was painfully difficult to keep her emotions in check while they performed, she could feel the tears about to overflow every time Quinn looked her way. There was so much happiness inside her that she could hardly stand it. When they finished and Quinn looked at her, just looked at her that way, Rachel knew how far she'd fallen. It wasn't ever going to stop.

The judges came back in and Mr. Schue announced the winners, but she didn't even wait for him to finish before bounding up to snatch the prize and started to make a small speech to the group about how deserving the win was even though everyone tried admirably and should be applauded for doing so. Quinn was shaking her head pointedly from where she still sat, not getting up with her. At the look on the other girl's face, Rachel relented, and cut the speech short. Everyone promptly got their things together and started to leave. Santana bitching about the unfairness of Quinn winning twice just because she's blonde was clearly heard over the shuffle.

Rachel looked around for Quinn, who had suddenly disappeared, and was disheartened. Why did she leave already? Rachel had really hoped to have the chance to talk with her and revel in their win, but it looked like that was going to have to wait until later. She wondered where Quinn was on the possibility of them using their winning coupons to celebrate at Breadstix together, as in, at the same time, at the same table even?

"Hey, Rach."

She tried not to wince at hearing his voice.

Finn was… well, Finn was complicated. Correction: her situation with Finn was complicated. Finn himself was fairly simpleminded and easy to figure out. He was a boy who had no idea what on earth he was doing…same as every other teenage boy in existence.

"Hello, Finn!" she chirped politely.

"Congratulations on the win. You guys were good. I was kinda worried cause I thought you two might end up clawing each other's eyes out before you got through it, but no crazy stuff."

"Um, thank you," she said uncomfortably and cleared her throat. "That's…kind of you to say."

It was odd. For so long she had obsessed over this boy now towering over her. He filled her thoughts night and day. He could say clumsy, but lovely, well-meaning things, and he could also be an
enormous jerk.

It had taken her some time after their break up to actually admit that to herself, that he could be a jerk, because before she had always tried to pass it off as unintentional and chalked it up to his youth, immaturity. Surely, he never understood how hurtful some of the things he said and did were. Otherwise, he wouldn't have done it! Finn was a good guy, just obtuse at times...a lot of times.

Yet, after being with Quinn and her Finn-warped world slowly began to fade, she started seeing a lot more about their relationship that she hadn't wanted to see at the time. Finn always seemed embarrassed by her. He hardly ever stood up for her. He complained endlessly about never getting past second base. She'd always ignored those things before, in favor of the good, because she loved him and that's what you do when you love someone. At least, that's what she had thought.

Quinn changed that. Not only was her physical connection to Quinn unparalleled in any previous relationship, but the way she felt about her was so vastly different from what she had with Finn, Jesse, and even Noah. She thought she had loved them, well, Finn and Jesse anyway, but she knew now how sorely mistaken she was. What she felt for those boys wasn't love at all. It paled in comparison. She'd felt attraction, affection, and an intense need for a connection with someone else, for someone to want her, for someone to love her. She'd thrown herself headfirst into her relationships with them because she was desperately searching for that. She'd even convinced herself that she'd found it. Instead, she could see now that it was hardly at all what it should be.

Friendship mixed with mild attraction swirled with desperation, that was Finn. Add in a diva-off and then it became Jesse. Noah was merely a mild detour for sexual experimentation purposes...a very mild detour.

At least she'd been able to come to this realization now and not much later in life after she made too many mistakes she'd regret. That was something to be grateful for. While she would always feel something for Finn, whether it be friendship or perhaps something slightly more than that, it was so far beyond over for them. Her time with Quinn had effectively erased the boy from present day thoughts and it was only in moments like these, when they found themselves in a room together, that she would remember what it was they shared. She hoped Finn could find a way to forgive her for hurting him and that they could move on as friends. They always seemed to work better as friends. If she hadn't been so set on making it mean more, then maybe that's all they would have been. Too late for that now.

"Haven't seen you around much lately."

"I'm in school every day," she replied, puzzled. "And in Glee. We see each other all the time."

"Ah, yeah," he shrugged, "well, I just meant, you know, like, we don't talk much or anything."

"You're right." She nodded. "We haven't talked very much since everything that happened... I guess I thought you weren't quite amenable to speaking with me right now."

"Huh?"

Right. She'd forgotten how often she had to stop and explain things to Finn. He was never able to keep up with her very well. Probably the only time he ever did was when they were singing and barely even then. Over time, she found herself second guessing certain words and thought processes for the sake of the boy being able to understand her.

"You weren't up for it," she simplified.
"Oh, hah, yeah. Well, I wasn't at first, but I-I think I'd be cool with it now."

"Are you saying you'd like to be friends?" she asked hopefully. "Because I'd like that too."

"Friends?" he frowned, looking confused. "Uh. Sure. Friends. But that's not what you were asking for in the song though."

"Excuse me?"

"The song you picked. It was cool, you know. I really liked it. Look, I was majorly pissed at you for the thing with Puck, but I dunno… I feel like I haven't actually seen you for months and it kind of sucks. So I realized that it sucks not being around you. I think I wanna give us a second chance. I messed up by not telling you about Santana and then you messed up with Puck, but I don't care anymore. I want to get past it. Actually, I've been wanting to say this for a few days now, but you looked like you'd kinda moved on and all, but when you sang that song for me… I knew we could make it work."

"S-sang that song for you?" she stammered.

"Yeah!" He nodded eagerly. "It was totally obvious. I mean talking about being stubborn, making mistakes, life isn't easy with you, and all that stuff. It was totally about you and your issues. I think it's really awesome that you admitted to it like that."

Rachel had never experienced a stroke before, but she was sure whatever was happening to her right now was a lot like one.

Finn thought it was about him? Her song with Quinn was about him and performed as some misguided attempt to win him back?

*Brain. Not. Functioning.*

"F-Finn, I don't, I don't-"

"Come on, Rach," he grinned dopily at her and took one of her hands. It was strange how foreign it felt now. His enormous paw dwarfing her. It was so different from when she held Quinn's hand, every single thing about it, right down to the butterflies. "What do you say? Let's try us again. I missed you."

*This was not happening. This could not be happening. Where did everyone else go? Why were they alone now? Dammit!*

"I don't know what to say."

"Just say yes. I forgive you, Rach. I love you and I want us to be together. I know you want it too."

At that, she seemed to be able to break out of the daze and regain her bearings. She found solid ground once more and took her hand away from him. He looked surprised.

"I'm sorry, Finn, truly. But you have the wrong idea. I didn't pick that song for you or whatever it is you may believe."

He scoffed. "You don't have to deny-"

"Listen to me," she said firmly. "It was not about you, but I am genuinely sorry that you took it that way. Look, you broke up with me and it did hurt, but I've moved on. We don't belong together; we
never did. I would love to be your friend, but I-I can't be your girlfriend."

"What are you talking about?" he asked in bewilderment. "You told me you loved me!"

"I-I thought I did," she said dolefully. "Maybe I did! But whatever the truth was then Finn, it's not how I feel about you now."

"Is this some chick game where you're playing hard to get? Cause that's not cool, Rachel."

"It's nothing of the sort and I'm insulted by the mere insinuation of it!" she snapped indignantly and then tried to calm herself. "We just don't work together. You lied to me for months. I ended up feeling desperate enough to kiss Noah. We always hurt each other more than we make each other feel good. You have to see that. Relationships shouldn't be that way."

"That's not true! We're awesome together! We make a great team. Why are you shooting me down like this? Is there someone else? There's someone else! Who?"

"Finn…" she said sadly, "I care about you and I will always care about you. You were the first boy I ever really liked. I'll always remember you for that, but we have to be able to move on and I hope that we can do so as friends because I meant it when I said that. I believe you're a good guy and I would very much like to have you as a part of my life. I just can't be that girl for you anymore."

There were tears welling in her eyes, but it wasn't because she was sad or because she regretted what she was doing. Even though this felt absolutely right, in every sense of the word, she couldn't help but feel a permanence settling in. She was really saying goodbye to this chapter of her life that had been both so sweet and so painful. She wouldn't change her past with Finn. He would be a part of her no matter what, but she no longer wanted him for her future.

"I-I should go now. I'll see you around, okay?"

"Rachel? Wha- Wait!" He shook his head angrily. "You're actually trying to tell me you sang that stuff about second chances and it had nothing to do with us?"

"I'm sorry," she offered helplessly with a sad shrug and walked out of the choir room.

Once out, her head was still reeling. Also, she was slightly nauseated.

Never in a million years did she expect that to happen. How could he think that song was about them? How dare he! That was about her and Quinn, and NO ONE had a right to step all over it and try to take-

No. Stop. He's never been all too bright. You just hurt his feelings. Don't be mad at him; feel sorry for him.

But there was a part of her that still really wanted to be mad at him. He could be so self-centered sometimes! How could he not see that she had moved on? And to just assume that she would go running back into his arms at first chance? Well, if she were brutally honest with herself, she'd given him enough reasons to believe she'd do that, but still!

She'd thought they were over…really, truly over. Why did he have to go and do that? Just bring it all up again when they could have kept moving forward. Now things were going to be even more awkward in Glee and they still had to sing most of the leads together… Her stomach churned at the thought. Glee was supposed to be her refuge, her time to shine, not to feel uncomfortable and tense because she'd rebuffed her ex-boyfriend's attempts to rekindle a doomed relationship.
Why did he have to be so dumb?

Someone grabbed her hand and before she knew it, Rachel was forcefully yanked out of the hallway into a dark room. The door shut behind her immediately. She couldn't see in the black and tripped over something, but a pair of strong arms wrapped round her waist steadied her before she fell. All in the same movement, hands whirled her around and she yelped when she found herself trapped between something solid and the person holding her.

Lips attacked her roughly without pretense. A tongue plunged into her mouth, searchingly, desperately, demandingly. Rachel moaned, eagerly succumbing to the onslaught, and caught the other girl's face in her hands as she kissed back with every ounce of passion. Their bodies melded at every curve, she could feel both their hearts racing wildly out of control. She flushed with a heat that went streaking down to the wetness pooling between her thighs. A hand hooked behind her knee and hitched her leg high up around her waist, grinding hard into her. Then she was at her throat, nipping and sucking fervently while rocking against her throbbing core. Rachel whimpered. It was all she could do to hold on.

"Tell me you don't want Finn," she demanded harshly.

"I don't want Finn."

"Tell me you want me."

"I want you," she gasped. "Only you."

"My name, say my name." Her hands went so high up Rachel's legs she was gripping her ass.

"I only want you, Quinn."

"You're mine," she growled against her lips.

"Yes, yes, I'm yours."

They were sitting on some boxes or maybe they were crates, Rachel didn't know or care. Her head rested against the wall while her body was warmly entangled with Quinn's as they came down from the highly charged encounter. They were wrapped up as comfortably as they could be, Quinn's arm around her waist, Rachel's cheek against her shoulder, her leg draped over Quinn's who had her hand on Rachel's knee, her thumb tracing absent circles across the sensitive flesh of the inside curve.

It was soothing. She liked being with Quinn like that. There was something inherently intimate about being this close, just to be close, while engulfed in darkness. She couldn't see her, but she could feel her.

Eventually, Rachel explained what had happened with Finn, what he thought, that he wanted them to get back together, how she turned him down. Quinn never said a word, just listened.

"How did you see us?"

"I was waiting for you outside in the hall," she said quietly, "but you never came out. When I went back to check…"

"Oh," Rachel murmured, feeling twinges of guilt. "I didn't mean to make you worried."

"You didn't. I mean, it wasn't your fault. You shot him down, right?"
"In flames," she admitted with a tinge of sadness.

"Are you sorry?" she asked so softly, Rachel wasn't sure she heard it at first, but she had.

Instead of reprimanding Quinn for even considering such a thing, she took her hand from her knee and squeezed it tightly so that the other girl would understand.

"Never."

Quinn exhaled heavily and so she nuzzled further into the crook of her neck, keeping their linked hands in her lap, pressed against her stomach.

"So…it's safe to assume this arrangement of ours means being exclusive?" she ventured lightly.

"Yes."

"For both of us?"

"Do you have a need to be a free agent, Rachel?" she shot testily.

"I was referring to you."

"I broke up with Sam, didn't I?"

"And there won't be anyone else?"

"Who else would there be?"

"This would be you avoiding answering the question."

She sighed exasperatedly. "Yes. It means both of us." There was a pause and Rachel could sense that she wanted to say something more. Quinn searched for her in the darkness before finding purchase on her cheek and she urged Rachel to turn to her. "I-I don't want anyone else," she said shyly, her lips brushing against Rachel's ear. Her breath was hot and sweet on her skin.

"Good," she murmured. "That's all I needed to know."

With that, she disentangled herself and stood up, attempting to rectify her disheveled appearance by smoothing down her hair and clothes.

"Wait, you didn't answer the question!"

"Sure I did."

"Wh- Get back here!"

Rachel just giggled and opened the door, flooding the janitor's closet with light momentarily before shutting it again, leaving Quinn to count to five hundred before feeling safe enough to go too.

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She hadn't expected it, but was over the moon to get a text from Quinn saying they should use their prizes tonight after she finished Cheerios practice. Rachel quickly agreed and suddenly there were plans set for Quinn to pick her up at her house so they could go out to dinner together. She spent the rest of the day skipping, dancing, and singing under her breath, until Kurt elbowed her to stop making a fool of herself (and annoying him). That only curbed her impulses until she got home and she danced around her room, singing at the top of her lungs as she got ready for the evening. Rachel
was riding on a high and nothing was going to bring her down.

Quinn was still in her Cheerios uniform when she picked her up, but she was pleased to note the reaction to her outfit for the night. Rachel had caught on rather quickly to the blonde's penchant for her barelegged in mini-skirts. Quinn didn't say much other than "hey," but Rachel giggled when she caught her glancing sideways several times throughout the car ride.

It was perfect.

"So I thought dates weren't allowed," the brunette said, eyeing her menu inconspicuously as they sat in their booth and Quinn looked at her warily.

"That's not what this is," she said warningly, pulling out the coupons they won. "See? No one's paying. Not a date."

Whoa. Déjà vu.

"Just two friends…sharing a meal…in public."

"Right."

"Does that mean we can't play footsie?"

Quinn looked around in a panic. "Can you not?"

Rachel smirked. "I'm simply trying to ascertain how the rules work. You don't seem to mind it being known that we're friends, so I assume if it's acceptable for friends, we're allowed to partake in it, yes? What friends do, we can do?"

"If you want…" she mumbled, not comfortable with where this was going.

"So we could go to the movies, go shopping, bowling, go to dinner together? Just as long as I keep my hands to myself?" she grinned mischievously. "A friend, not a girlfriend."

"Yeah…sometimes, I guess."

"Even though that's what I am?"

"What?"

"Am I your girlfriend?"

"Would you stop? Shut up!" she hissed. "Not here!"

"Just nod yes or no."

Quinn nodded almost imperceptibly, praying that she would stop now. All it took was one wrong person in the right place at the wrong time and it was all over. Rachel didn't understand that and Quinn wasn't about to make her understand. There were things about her life better left unsaid.

Rachel, however, seemed extremely pleased with herself and the waitress came over to take their order. Quinn frowned at Rachel ordering only a small salad.

"You're not hungry?" she asked as the woman walked away.
Rachel shrugged noncommittally. "They don't offer very much here that's vegan friendly."

"You don't like coming here, do you?" she said in sudden realization.

"It's fine," she waved her off, "I'm just happy being with you."

"We could go somewhere else."

"Then we wouldn't be able to use the coupons. Defeats the purpose, don't you think? This is our celebratory meal!"

"I'll give them to Santana," she argued. "Let's just go."

This wasn't a date in any sense of the word, but that didn't mean it couldn't be somewhere Rachel could actually have food she would enjoy.

"I'm perfectly all right here, Quinn." She smiled. "But thank you for your thoughtfulness. Besides, if we went anywhere else, it would be more like a date."

"What?" Her brow furrowed. "Why?"

"Because you'd want to pay and by your reasoning, that qualifies as a date criterion."

"Stop talking about this!" she hissed, feeling at the end of her rope.

Her nerves were already frayed as it was with having to perform that duet this afternoon, then her momentary loss of sanity in a jealous rage over seeing Rachel and Finn. Now she was out in public engaging in something that could very well be a dangerous situation for them if they didn't play it right and Rachel seemed determined to send her over the edge with constant innuendos and harping on sensitive subject matters that were hard enough to deal with when they were alone. And she chose to do it in one of Lima's most popular restaurants!

While it was actually slow at the moment, seeing as it was a weekday and they actually didn't have anyone sitting close to them, it was still a very public, very exposed, very potentially volatile situation, and the girl didn't seem to get that in the slightest!

It was like any minute now she was going to jump up on the table and start shouting about how they were together and giving a play by play of their earlier closet session. Rather, considering it was Rachel, she'd start belting out some blatantly Sapphic love ballad and dedicate it to her lesbian lover, Quinn Fabray, Captain of the Cheerios, and then add in her phone number, home address, and social security number just to be absolutely sure everyone knew who she was.

Alright, so that was an overreaction, but she was at her wits end. Why couldn't Rachel just leave it be and talk about something not so frenetically charged and doom-worthy? The weather? They could talk about the weather! Glee club? Regionals? Hell, at this point she'd gladly take an hour long rambling about the infallible talent of Barbra Streisand!

"Come on, just admit it, you'd at least feel the need to. You even picked me up tonight. Who knew you had such chivalrous intentions?"

"It was because your Dad had the car!" she cried. "What is your point here?"

"No point."

"So you're just being difficult for the hell of it?"
"No one ever said I was easy."

"No, they definitely don't say that," she huffed.

"So if it isn't a date, do I still get to kiss you goodnight?"

Dread flooded her body. She wanted to cry. She wanted to scream. She wanted to hide. She was certain she went cross-eyed for a moment there.

"Are you stupid?" she shouted angrily, looking around at who could have been close enough to overhear. "I told you to shut up! God, Rachel! If you're just going to treat it as a joke, then this can't happen. I told you how it was going to work and you agreed! You know what, forget it, we're done here."

"No, no! Quinn! Wait, just sit down!" she implored, tugging on her arm and then quickly releasing her at the frightened look at their physical contact on the blonde's face. "I'm sorry, okay? I am. I didn't mean to upset you, I was only teasing." Quinn looked around at the sparsely populated restaurant, seeing the eyes on her. Now she was the one causing a scene. This was exactly what she was trying to avoid tonight. It was all going so terribly wrong… Rachel looked so upset. Big brown eyes stared up at her, desperately pleading for her to stay, not to leave her. Well, how could she just leave her? She couldn't.

Quinn sat down again reluctantly and leaned forward to speak barely above a whisper. "You can't talk about stuff like that around people." Her voice cracked fearfully. "Someone will hear. That was the deal, Rachel. If you can't handle it, then-"

"I can! I promise. I'm sorry," she said again. "Please. Don't let me spoil our night. We're celebrating. I just…I'm kind of amazed by all of this. I'm more than content with our current arrangement. I'm really very happy, Quinn."

"You are?" she remarked with genuine surprise. "I thought…I thought it would bother you…having to…"

"It's mostly because I never thought I'd get even this much. I suppose I got a little too excited. We've gone from you terrorizing me on a daily basis with slushies, derogatory nicknames, and hurtful comments, to spending a pleasant evening out to dinner together, after having just performed a wonderful duet in Glee, and I'm sure I'm promised a certain something at the end of the night."

"Can we leave this discussion for a place that isn't completely public?" she said through gritted teeth. Could her nerves take anymore of this? A person was never meant to exist so continuously and relentlessly on edge, with fear, to fret over every turn. The stress of it all had her trembling with weariness. Quinn felt a sudden wave of exhaustion. All she wanted was to put her head down on the table and sleep right now. Maybe burrow down somewhere far, far away, and take Rachel with her.

"Of course," she said tenderly. "Again, I am sorry I made you feel uncomfortable."

"It's okay. We just have to be careful."

She nodded dutifully.

"And…you're definitely promised something at the end of the night," she muttered.

Rachel glowed with happiness, ducking her head down to fiddle with the silverware, but couldn't
hide the enormous grin on her face. It made Quinn feel a little better despite everything.

The night still didn't go too well.

It actually bothered her a great deal what Rachel said, about being content with them, about thinking she'd never even get that much.

It bothered her so much she didn't really talk for the rest of dinner or on the ride home. Rachel didn't try to question her about it, just looked increasingly dejected as the night wore on.

Quinn should have been happy to hear it. She should have experienced relief to know that Rachel wasn't feeling bad about the secrecy. Instead, she felt worse. Rachel shouldn't have to settle for this. She deserved more than just being the secret behind closed doors. It made her want to cry to think that this girl, this beautiful, incredible, talented girl, thought so low of herself that she wasn't even bothered by being a dirty secret. She should be bothered! She should refuse! She should have told Quinn to go to hell!

Yet, she couldn't help but be ever thankful that she didn't. Because she couldn't give Rachel anything else. It was the only way for her. Did the brunette truly understand that? Is that why she was okay with it? Or was it because she was just...settling for content?

In the last hour, Quinn had really started to hate that word. It was repeating in her head far too much.

"I'm so sorry that I ruined our night," Rachel's quiet voice broke into her self-induced fog of doubt.

She blinked, realizing that she had parked already in front of the Berry house. It was dark in the neighborhood. They didn't have streetlights. Added to the charm? Quinn barely even remembered leaving the restaurant.

"You didn't."

"I was foolish to act the way I did. I upset you. I should have known better than to behave like that."

"Rachel..." she started uneasily, "if this ever makes you unhappy, us I mean, promise you'll tell me? That you'll end it? I don't want you to be just be content. I want you to be happy. You deserve that. I don't want to hold you down. I can't be the person to do that to you. I did it for so many years. I don't want to be-"

Rachel unbuckled her seatbelt and was across the divide on her lips in a matter of seconds.

She kissed her deeply, thoroughly. There was no urgency in this. It was as if they had eternity at their disposal. She sucked in her bottom lip, then the top, before her tongue licked out teasingly, playing as though it was seeking approval for entry when it knew it already had it. Quinn moaned softly at the taste of her, she could never get enough of that. Their lips came together again and again, fitting in just a way that was so right, like they were made to do just this, only this, only with each other. Blood cours ed through her veins, her temperature rose, heady with the sheer bliss that always was kissing Rachel Berry.

Like all good things, it came to an end, and Quinn's heart broke ever so slightly as it always did whenever they stopped.

"That's what was bothering you tonight?" Rachel whispered heavily against her face.

She nodded, unable to do anything else.
"Well, you're stupid."

"Excuse me?"

"You ruined what could have been a perfectly lovely evening with all this brooding. I'm rather annoyed with you right now."

Quinn's mouth opened and closed several times, utterly at a loss.

"Do I wish you felt safe and confident enough about who you are to proclaim it to the world? Of course I do. But I don't begrudge you for it, Quinn. I can only imagine what difficulties you're experiencing. I know very little of your upbringing, but from what I do know… It's okay. You have to believe me when I tell you that. Because I am happy. I get to have you to myself. I get to kiss you and tell you things and sing with you and play games with you and laugh with you. I don't care if it's behind closed doors or on a stage for all the world to see, as long as I get you."

"You're not always going to feel that way," she protested miserably. "You'll want more."

"Sure I will…someday. But we can cross that bridge when we get to it. For right now…this is where we are and this is how it is."

"Rach," she croaked, "I can't ever-"

"We'll cross it when we get to it," she said firmly, not letting her finish the rest of that sentence.

They both knew what she was going to say.

"But-"

"Are you really going to spend the rest of the night arguing with me? Because I must warn you, I am fully prepared to camp out here if necessary. I have excellent stamina due to my healthful lifestyle and years of strategic training for the fast paced, grueling schedule a Broadway star must endure while performing with high energy on the stage night after night."

Quinn huffed in exasperation, but her lips curled upwards into a tiny smile nonetheless.

"Excellent stamina?" She quirked an eyebrow. "Guess we'll be putting that to the test someday…"

Rachel promptly blushed.

"Okay," she sighed, giving in. It's not like she was in any position to be arguing right now anyway. "I'm sorry I was such a bitch tonight."

"You weren't a bitch. I've dealt with that side of you more than I care to admit. I know it well. You were just moody tonight, not a bitch."

"Then I'm sorry for being moody!" Quinn retorted a bit testily, eyes flaring.

Was she going to pick everything apart?

"Oh, well, now you're getting a little bitchy."

She had to laugh at that. It was getting a little easier to breathe now. She rested her head against the seat.

"Alright…so I do have one more thing I need to get off my chest about what you said earlier
"tonight."

"Yes?" Rachel shifted, trying to be as attentive and compassionate as possible.

"Do you think I'm the guy in this relationship?"

She stared at her for a moment, brow furrowed. "I beg your pardon?"

"Do you?" Quinn pressed. "I don't know how these kinds of relationships work! You made fun of me for picking you up tonight. And not that it's any of your business, but if we were to go on dates, which we're not, I would want to pay for you. I don't know why! It's weird! Does that mean I'm the guy?"

Rachel collapsed in a giggling fit, curling up in the passenger seat as she clutched her belly.

Quinn was hardly amused. It really wasn't that funny.

"Rachel!"

"I'm sorry, Quinn!" she gasped. "It's just…of all the things I thought you might say…"

"Stop laughing!"

"Alright, alright." She took some deep breaths and attempted to compose herself. "I'm going to be serious now."

That didn't work because the minute she looked at Quinn again, the giggles started all over.

"For God's sake!"

"Quinn, surely you understand the absurdity of your question?"

"No! I don't know. It's not like I've ever dated a girl before. With boys, I always knew how everything was going to go. I knew what they were supposed to do, how they were supposed to treat me, who was going to pay, where the lines were drawn. I don't know any of that now!"

"Aw, sweetie."

She ignored the skip of her heart to hear Rachel use a term of endearment with her.

"I swear if you're going to be condescending, I will drop kick you out of this car."

"Threats don't work on me, Quinn. Have you not discovered that yet? Now, since you seem to need an answer: no. I do not think you are the male equivalent in this relationship. There is no male equivalent, seeing as how we are both female. However, that being said, you do enjoy having the control, Quinn. So perhaps that is what you're mistaking as some sort of masculine alternative."

"You think I'm controlling?"

"No," she said pointedly, "I said you enjoy having the control, not that you're controlling - two very different things. You like being in charge, Quinn. You feel better knowing that the decisions lie in your hands. You are Captain of the Cheerios after all. You thrive that way. It's understandable considering how out of control you must feel in other parts of your life. Why not attempt to hold on to what you can? While I have issues with being actually controlling myself, it is rather freeing, if not terrifying at times to relinquish the reins to you. Case in point, our fabulous duet this afternoon! It doesn't mean you're the guy, just that you tend to be the aggressor in certain matters because that's
what makes you the most comfortable right now."

"I'm too aggressive with you?"

"You're not getting it," she shook her head with a laugh. "No, everything's fine, Quinn. You're not the guy. I'm not the girl. We're just...us. Besides, wanting to take me out to dinner and pay for it has nothing to do with being masculine or feminine. It simply means that you want to do something nice for me. And that's..." she took a deep breath, smiling, "wonderful. I bought you a rose, didn't I? Is that not typically ascribed to the male's role in heterosexual relationships? To give flowers? Yet you're not calling me the guy."

"I didn't even think about it like that..."

"Exactly. Stop worrying so much. You're going to give yourself wrinkles and you are far too young for lines."

She took a deep breath, feeling the last bits of heaviness that had plagued her this evening vanishing into the dark. Rachel was surprisingly good at making her feel better about these things. How did she do that?

"I'm also too pretty for wrinkles," she pointed out.

"Much too pretty," Rachel agreed with a completely straight face then bit her bottom lip flirtatiously. "Can I have my promised something now?"

"We already had a goodnight kiss."

"No we didn't!" she protested. "That was a 'you're-being-stupid-let-me-show-you-how-much' kiss. A goodnight kiss is different."

"I don't see a difference," she said casually. "It was a kiss at the end of the night, therefore a goodnight kiss."

"Is this your way of saying that you don't want to kiss me?"

"Well, we just did," she reasoned. "Do we have to again?"

Rachel looked absolutely crestfallen and it took everything Quinn had not to break the façade right then and there.

"No, we don't have to," her voice trembled, "but there's absolutely no limit on the number of kisses allowed at the end of the night."

"You're the one being such a stickler about the goodnight kiss rule."

"You're being ridiculous!" she huffed, folding her arms across her chest.

"And I have you this close to begging me to kiss you," Quinn smirked, holding up her thumb and forefinger to show her just how.

Maybe she really should look into this desire she had for making Rachel crazy...it couldn't be healthy.

The brunette glowered at her, obviously not finding any amusement in this game. "It's not nice to toy with people's feelings."
"It's called teasing."

"It's mean is what it is."

Quinn snorted. "Just let me kiss you already."

"No. I'm upset now. I don't very much feel like it anymore."

"Seriously?"

She didn't say anything.

"Rachel?"

"I should get going," she said flatly and reached for the door handle. "See you tomorrow."

"Rach!" she exclaimed, worried she had taken it too far. "I-I was just joking! Please?"

The brunette suddenly turned around and settled back into the seat with a victorious grin on her face.

"See? Told you it was mean."

Quinn's eyes narrowed. "You were messing with me?"

"You deserved it," she sang unapologetically.

"You're a pain."

"And you have yet to kiss me."

"So demanding!" she mocked.

"How else do you get what you want?"

"You could say 'please'?" Quinn suggested.

She rolled her eyes. "When have you ever used the word 'please'?"

"We're not talking about me!"

"GET WITH THE KISSING ALREADY, FABRAY!"

"IF YOU SHUT UP LONG ENOUGH, I WILL, BERRY!"

They attacked each other in a flurry of lips, teeth, and tongue, giggling throughout. She practically climbed over the divider just to share the seat with Rachel. They were lucky the Berry's lived on a street that only had a slight incline because Quinn knocked the gearshift into neutral and the car started rolling back ever so slowly. They almost passed the Berry house entirely before one of them noticed or maybe they both noticed at the time, because they screamed in a panic before Quinn slammed safely it back into park.

It took them ages to stop laughing.

"That still wasn't a goodnight kiss," Rachel said when they finally calmed down again.

"You know how you said you were controlling before?" she reminded her, tongue-in-cheek.
"Yes, yes," she rolled her eyes, "it's a work in progress. No one's perfect."

"I'm definitely not," she said with an odd note of forlornness that contrasted with the exuberant spirit of only seconds ago.

"Quinn?" Rachel questioned softly.

She shook her head, looking forward through the windshield at the darkened street.

"I don't want to do it."

"Don't want to do what?"

"Kiss you goodnight."

"Why?"

She still couldn't look at her. Her voice caught in her throat. "I don't want to go."

Quinn couldn't shake the feeling that something was going to happen, that something would go wrong, that tonight was going to be their last night like this. She never wanted to let it go. She wanted Rachel to stay with her in that car forever, just so it wouldn't end.

"It's only 'til tomorrow," she reassured her.

"I still don't want to."

It was stupid, unreasonable, and entirely illogical, but there was still that foreboding feeling sitting heavily in the pit of her stomach…taunting her, warning her. Was it just her fear that good things never lasted that got the best of her? Or was there something more to it? Maybe Rachel's claimed psychic powers were rubbing off on her. She shook her head at the absurdity of that. Her girlfriend was intuitive at times, but hardly psychic, not that she would ever try to argue with her on that point. Pick your battles and all.

Jeez…did she just refer to Rachel as her girlfriend?

Her head was swimming.

"Y-you could…sneak in for another sleepover?" Rachel offered unsurely. "Would you want that?"

Quinn didn't care if she was joking or not. "Yes."

"Oh," she said breathlessly, "then…"

"But I can't. My mom's expecting me home. It's a school night."

"Right, of course." She nodded jerkily, looking disappointed.

With a deep breath, Quinn resigned herself to what she had to do and gave Rachel exactly what she wanted, a perfectly sweet, loving good night kiss. The brunette sighed happily and licked her lips. She closed her eyes at the sight of that tongue on those perfect, full lips.

"Good night, Rachel," she whispered.

"Good night, Quinn."
"Thank you for singing with me today."

"Thank you for the song."

Chapter End Notes

"Maybe" by Kelly Clarkson
The next day came and went as though it were nothing at all. So did the day after that. Then it became a week. Quinn's fears, it seemed, were for naught. The only worrisome thing was that the school was beginning to really pick up on their friendship. Some people were starting to understand that Quinn and Rachel were actually friends now. There was some gossip, a few of the older Cheerios complained at one point, but Quinn immediately put a stop to that. Coach Sylvester was simply pleased to see her Captain running the girls ragged with more vigor than usual. After that hellish practice, where Quinn reminded those girls just who they were dealing with, they didn't say much more about it.

Santana didn't say anything at all.

If there were a few odd looks in the halls, Quinn just made sure to go out of her way to be more frightening than usual. As a whole, everything really seemed to be working out pretty decently. Though, she didn't go over to the Berry house as often anymore, only when her Dads weren't there. Rachel certainly didn't like that at first. She didn't want her avoiding her parents just because of tension and she thought Quinn was just trying to skirt an uncomfortable issue that she simply needed to deal with.

Quinn curtly explained that it made her feel awkward and gave nothing more. She would never tell Rachel about what she overheard the men arguing about that night. What good would come of it? Instead, she'd just make things easier on them all and stay out of the Berry men's sight as much as possible. It was better that way.

In the end, Rachel caved, even though she protested that it meant they would be spending less time with each other as a result. Quinn didn't like it either, but promised to try to make up for it by figuring out how they could be together elsewhere. Though Rachel didn't say it, Quinn knew the reason that the girl hadn't put up a big fight about the issue with her Dads was that she was struggling with them herself.

Her parents were being secretive and overall very strange about Quinn. Rachel had never known them to be like this before. She'd had always had an open and honest relationship with her Dads, so this was something very new and unfortunately distressing. Yes, her rather checkered past with Quinn Fabray was something predictably worrisome for her loving, protective parents, but this was something else altogether. They absolutely refused to see Quinn on any other level, no matter how much she explained, begged, pleaded, reasoned, cajoled, and at one low point, extorted. None of it made a difference and she didn't understand it in the slightest. Her fathers had always been open, accepting, reasonable men. Yet, it was like Quinn was the one person in the world that proved the exception to the rule.

She asked Quinn once, and only once, if she would consider letting her reveal the true nature of their relationship to her Dads. If they understood what was happening, it would change their views entirely. Honestly, Rachel thought it might even help Quinn if she was able to talk to her fathers about what she was going through. She herself had been raised to accept love in all forms and had no difficulties accepting her feelings for Quinn, at least, no difficulty in the fact that Quinn was a girl. The fact that Quinn was Quinn…well…that was something else.

She wanted so much to tell her parents about what was happening, but she didn't want to betray her Quinn's trust. So she'd broached the subject as carefully as she could, but the blonde wouldn't hear a word of it. She grew angry, shut down completely, and stormed out. The next day, Rachel had to
swear she would never tell them before Quinn could move past it.

All of this was just so exhausting. And it didn’t make sense!

A divide was falling between her and her Dads. They didn't talk as much as they used to. She didn't make the effort and neither did they. Rachel knew why she was keeping her secret, but there was something they weren't telling her either. That honesty that had always been such a valued staple to their family life and relationship was breaking down; something was changing between them. It wasn't as though they were arguing and raging at each other; it was still relatively normal and calm in the Berry household, but it wasn't the same either.

Rachel did wonder, with some hurt on her part, why Quinn never asked her over to her house. It's not like she had to be outright introduced to Judy Fabray as the bisexual girlfriend. Why couldn't they use the guise of friendship at Quinn's house as they did at hers? Yet she was too nervous to broach it. If Quinn wanted her at her house, she would have asked, and she never did. So they just stuck to Rachel's, neither one of them speaking of the alternative.

It was one of those nights - a Saturday. Quinn gladly begged off attending another Puckerman rager in favor of cuddling with Rachel on her bed while her fathers were at a dinner party. Rachel was playing some of her favorite Broadway songs for Quinn (so she could be better informed on the subject, of course). Quinn didn’t protest. She was wrapped up in Rachel's arms, warm, relaxed, peaceful. That was more than enough. And the music wasn’t that bad. Some of it was actually really good, but she wasn't going to admit to that. Leave the diva hanging a little, get her a bit worked up over it.

Seriously, she needed this habit checked into.

"Had you always known?" Rachel asked suddenly.

They hadn't spoken for a little while - just listening, letting hands wander innocently, but Quinn wasn't surprised by the abrupt question. She was starting to get used to Rachel's way of - how to describe it? - communicating. Maybe that wasn't right. Whatever it was, she was starting to know Rachel and she really liked that she did. She wanted to know her better than anyone, all the little things, all the big things, the secrets and the not-so-secret. She wanted to be that person.

It'd never really mattered to her before in previous relationships. She didn't care what Finn's favorite food was. She didn't pay attention to a word of what Puck said about Super Mario Kart. She never bothered to find out more about Sam's hobbies or try to understand his lame impressions. Those relationships had always been about certain terms that needed to be met, standards, quotas to be filled, a strictly outlined form of how things were to be conducted so as to appear in a certain way to the public eye. It was never about them. It was never about her, just the appearance of her, so to speak.

Yet she knew more about Rachel than she cared to know about all of her past boyfriends combined and it wasn't even close to being enough.

"Known what?" she replied lazily, trailing her fingers up and down the other girl's bare arm.

"That you were gay," Rachel said bluntly. "Did you always know and just denied it all this time?"

Quinn hesitated in her movements before continuing slowly. "I dunno."

"That is not an answer."
"Actually, it is."

"No," she said firmly. "It is a lazy, mumbled, nonsensical word that has no truth to it. You do know. Now tell me."

She gave her a look. "You're being bossy."

"It's part of my charm."

"That's highly debatable."

"Quinn!"

"I really didn't know, Rach. Honest." She groaned and pulled her closer, slipping a leg between hers. Quinn was using Rachel's arm as a pillow, it was curled around her shoulders, but they were lying side by side now, pressed against each other from breasts to ankles. If Rachel hadn't brought up this inordinately difficult topic of conversation, they would have certainly been doing something else by now. "But I guess that's because I was probably so hell-bent on not knowing."

The brunette frowned. "I don't understand."

She interlaced their fingers and stared at them for a moment. Fair against tan, perfectly manicured nails, longer fingers, shorter fingers, graceful fingers, fiery fingers. She smiled inwardly at her own inane musing. She liked the way their hands looked together.

"Okay..." she breathed in uncomfortably, trying to work up the nerve to talk about this. "There was this time, back in the beginning of freshman year, when I first started showering with other girls... that I would... I would kind of look sometimes."

"I see..." Rachel drawled teasingly.

Quinn wasn't of a mind to be lighthearted about this. "I always thought it was just for comparison. You know, the normal kind. Girls sizing up other girls. My mother always talked about it. She does it to every female that crosses her path, no matter the age. She finds something to criticize. Something she has that's better than them. Anyway, that's what I thought it was about, but..."

"Yes?"

Quinn heaved a sigh and shifted anxiously. This really wasn't easy to talk about. In fact, she hated it. Sometimes she felt like she was too open with this girl, too trusting... but it was Rachel.

"Do you remember Bianca Perry? The senior captain?"

"The tall, gorgeous brunette? Looked like just she walked out of a Brazilian swimsuit magazine?"

"That's the one."

"Y-you were attracted to her?"

Quinn noticed the tremor in her voice, but kept on. "We were in the showers after practice, she was next to me, and I just kind of happened to notice, nothing new, but I..." She swallowed painfully. "I felt something. I didn't even know what. All I know is that it freaked me out so badly, I never looked again. After that, I was always the first one in the showers and the first one out. It just became routine. I didn't think about it. It didn't exist."

"You were able to stop?" Rachel lifted herself on her elbows to lean over her, large doe eyes peering
into her with such sympathy. "Just like that?"

"I didn't have a choice."

"There's always a choice."

"You're telling me I chose to be this way?" Quinn retorted harshly, unable to believe that she would even have the nerve to say such a thing.

"Of course not," she replied patiently. "Feelings are one thing. We don't get a say in that. But there's always a choice in whether or not we act on them. Good or bad. Right or wrong. Wanting or not. You could have chosen not to kiss me."

"No, I couldn't have."

Rachel was taken aback. "What?"

She really didn't understand, did she?

"You were never a choice, Rachel. You just...were. No decisions. No thoughts. Just you." She sighed. "It was never a choice."

Quinn watched as the other girl ruminated on that for a while. Her brow drawn in concentration, her nose scrunched up as she tried to puzzle out some insanely long and convoluted repartee with herself as her brain went to places even Quinn would never understand as hard as she tried. Instead of asking her what she was thinking, she just nuzzled her nose lightly, trying to break her out of the serious mindset. It worked, in part at least, because Rachel eyes refocused on her and she smiled.

"Does it scare you?" she asked quietly.

She had to think about that. After a moment, she looked back at the brown eyed girl who was still watching her intently.

"I spend my days between being...so happy....and completely terrified."

"You don't talk to me about it. I so wish you would, Quinn."

About what it meant to be gay. What it meant for her life. Who she was. What they were doing. How everything was hidden. About being strong enough to be herself for the world to know and see.

She wasn't ready. And she wasn't going to be ready for a long time. Sure, announcing she was a lesbian and dating Rachel Berry would destroy her reputation...permanently, in a way that even getting pregnant hadn't done, but that wasn't the real problem. It was a scary thing, to have to give that up. It meant leaving behind all the things she had clung to so desperately before. She didn't want that; she liked having the power, being on that pedestal in school. She wanted to keep it. But it wasn't the problem.

"I don't want to talk about it."

"Talking helps," Rachel reasoned carefully. "It gives you a chance to express thoughts, feelings, fears that otherwise fester and worsen if kept bottled up."

"You're probably right."

Yet, it wasn't a concession in any way, shape, or form, and Rachel knew it.
"But you still don't want to talk about it," she said wearily.

"I still don't want to talk about it."

It broke Rachel's heart to hear how Quinn had been trying so hard all these years to repress her true nature. To think that she was so afraid of what it meant, that she denied a part of herself so completely...? How can a person live like that? Denying something essential to your very being? It was making sense now. How terribly Quinn had treated her. How obsessive her need to stay on top at school was. The boys she dated. And it particularly explained why Quinn had pursued her in the manner she did. Those natural urges she'd been suppressing for so long starting bursting through in a rather inappropriate and relatively unhealthy way.

Still. That was slowly being corrected and how could she fault Quinn for her methods when without them they wouldn't be where they were. Then again, if Quinn hadn't been wound so tightly, it could have saved them both a lot of time and trouble, while also saving Rachel the pain of being the outlet to her misplaced anger. Well, hindsight is 20/20. It didn't matter anymore how they got here. They were here, and the future was all that mattered, a future she most definitely wanted with Quinn Fabray.

It made Rachel want to cry when she thought about how stifled, self-loathing, and scared her girlfriend must have been, and still was to a certain extent. She wanted nothing more than to be able to help her, to make her feel better about herself, to show her everything that she was and all that she had to be proud of. But Quinn wasn't ready to hear it yet...not completely. It didn't discourage her though. Quinn needed time. She had faith that Quinn would one day be ready to accept herself fully and she couldn't wait for that day. Quinn deserved happiness, even if she didn't believe herself worthy of it. Rachel would convince her.

The blonde was watching her with thoughtful eyes and she tried to pull herself out of the musings again. They weren't going to talk about it so she just had to let it go...for now.

In setting aside that topic, Rachel fell upon another that had made her heart clench the moment Quinn spoke the words. She didn't want to sound needy or jealous, like Finn had always accused her of when she jumped on him for this sort of thing, but she had to know. Her mind was already spinning off with sordid scenarios and those dark, sickly feelings were working their way through.

"So...you liked her?" she tried as casually as possible.

"Who?" Quinn replied absently as she ran her fingers through the ends of Rachel's hair, seeming much more focused on that than the question.

"Bianca."

"Oh God no!" she snapped to attention, giving her a horrified look. "I hated her. That girl was psychotic. She once took a bat to her boyfriend's car 'cause he wouldn't get her a caramel macchiato in the middle of the school day."

Rachel gasped. "I thought that was just a rumor!"

"Oh, it happened. His parents pressed charges, but Coach Sylvester stepped in somehow and made it go away. I have no idea how and I don't ever want to know."

"B-but you admit you were attracted to her."

"I don't know," she muttered, "maybe."
"It was enough to freak you out."

"I told you," Quinn replied firmly, "I didn't think about it. Just shoved it away, ignored it, pretended like it never existed. I didn't know what it was I felt, but I really didn't want to feel it again."

"Is that your type?" she pressed, knowing she was digging herself into a hole here, but it wasn't in her nature to stop. Her masochism tended to get the best of her sometimes.

"What?"

"The tall, exotic, sex on a stick, sort of look. Is that your type? Is that what you find attractive?"

Quinn was bewildered, not to mention extremely uncomfortable.

"A-a type? I don't have a…" she stammered. "I've barely even… Why are you asking me this?"

"I'm just interested to know what you find physically appealing now that you've started to open yourself up to your true feelings."

She sat up, abruptly disentangling them, while Rachel remained on her side as calmly as possible, propped up by her elbow.

"Liar."

"Excuse me?"

"You're such a liar. This isn't about mere curiosity, it's about your insecurity. You're worried that I think Bianca Perry is hotter than you."

"Well, of course you do!" she shot back. "She was considered practically a goddess at McKinley. Santana even came second to her."

"From the way you're talking, it seems like you're the one into her!"

"I certainly am not!" she said indignantly. "I was never attracted to Bianca Perry, Quinn. I appreciated her looks, but there is a distinction between thinking someone is good looking and being attracted to them. You're being very defensive."

"I'm annoyed!"

"Why would you be annoyed?"

"Because how could you possibly believe that I would think anyone is more beautiful than you?"

Rachel was stunned. It took her a few moments to recuperate enough for a response.

"I-I never said that."

"I know you. I can see it. That's what you were thinking. What do you think is going to happen here, Rachel? I admit I'm gay, slum around with you for a while, then move on to bigger, better things? Hotter, sexier girls?"

"Maybe?" she whispered.

"What is wrong with you?" she cried. "Yes, Bianca was hot. She was gorgeous. I think she's modeling in Europe now. But she doesn't hold a candle to you."
"Quinn, I won't be ridicul-

"You're so beautiful, Rachel. Don't you see that? Don't you see how much I want you whenever we're together? I can't keep my hands off you. I want to be with you all the time. I want to kiss you all the time. I can't...I can't stand to hear you talk this way. It...*hurts* to think that you don't know that about yourself."

Rachel gave her a dark look that Quinn knew she deserved.

"Because you feel guilty for your part in it?"

She looked away sadly. "That too."

"You really think I'm beautiful?"

"In every way."

She saw the jumbo sized cup before anything else. Instinct like none other had her bracing for the sudden impact, eyes shut tight. Yet the expected never came. Still bracing, she opened one eye to peek and Santana Lopez was standing nonchalantly in front of her holding a giant purple slushie.

"Just do it already," Rachel groaned.

"Do what?" she replied with an innocently raised eyebrow.

The Latina pulled out a straw, plopped it in, and took a long sip before releasing it with a pop. Smacking her lips at the taste, she frowned curiously over Rachel.

"What?" she asked with a shrug. "Oh! Did you think you were going to get your weekly slushie facial this morning? Tsk, sorry to disappoint, Manhands. Maybe tomorrow. That is, if Quinn comes to her senses by then and lifts the ban, of course."

"If you're not going to throw that in my face...which I still kind of think you are...then what do you want?"

She shrugged again, but the look on her face said something else entirely.

"Nothing. Nothing at all. Just thought you should know - whatever it is that's going on between you and blondie? I'm going to find out. And you best be believing it's not a matter of *if*, but *when*. So until then...enjoy." She handed her the cup. "Grape's your favorite right?"

She was still holding the slushie, frozen in place, long after Santana had sauntered out of sight.

Rachel started beaming the moment Quinn walked through the door to the choir room. She couldn't help it. Just the sight of the blonde made her heart race, her stomach flip, and happiness shoot through her veins.

She really needed to get herself under control. How were they supposed to continue to be a secret if she kept grinning at her like this? Even the emo!punk blind kid who tripped people in the halls with his walking stick for fun would be able to pick up on it. Now that Santana was on the warpath, they had to be especially careful.

Quinn smiled back and seated herself next to her. Fortunately, it was early yet for Glee club, and they were only ones in the choir room.
"Hey," she said softly.

"Hi," Rachel replied and before she knew it, she was kissing her.

It was soft, and brief, and not nearly enough, but it was something. They released each other with a sigh, still wary of their surroundings and that someone could walk through the door any minute now.

"I feel like I haven't seen you all day and it was only three periods ago."

Quinn's eyes sparkled and she tucked back the few strands of hair that had fallen into Rachel's face, biting her lower lip. "I know what you mean."

Rachel was desperately trying not to kiss her again, especially since they were alone, but then it occurred to her...they weren't supposed to be alone.

"Where is everybody? They're going to be late..." She looked around at the empty seats reproachfully.

Quinn was licking her lips with a frown, as if tasting something strange, and all of a sudden grabbed Rachel's chin.

Rachel looked at her with wide eyes. "What?"

"Open your mouth," she demanded in her no nonsense tone.

Before even considering a reply, Rachel did as Quinn ordered.

"You taste like grape and your tongue is purple," she said, her brow furrowed. "Why do you taste like grape and why is your tongue purple?"

"Oh!" She shrugged, relieved that's all it was. Really, Quinn gave her a run for the melodramatic tendencies sometimes. "Santana gave me a grape slushie earlier."

The blonde's cheeks flamed with anger. "She did WHAT? I will kill her. I will freaking destroy that bi-" 

Rachel was struggling to pull the raging cheerleader back into her seat as she tried to storm out of the room.

"Quinn! Quinn! Stop! She gave me a slushie, as in handed it to me! She didn't toss it in my face as per the usual treatment."

That stopped her. She turned around with a confused look and Rachel felt confident enough to release the hold on her wrist.

"She did what?"

"I am just as baffled as you are on the matter."

"Wait...you're telling me that Santana – Santana Lopez – offered you a slushie, instead of drowning you with it, and you...drank it?"

"Yes?"

"Rachel! She could have poisoned it or something!" Quinn said in disbelief. "What were you thinking?"
"She wouldn't do that!" she protested with a frown. "...Would she?"

Quinn scoffed.

She shook her head. "No, I saw her drink from it first. Besides, it was my favorite. I didn't want it to go to waste."

"You do realize that if she didn't poison it, and that's probably true seeing as how you're still alive right now, she could have spit in it? Or she was only pretending to drink from it and like...had the whole football team spit in it? Or worse..."

All the color drained from Rachel's face.

"Oh...my...God..." She started hyperventilating. "I didn't even think... I drank the whole thing... Oh, I'm going to be sick..." She collapsed onto a chair and Quinn dropped beside her, rubbing her back soothingly as she put her head between her knees.

"Just take it back, take it back, and we'll pretend I never heard it, and it never happened," Rachel whined.

"Okay, okay, I take it back," she said quickly. "I'm sure nothing was wrong with it. Santana was just trying to mess with your head. She didn't do anything bad to it. You're fine, sweetie. Don't throw up."

"Right...okay...won't throw up...good..." Rachel nodded through deep breaths.

The rest of the Glee club started filtering in and Quinn had to take her hand away, but fortunately some color had reappeared in the girl's cheeks.

"Good lord, Rachel, you look like someone just attempted a gangsta rap remake of Barbra's 'People'," Kurt said, sitting down in the row behind her. "Are you alright?"

"I'll be fine!" she rasped, head in her hands.

Quinn just shrugged, pretending not to know, but shot her girlfriend another worried look.

Santana was on the scent now. They had to be even more careful.

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It was their lunch day. Once a week, the two of them would forego the usual cafeteria routine at separate tables, Rachel with the excuse of extra credit work in Chemistry (the pun not lost on Quinn when she came up with it), and Quinn with the excuse of Coach Sylvester imposing a mandatory weekly meeting so she could plot how to win Nationals both by legal and illegal measures if necessary (it was coming up soon and Sue was obsessively worse than her usual terrible self so no one batted an eye).

Today Rachel had wanted to meet in the auditorium, which Quinn was excited about because that usually meant less lunch and more Rachel. When she walked in, she noted with curiosity that the curtain on the stage was closed instead of open as usual. She went around backstage and found the brunette laying out a blanket on the stage floor, a picnic basket sitting next to her, and some pillows.

"What are you doing?"

"If you're so convinced you'll be valedictorian, surely you should be intelligent enough to put the pieces together," she said dryly, but looked up at her with a teasing grin.
"It's…it's nice, but we're…” Quinn trailed off and looked around as if there would be someone lurking in the shadowed corners to see.

"Completely alone," she finished for her knowingly. "No one comes in here besides Glee club and the band, and not even they will come here during lunch period. It's just us. Promise. I even closed the curtain. It's cozy and romantic."

Quinn was still wary, but she didn't want to disappoint Rachel, who looked so hopeful as she started pulling out carefully packed food. It was a bigger risk than they usually took; if someone walked in, it would be impossible to explain away as nothing. So she stood there, still a little ways off in the wings, unable to make herself take those steps forward.

There was something else she didn't like about this.

Rachel looked up with a small frown, realizing that Quinn hadn't joined her yet. The frown deepened when she saw her still standing there in the shadows.

"What's wrong?" she asked timidly, folding her hands on her lap. "Is…is it too much?"

"You've done this before," Quinn said more harshly than she intended to, but didn't regret it.

She didn't know why she felt so strongly about this, why she had such a feeling about it… Maybe it was how practiced Rachel looked in her movements. Maybe that was what gave it away. She looked like she knew exactly what she was doing. There was no hesitancy, no uncertainty, in a way that can only come from having experience.

So much was going through her mind right now and anger was the first familiar emotion she latched onto.

Rachel was shocked, but didn't refute the accusation, as Quinn expected. That didn't mean it didn't hurt more to have it confirmed.

"O-oh, I…yes…well…” she stumbled over the words.

Of course, she hadn't thought she'd be caught. Quinn's chest heaved with rage as she stormed over to the blanket and glared down at the now sheepish looking brunette.

"With Finn?" she spat.

It had been a question, but she didn't need an answer. Quinn just wanted it said out loud.

Rachel's cheeks got redder.

"Yes," she whispered reluctantly, "But, Quinn, please let me explain-"

"So I'm just getting his sloppy seconds? Is that it? Did you really think you could fool me? I'm second to no one, Rachel! No one! And you don't get to make this out to be some sappy, romantic thing for me when you've already done this for another guy. How dare y-"

"STOP IT!" she yelled and stood up. She didn't look quite so embarrassed anymore, just angry.

Well, who the hell gave her the right to be angry too?

"Oh, you're going to yell at me now? Screw you, Rachel! You were all over him even when we were together. Even when I was pregnant! I accepted that Finn cheated on me. Fine. I slept with Puck after all. But you…how could you? You know how I feel about you and Finn, and you just go
and…pull this?" She shook her head furiously. "I'm out of here! You can just go to hell for all I care."

She spun around to leave, but Rachel had a firm grip on her arm.

"Quinn, no, don't go! Please!"

The contact only infuriated her all the more and she flung her off roughly.

"Would you stop?" She stepped back and folded her arms across her chest tightly. "Just stop shouting and let me explain."

"Go right ahead," she sneered, "explain."

Rachel lifted her chin determinedly. "I did do this for Finn once. I've had this…fantasy, long before he even came into the picture, of how romantic it would be to have this sort of picnic on the stage. The lights shining down, the rows and rows of empty seats, being completely alone, just two people up here in an enormous room, and feeling like you've never been less alone. I always wondered what it would be like, to have someone I…cared about…be here with me, to share my stage, and how romantic and wonderful it would be."

She sighed.

"Everyone knows how much I love the stage, how I crave the spotlight, but it is lonely sometimes, so I always wondered if I could bring someone into it with me. That way I get my moment, but I also get…" she trailed off and Quinn wondered what it was she wanted to say, but didn't seem to be able.

"I thought Finn could be that person, but…it wasn't…it wasn't what I expected. It didn't feel right. It was awkward and strange and…I don't know. I thought it was just my expectations being too high, but then you happened and I started thinking about how much I really wanted this with you. I didn't even have to wonder if it was going to be all that I hoped for because you've already exceeded all my expectations, Quinn. I'm sorry I made you feel like I was re-dating, or whatever you might call it, but I really just wanted to have the chance to get it right this time. With you."

Quinn didn't say anything.

"Are you still mad at me?"

"Did you kiss him?"

"Yes," her voice cracked. "It was the first time we ever kissed, actually."

"And he was still with me, wasn't he?"

She swallowed thickly, looking more ashamed than ever. "Yes. Before he knew you were pregnant."

Quinn breathed in sharply and waved her hands as she backed away from the other girl. "I can't hear this…I just can't…"

"I'm sorry," Rachel said miserably. "This was such a bad idea. I don't know what I was thinking."

She turned away just as the tears began to fall and crouched down to pack up the food.

She was just about to start folding up the blanket when a loud cranking sound made her whirl around. The curtains fell back, brightly opening up the stage to the rest of the auditorium. When they
were all the way back, Quinn reappeared and kneeled down beside her without a word. She smoothed out the blanket and arranged the pillows so that she could lie down comfortably.

Rachel looked on, speechless.

"Did you bring me something non-vegan?" she asked lazily, pushing down her Cheerios skirt a little.

"Y-yes," she stammered, still in shock at the abrupt turn, and brushed away the remnants of her tears. "You really still want to?"

Quinn rolled onto her side, propping her head up on her arm. It was a few long moments before she finally spoke. "I'm sorry I yelled at you," she said, running her fingers along the blanket, not looking Rachel in the eye. "I-I don't like knowing that he…" Her voice grew strained, like she was fighting back tears. "I can't handle hearing about you with him. I'm over him cheating on me, I don't really care anymore. It did sting at first that he would betray me like that, but hey, look what I did to him." She shook her head bitterly. "But that it was with you? I-I don't... I hate that he was with you, Rachel. So much. I can't stand it. And then this... when all I want is to forget that he ever got to..."

"I understand," she said remorsefully. "Truly. I'm so sorry, Quinn. I should have given you some warning. In retrospect, it was a discussion we should have had, rather than a surprise."

"But surprises are more romantic, right?" she replied knowingly.

The brunette grinned bashfully and nodded. She took a deep breath. "You wanted a romantic lunch with me, Rachel Berry, and you're going to have one. Give me food."

She laughed and rolled her eyes. "And that is just so romantic."

Quinn pushed herself up on her arms, leaned in, and kissed her sweetly, lingering in its final few moments as long as she could.

"Is it more romantic now?"

The flush of Rachel's cheeks was her answer.

"Better than him, right?"

Rachel pulled her back to her mouth. "So much better."

When they finally got around to the food, which was actually when Quinn started whining about how hungry she was, Rachel unpacked the picnic basket again and the blonde's eyes widened as she really saw what was there now.

"Don't tell me that's..."

"Yup," Rachel said with a glowing smile. "An assortment of specialties straight from Charlie's Delicatessen."

Quinn's eyes were as round as saucers. "My favorite sandwich?"

"With extra bacon."

She gasped and looked at Rachel, then back at the food, then back to Rachel before launching herself at the other girl. Rachel squealed delightedly and they went tumbling backwards, Quinn
kissing her all over her face.

"You – are – the best – ever."

"You only say that because I gave you bacon," Rachel pouted, "which was extremely difficult due to my strong personal beli-"

Quinn muffled the rest by covering her mouth with her own.
I just wanted to say that I’ve had this story planned out for ages. I have pages and pages outlining how it’s going to go from beginning to end. Yes, it is long. Yes, there is a point to all of it. If you see stuff that's paralleling more recent Glee things, it's entirely by accident. Most of this story was written while S2 was airing.

"It has got to be disgusting up there."

"Think of the spiders. If we shined a light right there, imagine the amount of cobwebs we'd see."

"I'd rather not, thank you."

"At least the stage is cleaner."

"But what if one of the spiders dropped down in the middle of a performance…"

"QUINN! I don't need nightmares!"

"I'm giving myself nightmares."

"Perhaps we should stop staring at the ceiling then."

She turned her head to the side so she could see Rachel. "What should we stare at then?"

The brunette turned as well and smiled at meeting Quinn's eyes. "This right here isn't so bad."

"Not an eyesore?"

"You're beautiful and you know it."

"Of course I do."

"Do you really?"

Quinn gave her a look that let Rachel know she wasn't going to answer and they were going to drop that line of conversation.

"I'm so full," she moaned and rubbed her stomach.

"I tried to stop you."

"It was all so good though! Charlie's is my weakness. I practically lived there when I was pregnant. If they could have set up a cot for me in the corner, I would have been set. All the guys in there know me by name."

"They should name that sandwich after you."

"Oh, my crowning glory. Who needs Prom Queen when I've got a deli sandwich with my name?"
"I'd call it… 'The Bacon Quinn'."

She groaned and gave her an exasperated look. "That is the lamest thing I've ever heard."

"What? I think it's great! In fact, I'll go in there tomorrow and suggest it. After all the business you've given them, surely you deserve it."

"You wouldn't dare!"

Rachel giggled. "It'll be perfect! Your name up there on the board in chalk, I'll make sure they do it in extra bold letters. Multicolored!"

"You better be joking right now."

"Am I?"

"I would never speak to you again."

"I'd be okay with that," she shrugged, "you don't have to talk, as long as we do other things."

Quinn gasped in outrage and Rachel laughed gleefully.

"You are such a tease."

"And you love it."

They laid there in a comfortable silence for a few minutes. Rachel was scrutinizing the track lights (off at the moment) while Quinn simply watched her. She had to give herself a small pep talk before she could work up the nerve enough to say it. Turning on her side, she leaned on her elbow and looked down into Rachel's eyes.

"You don't call me enough."

Her brow furrowed in confusion. "We talk on the phone nearly every day."

"Once a day," she corrected her. "Exactly once a day we talk, usually at night. Never more than once. And you text me three times a day. No more, no less. Even if it means not replying, you won't let it go over three."

"You've been counting?"

"What's going on? Why don't you call me more? Why don't you annoy me?"

"Hold on," Rachel scoffed in disbelief and sat up, leading Quinn to do the same. "Let me get this straight. You're sincerely asking me why I don't call you so often that it starts to annoy you?"

"I want to call you all the time," she huffed. "I always want to talk to you, but you're so standoffish sometimes. You…you weren't like that with the others."

"The others?"

"Finn…Jesse…even Puck."

She started to get uncomfortable. "Quinn, I don't-"

"Is it me?" she pressed. "Do you just not feel that way with me? You practically owned their phones
with how much you blew them up. But you're not like that with me. I can handle the truth, okay? I just want to know."

Rachel looked almost…amused. How was this in any way funny?

"So what you're saying is that you want me to badger you incessantly with phone calls, emails, text messages, handwritten notes, and baked goods with handwritten notes in them, until you're severely irritated and feel like I'm smothering you?"

"Yes!" she cried and then thought about it. "Well, no. Actually, yes. I don't know! I just mean… I want more."

_I want you to need me like I need you._

But she couldn't say that.

Rachel flung herself into Quinn's arms, causing the girl to fall backwards onto the pillows, and knelt over her, giggling madly.

"Quinn! You have absolutely no idea how difficult it has been to contain myself, to ignore practically my every instinct in an effort not to scare you away. I didn't want to make the same mistakes as I have in the past so I put a limit on the number of times I was allowed to contact you within in a twenty four hour period. No matter how much I wanted to call or text you, I would resist because I… I have to break my bad habits."

Then there was that sad smile on her face that Quinn hated to see. It was the same one she had after Finn would say something stupid and hurtful. It was the one she had when she felt ashamed.

"I don't want you to get sick of me," she said quietly.

"Rachel…" she sat up and wrapped her arm around her waist, pulling her close so that the girl was sitting on her lap, "I don't think I can ever be sick of you."

"Don't say that," she shook her head, looking away.

"But I mean it," she insisted and cupped her cheek, gently urging her to meet her eyes. She did so hesitantly and Quinn smiled up at her.

_How can I tell you all that you are? How can I make you understand?_

"Don't ignore those instincts anymore. I-I want it. Okay?"

Rachel kissed her fiercely.

When they finally left each other to continue the rest of the day, it wasn't a minute before Quinn's phone vibrated.

_I'm worried you'll regret this._

_I might._

_That's not comforting._

_Honesty is the best policy. Aren't you always the one telling me that?_
Fine. But is it possible for you to be honest as well as reassuring?

I'll work on it.

There was a few minutes break and she tried to pay attention to her teacher in the front of the class, but her mind was stuck on Rachel. Quinn wondered if she would reply or if she should say something else. But then another message came.

I miss you already.

She smiled to herself, feeling giddy and warm all over. This was turning out better than she ever thought. Why hadn't she said something to Rachel sooner? Too chicken, of course. It scared her to think of what it might have meant otherwise. All this time she'd been afraid that Rachel just didn't share her feelings completely – that Quinn was just her rebound. She was slowly starting to understand that it wasn't that at all.

Next year we should make sure all of our classes are together.

Do not joke about things like that with me, Quinn Fabray. I'll do it. I'll break into the office with Puckerman and hack into the computer system if necessary.

She giggled at the mental image that conjured. Rachel and Puck in ninja gear, ski masks, picking the lock into the school, bickering when Puck decides he wants to super glue the secretary's desk shut… Then she tried to cover it by coughing when she got some looks from people in the class.

No joke. Physics will be much more tolerable if I have you for a lab partner.

I'll start working on it immediately! We might have to bribe some people in the office…I'll discuss it with Noah. Leave it to me!

Her teacher was giving them an assignment so Quinn stopped for a few minutes to write it down. When the woman went back to lecturing, she went back to her phone. It took her a few moments of tapping anxiously on the keyboard before she finally typed out what she wanted to say.

Was it what you wanted? Even though I yelled at you at first?

Her stomach rolled and her palms grew damp as she waited for a response. What was taking her so damn long? Quinn rapped her fingernails on the desk, brimming with nervous energy. The boy next to her gave her an annoyed look and she glared at him so fiercely, he cowered and turned away, not looking at her for the rest of the period. Finally she had a reply.

It was wonderful (even with the yelling). I knew it would be. It's you.

Quinn breathed in deeply and the anxiety melted away. She hadn't ruined it. Rachel was happy. Everything was okay.

I still feel so full. I might throw up.

Maybe next time you'll listen to me!

Oh, don't nag.

Shhh. I can't talk anymore. Mr. Grayson is glaring at me. I think he knows.
Did no one teach you how to text under the desk?

I'm trying! It's not like I ever do this with anyone... I should be paying attention to the lesson!

But you'd rather talk to me.

Always... It seems there is little I wouldn't do for you Miss Fabray.

I'll remember that.

And I'm sure you'll make me regret it.

Quinn thought for a few seconds about her next message.

Are your Dads going to be home tonight?

No, actually. I think they have a work function to attend.

Can I come over? Do our homework together?

Are you really going to let me get any homework done?

She smiled widely and covered her mouth with her hand so her teacher didn't get suspicious, which she likely already was.

Cross my heart.

Liar.

Her silly grin was giving her away. She'd been right about her teacher being suspicious. The woman was glaring at her now with that look on her face like she was going to try and take her phone. Well, that wasn't happening on any planet. Quinn was the Captain of the Cheerios. None of the teachers messed with her unless they wanted the wrath of Sue Sylvester upon them. But this particular woman would at least put up a fight.

Crap. Mrs. Farnessi is coming over. I can't talk anymore.

Did no one teach YOU how to text under the desk?

Nag!

Bacon Quinn.

Quinn went to Rachel's straight from practice. She brought a change of clothes and showered while Rachel made them dinner. Rather, she ordered take out. It was easier since Quinn was absolutely against all the vegan options Rachel had made her try so far. She knew the girl was going to keep trying though so she'd just have to put up with it.

They ate at the dining room table and Rachel got to play footsie with her like she had wanted to that night at Breadstix. It was silly and perfect. They couldn't stop laughing.

After dinner, the diva was adamant about them starting their homework, since it was already getting late, and Quinn reluctantly agreed. She settled herself at Rachel's desk while Rachel was on her bed, books opened, papers everywhere. It was quiet, which had annoyed Quinn the first few times they
tried doing homework together. She liked having music on in the background, but Rachel was a firm believer in radio silence during academic work because music was distracting. It's the one place in life music didn't belong, she explained, which shocked Quinn because Rachel sometimes acted like music could cure cancer if you tried hard enough. She could find a purpose for it anywhere…except during homework apparently.

They'd argued about it, Quinn saying she couldn't concentrate without it, Rachel saying that was contradictory because it was actually a distraction. In the end, Rachel claimed the right to set the rules in her house. Quinn couldn't refute and begrudgingly gave in. She was starting to get used to it by now…though it was still annoying.

"You don't kiss me enough."

Quinn stopped in the middle of a sentence on her history assignment and looked up at the ceiling to consider whether or not she heard that right. Yep, she definitely heard right. Putting down her pen, she swiveled around in the chair to fixate on the brunette who was staring right back at her, sitting upright, legs folded underneath her, homework forgotten.

"Excuse me?" she said pointedly with a raised eyebrow.

"Well, I didn't mean it quite like that," Rachel backtracked.

"I should think not."

"We kiss often."

"Uh, yes."

"But you don't…" she trailed off and blushed slightly, which piqued Quinn's curiosity all the more. She rolled the chair closer to the bed.

"What?"

"While I am perfectly content with our current situation-"

"I hate that word," she said sullenly.

Rachel held her hands up apologetically. "I'll rephrase. I'm not complaining in any way, shape, or form, but…I do feel as though our level of physical intimacy has receded somewhat."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"Don't get defensive. Just hear me out."

Quinn crossed her arms in a decidedly defensive manner, which made Rachel give her an exasperated look.

"Let me preface this with the understanding that I am not ready to give myself to you fully in that way. That's not what this about."

"Okay…"

"But before we made our relationship official, we were further along…i-in our familiarity with each other. Yet ever since we decided to be together, it hasn't been like that anymore - which I find completely backwards."
Her mouth dropped open. "You think we don't do enough?"

"No! Maybe. I don't know," she said bashfully. "It's just…we were doing more, Quinn, and now, although it's wonderful, please don't misunderstand me, whenever we have time together it's been relatively tame compared to what we were engaging in before. With the exception of that janitor's closet interlude, hands have always remained in respectable places, clothing is never removed. Again, please know that I'm not dissatisfied in any way with where we are, but I would like to understand why it's…"she shifted apprehensively, "changed."

Quinn was really just trying to wrap her head around the fact that they were actually having this conversation.

"I-I wasn't thinking about it before."

As soon as the words came out of her mouth, she knew she had said the wrong thing. Rachel immediately lowered her head, looking absolutely wounded, as if Quinn had just said she resembled a bug or something.

"So now that you actually have to think about doing things to me, you don't want to?"

She was momentarily distracted by the mention of "doing things" to Rachel.

*God, what she would give to…*

"Quinn!" she snapped, aggravated at seeing the glazed over look in her eyes, thinking she wasn't paying attention.

"I didn't mean it like that and you know it," she replied seriously. "It's just…different now. That's all."

"I can't help but feel like your attraction to me has lessened."

She rolled her eyes. "Now you're being ridiculous."

"My feelings are hardly a thing to be ridiculed, Quinn."

She adjusted herself in the chair uneasily, uncrossing her legs and bringing her arms down to grip both sides of the seat. She needed to hold on to something right now.

"When I say things are different, I mean that there's more at stake. We…we're…I don't want to rush it. I wasn't thinking before, just doing. I was doing things that I wasn't even ready for. I was so…confused. I had all these feelings and I just wanted to get rid of them so-"

"You thought grinding against me while we were on a piano was going make it go away?" Rachel replied incredulously.

Quinn blushed at the memory. "I wasn't thinking!"

"You were just doing…” she repeated with a nod, starting to understand. "You were acting on your repressed urges without allowing yourself to comprehend them fully.”

"Yes?" she admitted reluctantly, uncomfortable with hearing her say it so…clinically, like she was some textbook case of repressed gaydom.

"I see. So if we were to take things a step further now, you would be uncomfortable with that, because you're not ready?"
"No!" she blurted and then turned even redder at how desperate she'd sounded. The other girl looked surprised by her vehement response.

*Fix it! Fix it!*

"Wait. What do you mean 'a step further'? What exactly are we talking about here?"

Rachel bit her bottom lip with a lascivious grin, letting Quinn know exactly what she meant. The blonde sucked in a breath. Suddenly feeling like the room was much, much too warm.

"I just want us to be comfortable without the pressure," she explained tentatively. "I don't want you to feel pressured… Okay?"

Rachel's eyes widened and Quinn groaned inwardly, knowing she had figured it out.

It was true what she said about going places that even she wasn't ready for in the beginning. She still felt like she didn't know what she was doing, but the night that Rachel had shoved her away always floated somewhere in the back of her mind whenever they were kissing. It was a constant reminder that enabled her to keep her hands where they should be and not where she was dying to let them go. It was why she never let any clothes be shed. It was why, though they got very heated, she didn't let herself go completely because she knew she had to stay in control of her own desires. It had proven itself to be one of the most difficult things she'd ever done.

Staying behind the firmly drawn line with her old boyfriends was easy. She didn't want more. Now things were oh so very different.

She had never experienced such sexual frustration before in her life. She thought she might lose her mind, but every time the chance came for them to just take a step beyond the usual boundaries - that night was in her head again, the hands pushing her away, the way she trembled with her naked back to her.

Quinn would never forget it.

"Is that what this is about?" Rachel murmured, her shoulders drooping in relief. She'd finally gotten to the root of that tenuous question she'd been battling herself with for weeks now. "That night?" She shook her head. "Baby, you can't keep beating yourself up over that."

"Like I said…" Quinn muttered uncomfortably, staring at the floor, but after a pause, she looked up at the brunette in wonder. "Did you just call me 'baby'?"

She winced. "No?"

Quinn unconsciously wet her lips, marveling at the shiver that went through her to hear Rachel call her that. She'd hated it whenever the guys tried that with her and promptly kicked them of the habit. But when Rachel said it…it was just butterflies in her chest.

She smiled faintly, giving her a wordless answer. "Do I get to say it too?"

Happiness washed over the other girl in a brilliant glow, unwilling and unable to hide a single iota of it.

"If you want to…"

She got up off the bed and promptly straddled her in the desk chair. Quinn looked up at her warily, but Rachel just curled her arms around her neck and wriggled around until Quinn was forced to put
her hands on her waist to stop the provocative movement and she smirked triumphantly, having gotten what she wanted.

"While I appreciate your careful consideration of my feelings and not wanting to pressure me, I think in the future we should allow ourselves to be more open about this particular subject. If you had simply spoken with me about your concerns, you would have found out something not altogether surprising."

"What's that?" she asked hoarsely.

Rachel was wearing a skirt that had ridden up almost entirely when she sat down and now a very sensitive area was pressed up against her with only the flimsy material of her panties standing between Quinn and the chance to…

"You would have found out that I'd like just a little less thinking and a lot more doing."

Rachel's mouth descended on hers before she even had a chance to respond.

It's safe to say the physical side of their relationship was progressively back on track after that.

Another few days passed without incident. Other than that encounter with Santana, the Latina seemed hardly interested in them at all. Quinn knew better than to let that lull them into a false sense of security. If Santana couldn't get instant gratification, it only made her more determined to get what she wanted. She may have a temper, but when it came to this sort of thing, she was an expert hunter, knowing just how long to wait, how to crouch down unseen, wait for the perfect moment to strike for the kill. If Quinn hadn't been so focused on Santana and keeping her fellow cheerleader off the scent, maybe she would have been able to prevent what happened next.

"No, no, no, you stay away from that phone, Quinn Fabray!"

Quinn was on her stomach reaching for her purse from the bed.

"I was just going to check- OOF!"

Rachel ambled on top of her, reaching over her, and snatched the cell phone away. Quinn tried to fight back, but the brunette had her pinned, holding her down with one hand and the phone in the other.

"Get off me!"

"No phones!"

Rachel leaped off her and ran for the window, she threw it open and held the phone out over the ledge. Quinn gasped in horror.

"What are you doing?" she shrieked.

"We agreed! No texting or talking to other people when we're alone together. Our time is limited so we make the most of it."

"If you drop that, I swear to God, Berry…" she growled.

"Are you going to keep your promise?"

"You're holding my cell phone hostage!"
"WELL?"

"Fine! I won't look. Jeez. I was only going to check my messages. Give it back!"

"Rachel?" a man called from downstairs.

Quinn's eyes went wide in a panic.

"In my room, Dad!"

"I thought you said they wouldn't be home before nine!" Quinn squeaked.

"They weren't," Rachel replied, "But it's okay, Quinn. It's not like you're not allowed to be… what are you doing?"

The blonde had stuck her head out the window.

"I'm looking to see if there's a way I can climb down. Maybe that ledge there… I could drop down…"

Rachel grabbed her by the waist and yanked her away from the window. "Don't you dare! Are you crazy? You could kill yourself. What do you think is going to happen if they know you're here? Open season?"

There were footsteps on the stairs. Quinn didn't say a word and bolted for the bathroom, disappearing just in time before Leroy opened the door.

"Hey, sweetie, we're home early. Brought some dinner for you. Better come down before it gets cold."

"Thanks, Dad." She smiled. "I'll be down in a few minutes."

He closed the door again and Rachel looked towards the bathroom disapprovingly. She went in to let her crazed girlfriend know that the coast was clear, but she was still going to have to face her fathers when she went downstairs. But Quinn wasn't there. Baffled at first, Rachel checked behind the door - still no one. The room was empty. Then she saw that the shower curtain was drawn.

_Oh, she couldn't be serious…_

Rachel pushed the curtain back and there was Quinn, standing sheepishly in the stall.

"He's gone?"

She folded her arms across her chest. "Baby, I think we're going to have to have a real conversation about this."

"What?" she tried nonchalantly.

"You are in the shower, fully clothed, hiding from my father."

"So? What if he checked the bathroom? He could have seen me."

"This is getting out of hand!"

Quinn shook her head and reached out to grab the front of Rachel's shirt, pulling lightly.
"What?"

"Come in here," she said mischievously, pulling harder.

"In the shower? What? Why?"

Quinn didn't answer and just wrapped her arms around her, dragging her in, despite Rachel's protests.

"This is silly!"

"Shhh," she said and backed them both up till Quinn was pressed up against the cool tile. Her hands slipped downwards to firmly grasp Rachel's ass and she pulled her in close to stand between her legs, finding her lips eagerly. Rachel responded instinctively, cupping her cheeks in both hands, and let herself lean into the blonde heavily. *She felt so good...* Their breasts flattened against each other; she could feel the heat coursing between them, hardened nipples straining rigidly through her bra.

Rachel delved into the waiting mouth with her tongue, stroking just so. Her skin flushed at Quinn's touch, she was already panting. Quinn moaned when she ran her hands down to her waist to push her harder against the tile, brushing past the sides of her breasts for all too brief contact. Rachel gasped when the blonde thrust her hips against her and covered her neck with scorching, open mouthed kisses. She moved against her almost desperately to seek that coveted relief that she seemed to be cursed to never find. Quinn's sweet, talented tongue dragging across her bare skin made Rachel throb with the thought of what it could do elsewhere. Quinn smirked and yanked the curtain closed behind them.

"I thought this was supposed to happen when we were naked...with water," Rachel gasped.

"Next time," she said, squeezing her tighter and kissing her harder. "It is the proper way after all."

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"I wonder if we can consider that an improvement," Rachel mused as she fixed her hair in front of the mirror, undoing Quinn's handiwork.

The blonde spun around with a glare.

"*Improvement?* Are you insinuating something?"

"We've gone from you hiding in the closet to hiding in the shower," she explained nonchalantly, still fussing with her hair. "Would that be considered a lateral move or perhaps a small step up?"

Quinn snorted. "Oh, *funny.*"

Rachel smirked at herself in the mirror. "I thought so."

Her phone was on the vanity and as soon as it was in her hand, Quinn's indignant cries filled the room.

"You're leaving," she reasoned. "The rules don't apply now."

"You threatened to throw mine out the window!" Quinn shot back furiously.

"You weren't *leaving* then."

She growled. "Well, I'm *glad* I'm leaving now!"
"No, you're not," Rachel said mildly.

"Oh, yes I am!" she insisted.

"What are you going to do? Try to sneak past them? Just go and say hello, Quinn. That's all. It won't be the end of the world."

"And you can swear to that?"

"On Barbra herself."

She rolled her eyes. "You better be coming with me. I'm not going down there alone."

"Just one second, I wanted to see…" she trailed off.

Quinn was busy getting her things together so it took her a few moments to notice how quiet Rachel had gone.

"Something wrong?" She turned around to see the girl a sickly shade of pale as she sat on the bed staring at her phone. "Rach? Rachel? What is it? What's wrong?"

She didn't answer, only looked up at Quinn with pure horror.

"What is it?" she almost yelled, panicking now, and took the phone away from her to see what had gotten Rachel so spooked. She saw the headline in big bold letters.

**BREAKING NEWS AT MCKINLEY HIGH: HBIC QUINN FABRAY CHEERS FOR THE OTHER TEAM – SPOTTED TANGLING TONGUES WITH FELLOW GLEE CLUBBER RACHEL BERRY.**

She didn't have to read the rest of the blog post. That was enough. The phone slipped out of her hands.

"Quinn…" Rachel whispered, "Quinn, it's going to be alright. Jacob makes up rumors all the time… no one will think anything of it."

She sounded so far away.

How could he have found out? They were so careful!

No. That was a lie.

They were reckless, increasingly so. Dozens and dozens of stolen moments whirled through her head. Which time had he caught them? Which one had been the fatal shot? She was so stupid! She knew better than that and yet she had allowed herself to be lulled into a false sense of security, because of Rachel…always because of Rachel…for Rachel.

Oh, God! What was she going to do? It would be rampant through the school tomorrow, the words on everyone's tongue. For as loathed as Jacob Ben Israel was, everyone still read his blog. Quinn Fabray… a lesbian. It was over. She was finished. Her parents… they would know before the day was out. Her mother for certain, her father not long after. Rumors of this nature in Lima spread much further than the deceptively solid walls of McKinley High. The entire town would be whispering her name again; the shamed daughter of Russell and Judy Fabray had not only gotten herself knocked up at sixteen, but she was gay. What she would face now…
Was she breathing? She was certain she wasn't breathing. Her body felt cold, trembling, as if she were ill. She certainly felt ill. Her world was crashing down around her and there was nothing she could do to stop it. Again. This was happening again. How could she let it come to this? She had sworn she would never let herself be here again. How could she be so stupid? WHY?

A warm touch startled her. There was the distinct pressure of someone trying to hold her. Quinn looked down to realize that Rachel was tentatively trying to take her into her arms. Dread. Disgust. Fear. Loathing. Hatred. All of it made her stomach lurch.

"Don't touch me!" she cried, shoving her back.

"Quinn…" her voice trembled fearfully, pleadingly.

"Just don't freaking touch me."

How to get out of here? How to leave this oppressive place? How to get as far away as possible from the teary eyed girl standing before her? She didn't want to look at her. She didn't want to see her face. She wanted to be a hundred thousand miles away from her and even then it would not feel enough. Away. Just get away.

Her feet moved before her mind could catch up and Quinn was already to the front door, ignoring the calls of the men behind her.

She was driving much too fast without seeing hardly anything. Her hands were cold and clammy against the steering wheel. Then she couldn't see anything at all. In one heart lurching moment, she swerved off the road. The bright beams of her headlights carried off into some endless blackness where she had stopped. Next to some fucking cornfield. In fucking Lima. In fucking Ohio. Quinn turned off the ignition, leaving her without a light, ripped off her seatbelt, grabbed her phone, and flung the door open to get out.

There was no one on the road right now. It was past 10 o'clock. Lima was dead by 8. She was alone in the pitch dark, no moonlight to speak of, stranded by an empty cornfield.

It took some time for her fumbling fingers to get to his number. Then it was ringing. Once. Twice. By the third ring she was screaming for him to answer it as if that would help somehow.

"Hey," came that familiar voice.

"WHY DON'T YOU FUCKING PICK UP YOUR PHONE?"

"Whoa! Whoa! Hold up. Wha-"

"ARE YOU ALONE?"

"Uh, yes?"

She clenched her teeth, hissing now, "Sam, I'm not dicking around, so help me God. Are. You. Alone?"

"Yes! I swear! What's going on? You sound-"

"Did you tell anyone about us breaking up?"

"Um, no..." he replied apprehensively. "Not really anyone's business. Besides, I'm still kind of having trouble believing it myself so..."
Quinn tried to remember to breathe. Her lungs felt as though they would burst.

"Remember when you said to ask if there was anything I needed?"

"What happened, Quinn?" His tone grew serious, in that gentle, but constant way he always had about him.

She furiously fought back the tears clouding her vision. "T-that perverted Jewfro outed Rachel and me on his blog. It'll be all over school tomorrow."

She heard him mutter a few choice curses that didn't even compare to the ones that were running through her own mind right now.

Then it had to be said. No cushioning it.

"You have to be my boyfriend again."

"WHAT?" he yelped so loudly into the phone, she winced when it pierced her eardrum.

Quinn hurried to explain, terse and unyielding with every word. "If we walk in, hand in hand, affectionate as ever, everyone will see and think he's just making up perverse fantasies again."

"Oh, Quinn, I don't."

"I need you to do this for me," her voice cracked roughly. "Please. If it gets back to my parents… Sam, you know. I don't have a right to ask you, but I'm doing it anyway. I need you. I-I don't have anyone else."

There were a few moments of silence on the other end. She could only hear his rapid breathing in time with the pounding of her heart. What was this? How did she get here? Standing on the side of the road in the dark, nothing before her, nothing behind her, pathetically begging a boy to save her. Who was she?

"Okay…" he said after what felt like too long and she stifled a sob of relief. It was exactly what she had needed to hear. "Okay, Quinn. You've got me," he said soothingly. "We'll fix this, alright? It's gonna be okay."

"Thank you," she whispered hoarsely. Her eyes burned with unshed tears. Her throat was in a painful knot. Everything hurt. "I feel like that's all I ever do with you. Apologize and thank you."

"Ah, it just means you have manners," he said lightly. "Before this, I didn't even know you knew the word 'please'."

"Shut up, Sam."

They agreed that he would pick her up the next morning and they would go in together. Sam tried to get her to talk a little more, but she couldn’t stand to. After Quinn hung up, she threw her phone away as hard as she could into the blackness of the field and burst into tears at long last.
Weathering the Storm

It was a gray, rainy morning when Sam picked her up in his truck. He handed her a hot cup of coffee, just the way she liked it. It was only a light drizzle, but he turned on the windshield wipers anyway. Quinn watched them go back and forth. They didn't say a word to each other. Sam wanted to, but she must have looked like she didn't, because every time he seemed to work up the nerve, she would look at him and he would turn back to the road.

Quinn was tired. Just achingly tired.

She hadn't slept at all that night, but there were no sunglasses this morning. If this was going to work, she couldn't hide, she had to be at the forefront, for everyone to see. For everyone to believe her lie.

They pulled up at school much sooner than she expected. She almost asked him to turn back, take her somewhere else, anywhere else, away from here, a different town even, if only for a little while. But she didn't ask.

Sam turned off the ignition and sat back in his seat.

"How is this going to work?" he asked quietly.

"You hold my hand," she replied, her voice sounding dull and foreign in her ears, "you kiss me at my locker, you walk me to my first class, we sit together at lunch, Glee, and wherever else possible, then you take me home after practice."

"So like we used to be."

"Yes."

"Only it's not real this time."

She didn't answer.

"Was it ever real, Quinn?"

A sob worked its way into her throat, but she held it there, as painful as it was.

"Yeah," she whispered. The rain started coming down harder, they couldn't see out of the windshield. "With you it was."

Quinn clutched his larger hand in a near death grip as they navigated the halls. Sam didn't complain, just kept holding on. People were staring, some were laughing, others were whispering furiously to each other. She raised her head and defied them all.

It was killing her.

They had just reached her locker when Sam suddenly turned her around and pushed her up against the metal row. He put one hand over her shoulder to support his weight against the lockers and ducked his head towards her throat, his breath ghosting over her skin, but never making contact.

She wanted to push him away, but forced herself to be still.

"You have to relax," he murmured against her ear. "If you don't, they'll know something's wrong."
This won't work if you keep looking like this."

It was then she realized that he had put them in this position precisely to shield her from everyone's view. No one could see her face, just them in a seemingly intimate embrace. Knowing that for that moment she was safe, Quinn took a deep breath and buried herself against his chest. Silent tears soaked his sweatshirt that was already a little damp from the rain.

"Hey…" he whispered sadly and curled one arm around her waist to pull her closer for an almost hug.

"I didn't tell her," she said through quiet sobs.

"Huh?"

"Rachel, I didn't tell Rachel about this."

"Jesus Christ, Quinn!" he exclaimed harshly. "What the hell?"

"I couldn't!" she cried, shaking her head. "I couldn't. She won't… I'll lose her. I can't lose her. I couldn't tell her. What am I going to do?"

He clutched her tighter, brushing his lips over her cheek and then back to her neck again, "You're going to find her and fix it. Today. I don't care how. You can't do this to her, Quinn. It's messed up."

"She won't understand."

"Then explain."

"No. I don't want her to know."

"She has to know sometime. You can't keep this from her forever."

"I can keep it long enough."

"Quinn…" he said firmly, "I know how much you care about her, so don't let this happen."

She wrapped her arms around him, holding on with all she had.

"I'll lose her anyway," she whispered brokenly. "Not telling people was one thing…this…she can't love me enough for this."

"You're wrong," he said so fiercely, it made her shiver. "I love you enough to do this. She loves you even more."

"How do you know?"

"Because I've never wanted to hit a girl before."

"Sam…" she said reprovingly.

"It's true. I see her look at you and I know…how much she loves you, and that she gets to have you, so yeah, Quinn, sometimes I feel like punching her in the face."

Despite herself, she chuckled. It was her first tiny relief in nearly 24 hours. It was so incredibly unlike him to say anything like that. She knew Sam never would do such a thing, but to hear that he was so jealous of a tiny five foot two diva like she was another hulking football dude did strike her as
"She's also kind of loud."
"Stop it," Quinn laughed softly and gave him a slight push.
"No more tears?"
"You tell me. How bad do I look?"

He glanced down, still shielding her protectively from the hungry eyes of the student body, and nodded.
"I think you're good. Now get your stuff. I kiss you and then take you to class, right?"
"Right," she whispered, and after a moment's hesitation, touched his cheek gingerly. "You still love me, Sam? Even after what I did? What I'm doing to you now?"

He tilted his head and looked away before meeting her eyes again with a sad smile.

"I think I'm always going to love you."

So she collected her things, he kissed her in full view of everyone, causing the halls to chatter even more loudly, then hand in hand they walked to her first class of the day.

Rachel overslept. For the first time in her entire academic career, she overslept and was late for school, missing almost half of her first period class. It was unheard of. Her fathers thought she was deathly ill. No. She'd just been up most of the night and cried herself to sleep. That was all. They didn't even want her to go in today, but she had to go in today, and fought them tooth and nail to get out the door.

When she'd accidentally let Quinn's name slip, they reared back in horror. The blonde had run right past them last night without a word and Rachel knew they had heard her crying. Rather than get into another argument, she used their moment's hesitation to slip out the door and take off in her Dad's car.

She needed so badly to see Quinn. Last night would forever be burned into her memory. How pale and terrified the blonde looked. And sad. So…so…sad. It brought tears to her eyes to even think of it. When Quinn pushed her away…she swore it was as though she could hear the sound of her own heart breaking. But they could figure this out! Rumors were rumors and they kicked up a big dust storm in the beginning, but always settled down pretty quickly. They just had to continue on as usual, not pay any attention to it, and the dust would settle.

She really needed to see Quinn, but they didn't share a class until fourth period. She tried texting her several times, but received no reply. Was she ignoring her now? The wait was excruciating. Rachel had to know how the blonde would react. Would she treat her the way she did last night? Would it be the old Quinn Fabray snarling in her face and calling her names? Or would it be her Quinn?

After the first class ended, Rachel scoured the halls for some possible sign of her as she went to the next class. There was little chance she would run into her blonde, Quinn's class was on the opposite side of the building. Still she looked. And as she did she caught another blonde, not hers, grabbing Jacob in the blink of an eye and shoving him into the AV room. Forgetting about being late, she stealthily ran over to the door that was left cracked open and listened in.
"Here's the deal," Sam said roughly, "you're going to put a retraction on your blog about Quinn, and I'm not going to hang you by your shorts on the flagpole tomorrow."

"How so very 80's of you, but 'fraid I can't do that, Sam Evans. I've got it on a good authority that the illustrious Fabray is in fact Fabgay."

"Are you an idiot? Are you actually saying to my face that my girlfriend is gay and expect me not to punch your lights out?"

There was some scuffling and a squeak from Jacob.

"I thought you guys were over!"

"And on whose authority do you have that from? Better check your sources again. Quinn's my girl, you're messing with her, what do you think I'm going to do to you?"

"If you'd be so kind as to release my shirt now… Ow! Okay. Look, I didn't know you two were still hot and heavy, but let's get real here, you're not the kind of guy who's gonna beat up a poor defenseless loser like me so drop the charade."

"You're right… I'm not gonna kick the crap out of you, though you deserve it, but what I will do is tell Santana that you're the one who keeps stealing her underwear out of the Cheerios locker room."

"YOU WOULDN'T!"

"Try me, Jewfro."

"The retraction will be posted tonight."

"Good choice."

Rachel hurried off to class, thoroughly confused, and even more distressed than before.

The sniveling weasel had the gall to assault her as she came out of her third period class, shoving a microphone in her face as she tried to walk away.

"Miss Fabray! There have been several conflicting reports regarding the current status of your sexuality as now Sam Evans claims to be your one and only, yet sources claim you've been doing the naughty with the school diva, Rachel Berry. Care to weigh in on the fierce debate taking place at William McKinley? With explicit details perhaps?" he leered. "People have already started placing bets."

Quinn's blood boiled over and she physically recoiled from the boy, but all that she allowed to show was a dispassionate eye roll and said as politely as possibly, "I love my boyfriend very much, we're very happy together. You're an idiot. Get out of my way."

She had to remain calm and in control, if she reacted too much to the rumor, it would only lend it more truth.

Elbowing her way past him, she had just started to put some distance between them when he called out, "If you give me details about your dressing room escapades, possibly some unwashed clothing, and a security tape, I'll give you my entire bank account! I'm Jewish, I have money!"

She spun around, thoroughly revolted, with half a mind to… And then it occurred to her.
Dressing room? What dressing room? They'd never gone shopping together before. They were planning a visit to the mall next weekend, but hadn't been there yet. The realization smacked her across the face.

Jacob made the whole thing up.

He never saw them together.

It actually was just another one of his perverted fantasies.

Laughing from the sheer incredulousness of it all, she spun away and saw Sam coming towards her, his gaze darkly fixated on the other boy. Feeling like a hundred pounds had been lifted off her shoulders, Quinn ran and jumped into his arms happily, wrapping her legs round his waist and gave him a resounding, smacking kiss on the mouth.

"You look happy…" he said suspiciously, looking up at her. "Why do you look happy?"

She giggled and dropped down to her feet again. "That moron doesn't know a thing!" she whispered. "He just made it all up! He doesn't know it's real. This I can handle!"

His eyes widened slightly at the revelation and leaned in close to her, just so that no one would overhear. "So we don't have to pretend anymore?"

"Oh, no, we do," she said distractedly. "For a while anyway. But this is nothing!" Quinn grinned up at him, taking fistfuls of his shirt and tugged excitedly. "I have to find Rachel and tell her everything."

"I think you're going to have to do it soon…" he said and she followed his line of sight to the small brunette standing towards the end of the hall.

Her heart plummeted the moment their eyes met. Any trace of relief and happiness vanished in that moment as Rachel's large brown eyes bore into her. She just stood there, blankly, and Quinn wanted nothing more than to run into her arms and kiss away the hurt, to reassure her that it wasn't what she thought, she didn't want this, she didn't want anyone else, but she only took one step forward before remembering all the eyes on her. When she didn't move, Rachel turned away.

At that moment, Quinn cursed her life for being the way it was. Cursed God. Cursed herself. Cursed the school. Cursed her parents. Cursed everything. Everything except Rachel.

"Go after her!" he hissed in her ear.

"I can't," she said angrily. It was all she could do to keep herself there and he was going to push her?

"It'll look suspicious."

"Quinn!"

"Just hold my hand," she said through gritted teeth and ignored the roaming eyes of the student body.

He squeezed so tightly, it boarded on painful. She didn't know if it was a reprimand or a reassurance. It was probably both.

It was quiet for a long time. The hustle and bustle of the student body echoed somewhere seemingly miles away. She wasn't crying. She couldn't find it in her to cry right now. It was numbness. This had always been coming. She'd prepared herself for something like this. But it hadn't helped. It still
hit her with all the force it could possibly muster, such a crippling blow. Would she ever be right again after Quinn Fabray?

Someone settled in beside her on the bench without a word and Rachel wanted to scream in frustration. She didn't want her here. She wanted her gone. She wanted to be left alone. She wanted a world without this girl for at least a little while. Give her some reprieve? Why couldn't she have had just the slightest bit?

"How?" she groaned. "How on earth did you find me here?"

"Well, I knew you'd be hiding from me so I thought about the last place Rachel Berry would go."

"And you guessed the boys weight room?"

"Actually, I checked Coach Sylvester's office, the boiler room, and the AV Club first. This was fourth on the list."

"You found me then."

"Yes, I did. Ugh, did you have to choose here? Even the boiler room smelled better."

Why was she here? Was she truly so selfish that she couldn't even realize that her presence was the last thing in the world Rachel wanted?

Was she doomed to always feel this way? Offer her heart only to have it pulverized by a vicious heel as though that were all she ever deserved. Quinn was always going to do this to her, yet she went forward anyway. Naively. Stupidly. Adoringly.

How she hated herself for it.

"Quinn, it's not like I've asked a lot of you, God knows I haven't," there was no emotion in her voice, just a harrowing vacancy that Rachel Berry was not known for, "but I would have appreciated it if you could have at least given me a courtesy phone call to inform me of your decision before I had to see that. Do I really mean so little to you?"

"You mean too much."

"That makes no sense."

"It makes perfect sense. You're just not listening."

"Why should I listen to anything you have to say? Leave me alone."

"I was too afraid…to tell you," Quinn said lowly. "I could have called you last night, but I didn't. I didn't want it to end. I couldn't…” She shook her head mournfully. "You're going to break up with me."

"Because you've gone back to Sam?"

"No. I haven't gone back to him!" she said fiercely. "We're not together."

Rachel wanted to slap her.

"So I just made it all up in my head, is that it?" she shot back bitingly. "I imagined you all over him? Kissing him?"
"It didn't mean anything! I don't feel that way about him. Sam's my friend Rachel, a very...very good friend. Look, he agreed to be my beard, alright? That's all it is. He's going to pretend to be my boyfriend for as long as I need him to."

"And just why would he agree to that?" she scoffed bitterly. "Lofty altruism? He just wants you back."

"True, he does, but he also knows it's not going to happen."

"You don't need him, Quinn!" she insisted. "It was just a stupid rumor! Why are you so afraid of everyone knowing who you are? Is it because you don't want to be a loser? You don't want to be treated differently? Is it that?"

"Yes," she said distantly. "There's that."

"There's more?"

"I can't be kicked out again, Rachel. I just can't."

"What are you talking about?"

"If my Mom ever finds out about... I'll be disowned." There was a very matter of fact tone to her voice, as though she were discussing business or schoolwork. "She'll be the one to kick me out this time. My Dad won't have to say a thing. She may have stood by last time, but this one...it'll be all her."

"Quinn, I don-"

She cut Rachel off, quickly explaining the rest. Quinn's grandparents left both her and her sister sizable college funds, which her father added to over the years. With a few student loans it would be enough to let her go wherever she wanted, even without a cheerleading scholarship. Russell tried to take it in the divorce, but Judy fought him and won, keeping the money safe from her father's greedy hands which he would have likely used to waste on his new, twenty-something, girlfriend. It was one thing her mother had managed to do right by her.

"If she finds out, I won't just be kicked out, she'll take the money too. My way out even if I don't get a cheerleading scholarship. My entire future depends on my parents support right now and if I lose that...I'll be forever a Lima loser." Her voice cracked and she looked away, stubbornly holding off the tears. "I can't let that happen," she stressed. "I got too close last time, I won't ever have it happen again. Do you understand? I moved back in with her because I had no other choice, but I haven't forgiven her and I don't know if I ever will."

"She's your mother, Quinn," Rachel ventured gently. "She's trying now."

"Yeah, when she thinks I just made a dumb mistake and got pregnant. Finding out her daughter is gay? She'll never accept that. I'd be dead to her."

"You don't know that."

"No, you don't know that. She's my mother, Rachel. You've no idea..." she trailed off and then started anew. "For my Mom: Getting pregnant? Embarrassing, but livable. Being a lesbian? Not a snowball's chance in hell."

"But how are you ever going to know what she'll do if you don't give her the chance?"
"I'll tell her someday." She nodded, as though convincing herself of it too. "When I'm older and on my own, supporting myself. She can hurt me right now, Rach." Quinn looked at her despairingly, tears clouding those beautiful hazel eyes. It tore her heart to see it. "I'm only 17. When I'm thrown out, what chance do I have of getting out of here? I need her support and she's going to help me whether she likes it or not because she's my mother and that's what she's supposed to do!"

"Okay. Okay. Shhh." Rachel slid over and wrapped her arms around her shoulders.

"Someday they'll find out their daughter is gay and won't that be fun to see? But not now. I learned my lesson well last year. My parents love for me is entirely conditional."

"Oh, Quinn, don't say that."

"It's true. You may be adopted, Rachel, but your fathers would do anything in the world for you. My Mom and Dad will never be like that and I'm their biological child. Just goes to show…"

"They're always going to be your parents, no matter what."

"Yeah. That's the worst part."

"Quinn…"

"Can you do this with me?" She turned to her abruptly. "Can you please do this?"

"Be with you while the rest of the world sees you with Sam?" Rachel shook her head angrily, moving away, letting the space fall between once more. "D-do you have any idea how much it hurt to see that just now? How bad you made me feel? Like I wanted to die. Like I never want to feel anything again. I can't do that. I can't stand by and watch you be with him-"

"But I'm not with him!" she cried stubbornly. "We wouldn't do anything considered more than just friends being slightly more affectionate than the norm."

"You're asking me to watch you with someone else and lie even more than we already were. You're asking me to-"

"I know what I'm asking."

"And still you ask?" she said heatedly. "What if it were you? If the situation were reversed, would you be able to do it? Would you be willing to watch me with another boy, girl, whatever, cuddling, kissing, holding hands? Would you be able to stand it?"

"No," she admitted despondently. "I would be too selfish. But then again, we always knew you were the better person between us."

"That is not fair!"

"It isn't," she said, tears falling now. "That's why I know you're going to say no."

"Is that what you want me to do? You want me to end it so you don't have to take any of the responsibility? You get to run away, but it'll really be my fault."

"NO! I want you, Rachel! More than anything, I want to be with you."

"Then be with me!"

"This is the only way that I can!" she cried. "Until we're away from here."
Rachel watched her for a long time, a stunned look on her face.

Did she mean it? Is that what she meant? Did she really...

"A-are you saying you want us to leave Lima together?" she said in barely a whisper.

Quinn nodded heavily. "You're going places, Rachel Berry. You're meant for so much more than this town. You deserve to have your name in lights and I know you're gonna make it happen. Wherever you go, I'll follow. I-if you want me, that is."

"I do want you," she murmured, "so much."

"Can you do this?"

"Is this your ultimatum?" she asked. "Either accept Sam as your pseudo boyfriend or we're finished?"

"I don't have a choice."

"Yes, you do. We always do. I don't care what you say - this is of your choosing."

"Please don't leave me. Please."

Quinn couldn't believe it. Were these words really coming out of her mouth? Was she begging now? Quinn Fabray did not beg. She demanded. But here she was, fighting to urge to fall to her knees and cling to the diva, praying that she could understand enough, to want her enough, to love her enough.

Rachel was quiet for so long, she thought her heart would give out.

When had she gotten so weak? This was why people were always held at arm's length. Not just her secret...but this. Needing someone. Wholeheartedly. Desperately. Without a smattering of pride to be had. She didn't want to need, she didn't want to love, but she did, and she did so hopelessly. It wasn't right. It shouldn't be this frightening. It shouldn't feel so good and so bad. Was it always this way?

"I can't..." Rachel whispered hoarsely and Quinn felt as though a hot knife had been plunged into her heart.

Why was she surprised? She'd told Sam, didn't she? She knew she'd asked too much. She knew this was coming. And yet.

"...be without you," Rachel continued haltingly, but she could hardly hear, "s-so if this is what I have to do to keep you...provided it's temporary?"

Was she...was she...

Quinn could only nod dumbly.

Rachel looked up at her with bleary, red strained eyes that she would have given anything to make brighter again as they should be.

"I love you, Quinn," she said. "I'll do whatever it takes."

She tried to smile through the tears, but the relief, the happiness, the fear, it was all so much she just burst out sobbing and put her head in her hands.
She hadn't lost her. She loved her. Rachel really loved her.

The brunette rubbed her back soothingly as she cried and released her tightly pulled ponytail to give her some relief. She tangled her fingers in the newly freed locks and scraped her nails across Quinn's scalp as she ran her hand through again and again in such a tender way that soon had her calming down.

"And you're wrong," she whispered into her ear and pressed her nose to her cheek. "We are going places. Not just me, both of us. There's a whole different life out there for us, Quinn. A better one. A bigger one. You're going to find your dream too and we'll live them together."

Quinn didn't say it, but she was pretty sure she already found hers.

Sam and Quinn were sitting side by side in Glee when she walked in and though Rachel had expected it, the blow was staggering. She wanted to curl into a ball and weep at the sight. They weren't even touching each other or anything, just sitting there patiently, and it was almost too much to take. Why had she agreed to this? How had she let herself be roped in to this farce that grew with every waking day?

Because she loved her.

Because she'd do anything for her.

And Quinn knew that.

She should have had more pride, more sense. All she had to do was end it, say that the terms were too much. Say that Quinn wasn't worth this damage to herself.

But she was! She so...so was.

The fear in her eyes... The way she had wept when Rachel agreed... What was happening? What was she missing? Quinn had explained that it was to protect her future, much more so than reputation alone. That was something Rachel could reason with, that was enough to give her a sincere rationalization for her decision to agree. Now here she was. Belonging to Quinn in secret while the rest of the world watched what was hers parade around on a blonde boy's arm.

Was she a fool? Was she doing what she'd always done in her old relationships? Sacrifice the person she was for her significant other? Was history repeating itself?

Then she shook the thoughts away. It was different this time. There was no selfishness in this. No immaturity or pride. This was simple and concrete need.

Oh, how heartbreaked she'd looked sitting there. How beaten. When did Quinn Fabray ever look beaten? She was a fighter to the end. She did what she had to do, no matter the cost. Yet...today she'd looked as though she lost and it would be the end of her. Rachel never wanted to see her look so defeated again. That was not her Quinn. She refused to allow her to be that way.

So, yes, she would do this. Even if it killed her

Quinn needed her and she would be there. There was still something she wasn't telling her, perhaps more than one something, but whenever Rachel pushed, she met a stone wall, so she'd learned fast that Quinn Fabray could not be moved into something before she was ready.

Please, tell me I'm doing the right thing, tell me I'm not...
The blonde saw her come in and instinctively sat up straighter, Sam only watched her blankly. Rachel quickly moved to go to the opposite end of the risers, as far away from the lovebirds as she could get. Her stomach churned at the thought. But before she even took two steps, Quinn was waving her over, pointing to the empty seat beside her.

*Was she serious?*

Rachel hesitated and Quinn's brow drew grim with determination. Almost glaring now, she folded her arms across her chest and practically screamed with her eyes for Rachel to take that damn seat next to her.

She wanted to refuse just to refuse. Show in some way she still had control over herself. Quinn hadn't taken everything yet.

When it looked as though she wasn't going to do it, the fierce, glaring hazel eyes softened and Quinn's shoulders fell with disappointment. Rachel felt a twinge of her heart.

*Damn her.*

The diva made her way up the risers to the back where the couple was and seated herself beside the two blondes with a huff.

She may have agreed to this fool's show, but she wasn't going to make it easy on Quinn in any sense of the word. The girl would know just how much Rachel disapproved of this plan as often as she could remind her.

"Thank you," was all Quinn said, unable to look her in the eye.

Rachel said nothing.

"Yo, Quinn!" Puck laughed boisterously as he sat down a few chairs away. "Finally decided to try out the other hot Jew? Wonder what took you so long?"

"Don't tell me you actually believe that absurd piece of gossip?" she replied loftily with a hint of snide deprecation in her tone.

"Why not? I totally got off on picturing-"

"Don't even go there!" Mercedes held up her hand with revulsion written all over her face.

"That's disgusting," Tina said reprovingly.

Mike was next to her, eyes wide as he now had the visual himself.

"While I understand the euphoria of shopping, girls, was it really necessary to be caught in the dressing rooms?" Kurt interjected. "Are there not more appropriate places for your passionate displays of lady affection?"

"Did the security guards really have to escort you out?" Mercedes asked.

"For goodness sake!" Rachel cried. "There isn't even a Nordstrom's in the mall! And somehow we were caught there? How can you possibly believe a word of what Jacob posted?"

"It really is crap, come on guys," Finn said with a roll of his eyes. "They're obviously not gay."

"You're just saying that cause they both dated you," Artie pointed out.
"It's a good reason!"

"So what if they want sweet lady kisses?" Brittany shrugged. "Everyone deserves to be kissed like that. And maybe Jacob meant H&M cause San I got caught there once."

"Britts!" Santana cried from the front row.

"Caught doing what?" Tina asked suspiciously.

"Stealing!" the Latina said abruptly before Brittany could answer. "I was trying to shove a bunch of shirts in my bag and we got caught. No bigs. My cuz was the mall cop so he let us off."

"I got to hold his light stick," Brittany nodded.

Everyone stared at her.

"She means his flashlight, you pervs," Santana said exasperatedly. "Now I, for one, believe the rumor is entirely true. Why else would Q be hanging around the dwarf in the first place? Suddenly acting all besties? Ways I see it, it explains everything. Why Finn never got past that pathetic definition of second and Puckerman only got it in her once."

"Must you be so crude?" Kurt grimaced along with Mercedes and Tina.

"Just keeping it real. Those two are bumping fuzzies."

"OH, YOU B-" Quinn started to yell, but Sam's laughter took the wind out of her sails.

She looked at him warily. Everyone else was confused by his seemingly nonchalant behavior as well. Rachel was watching his every move.

Sam just slung his arm across the back of Quinn's chair and stretched his legs out leisurely. Like everything they were saying didn't bother him in the slightest.

"You guys really have no idea what you're talking about," he said, still chuckling.

"And what's that supposed to mean?" Santana frowned up at him from her seat.

"Just what I said," he retorted smugly.

No one knew quite what to make of it. Quinn and Rachel caught on fairly quickly to what he was insinuating though. The blonde flushed with embarrassment and Rachel ground her teeth.

"DUDE!" Puck gasped with his mouth open in shock, breaking the silence. "Tell me you're not! You didn't get under that skirt did you?"

"It's none of your business!" Quinn said sharply. "Nor is it anyone else's." She used that opportunity to glare at Sam while he only shrugged.

At that, Mr. Schuester walked in, and everyone had to leave the conversation off for another day.

Rachel was beside herself. She wanted nothing more to punch Sam square in the face.

It took all of two days for Quinn's mother to hear about the rumor, despite the retraction on Jacob's blog. It was still out. It was still in people's heads. The vigorous roundtabling in Glee was only a preview of what was happening in the rest of the school. Still, Quinn held her head high, with Sam
on her arm, and Rachel beside her.

She'd been persistent in that aspect. Rachel kept trying to separate herself from them but Quinn wasn't having any of it. Not only would it make it suspicious if their behavior changed after the rumor, seeing a divide between her and Rachel would just lend it a hand, but also Quinn wanted her there as much as possible so the other girl could understand that there was nothing between her and Sam besides sincere friendship. She also just wanted Rachel.

Seeing the three together without discord did help to quell the storm some, but it was still going strong. On the second day, Quinn took Sam aside.

"Okay, since you already insinuated it, *without* my approval I might add, might as well take it all the way."

"Might help if you tell me just what we're talking about."

"Sex. Us having it. Go ahead, tell your buddies."

"Uh…" He looked around the semi-empty hallway as if some practical joke was being played on him and people were going to jump out with cameras at any moment.

"Just do it," she sighed exasperatedly. "It'll explain why you're not bothered by the rumor as you so well pointed out yesterday. Actually, if it hadn't been so effective in shutting everybody up, I would have kicked you for trying it."

"You sure know how to sound grateful."

"I'm grateful. So go ahead. You have my permission. I'll neither confirm nor deny anything, which should be the seal in and of itself."

"Okay. Fine. When did we first?"

"A few weeks ago."

"That won't fly, we weren't really around each other much. They'll never believe it."

"We had a fight, that's all."

"And what did we fight about?"

She thought about it for a moment. "You…told your Dad about us doing it which led to a very awkward and uncomfortable sit down with your parents to have 'the talk'. I was mad at you for it. They go to church with my family. It could have caused problems."

"Then we made up?"

"Yes, you bought me presents, groveled incessantly, and so on."

"I still don't think this is going to work."

"What?" She frowned. "Why?"

"It's too suspicious," he explained. "This gossip comes out about you and Rachel, then I'm suddenly bragging about us? The guys are gonna think it's total bull. I need proof."

"PROOF?" she all but screeched. "How on earth are am I supposed to *prove* it short of actually
doing the deed in front of everyone? What? Wait till I show up pregnant again? Forget it! This was a stupid idea to begin with."

Sam chuckled at her fuming and slipped his thumbs into the straps of his backpack. "Uh...I was thinking more along the lines of a birthmark, a certain distinctive freckle, or something of the like that can't be seen in a bikini...? Got anything?"

"No!" she said quickly. "Of course not! And how would that help anyway?"

He shifted uncomfortably, obviously not wanting to say it, but Quinn's exasperation was reaching a breaking point. So he finally had to come out with it. "Puck would know. He'd confirm."

Quinn tried to quash down the wave of disgust that rolled through her at the mention of it. She shook her head. "I changed my mind. Don't say anything. I'm not having something...personal like that be fodder for the McKinley rumor mill!"

"I know a way to keep it low-key," he reassured her. "Besides, if Puck hasn't told anyone yet, then why would he start now?"

"Because he forgot to?" she replied dryly.

"Then I'll kick his ass if he does! Just like any boyfriend would. This can work, Quinn. Just tell me."

"Not going to happen."

He sighed. "Think about it this way...what would you rather them talk about? You and Rachel or a hidden birthmark?"

"I don't have a birthmark!" she cried in frustration, but then forced herself to calm down.

He had a point. He really did.

"Okay...fine."

She brought him down to her height and whispered in his ear. Sam's eyes widened slightly, but by the time Quinn saw him again, he was the picture of nonchalance.

"Alright," he nodded, "got it. So all the bases?"

"What?"

"It's important we're on the same page here," he said matter of factly. "Details are necessary. We can't get tripped up in this. Now, are we rounding all the bases or just skipping to home?"

Has he done this before? Cause honestly...

"Ew, God, whatever, Sam. Fine. All the bases. Just keep the crudeness to a minimum and I swear if I hear you're making me out to look like some slutbomb, I will personally see to it that you never have children. Understand?"

"Hey," he said, looking slightly hurt, "real girlfriend or not...I wouldn't do that to you, Quinn. If we were actually..." He shrugged. "I wouldn't have told anyone."

She rolled her eyes, scoffing, "That is such a load of-

"I'm not kidding. It wouldn't have been anyone's business but ours."
Quinn was a little taken aback by his sincerity. "Well…thank you."

"No problem."

"I-I really mean that, Sam. Thank you."

"Hey, it's not like I'm not getting anything out of this. The whole school's gonna think I've gotten into the nearly untouchable Quinn Fabray's pants. I'm gonna be a GOD!"

She groaned disgustedly and shoved him. "Gross. I am not discussing this with you anymore. Go away."

That afternoon was when Judy Fabray confronted her about Jacob's blog post, having heard it from some members of her church group, and Quinn held her cool until she was out of the room before running for her phone. Sam was there two hours later to have a lovely dinner with his girlfriend and her mother.

As she looked at him across the table, dressed in a polo t-shirt and nicer slacks than usual, his hair combed neatly, Quinn couldn't help but want to hug the boy and never let go. She had no idea what she would have done without him. His calm, collected manner seemed effortless. He wasn't trying too hard, trying just enough as he chattered away politely with her mother.

Sam was wonderful. Why…why couldn't she have loved him? But she did in a way. Not the way he loved her, but she did love him. Never had she had such a friend like him before. Rachel was different. Rachel was her best friend (among many other things), but Sam was a friend in just that sense alone. Perhaps her first real one, one that would last -she could only hope. That is, if he didn't end up hating her for all of this.

"It's terrible what that boy gets away with, making such disgusting accusations. I've half a mind to call the school about this."

"It's fine, Mom," she said diffidently, pushing the food around on her plate halfheartedly with her fork. "No one pays any attention to what that freak says."

Judy looked to Sam, leaning towards him slightly, dripping with the false charm she always put it upon herself to have. "Not that I condone any form of aggressive behavior, sweetheart, but by any chance have you confronted the boy about these heinous lies?"

"I wouldn't exactly call it a confrontation, ma'am, but we did have a very firm discussion about it," he replied. "I'm sure he's seen the error of his ways."

Judy chuckled and went back to her dinner. "Very good."

Quinn looked up at him in surprise. He didn't tell her that. Was that why Jacob put up the retraction?

"Did you really?"

Sam nodded. "Course. He should have known better than to mess with you, Quinn. He just needed the reminder."

She smiled at him gratefully.

"He deserves worse, however," Judy sniffed.

"Mom, really, it's not a big deal. He's a loser, everyone knows it."
"Yes and I suppose it's not all his fault."

"Excuse me?" she replied stiffly, bracing herself for what was sure to come.

"Well, what do you expect, Quinnie? Hanging around that Rachel girl... You only bring trouble on yourself by being associated with her."

"We're just in Glee club together," she said wearily. "That's all."

Her expression soured ever so slightly. "I know how much you like that little singing group, sweetie, but if it's affecting your reputation to such a degree... perhaps you should reconsider. People like that girl, who knows what kind of values she's been taught? It's disgusting what those perverted men have been allowed to do. Adopt a child? It's deplorable what society has lowered itself to today... Now we allow people like that to raise children? No wonder why there are so many problems in the world. They've probably corrupted that girl beyond measure. Don't you agree, Sam?"

He shrugged and gave her a nondescript, tight lipped nod.

Judy shuddered. "Absolutely horrid."

Sam looked to Quinn sympathetically, but her face remained expressionless as ever.
The Lover's Secret Song

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Quinn's head was killing her. Rachel and Sam had been bickering with each other for the past two hours, flinging barbed insults over her head in a whirlwind as they walked together through the mall. Sam wanted to check out FYE for the deluxe edition of 'Avatar' while Rachel wanted to go to Claire's (they were having a sale) and Quinn wanted to stick her head in the fountain until she drowned.

Endless. They were endless! She knew it would be difficult at first for the two of them to get along, but they were reasonable people! (Sam more so than Rachel, but that was Rachel being Rachel.) Yet, it'd been two weeks of this! Regionals were coming up soon and the Glee club had been hard at work rehearsing though their set list had yet to be decided upon. Sue was putting all the pressure on Quinn and the Cheerios for the upcoming Nationals championship. And Sam and Rachel could not for the life of them exchange a civil word! Her plan to have them all be seen together amicably, so as to deter any further gossip, was failing miserably because the two of them were constantly at each other's throats!

It was when the gossip about Sam and Quinn having sex started flying around the school that Rachel did a 180 on her decision to accept Sam's existence.

It had spread like a forest fire. Everyone knew. Rachel hadn't been in school that morning for five full minutes before she overheard at least a dozen people gossiping about it. She never said a word to Quinn. Her icy distance spoke for her. Quinn tried to find a chance to talk to her about it. Rachel had already heard Sam insinuate it, so she didn't think it was going to be that much of a shock for the girl to hear it. Rachel knew it was all lies. What difference did it make? But she'd been wrong.

After searching for Rachel all day, the diva had even swapped seats with people in their shared classes so that she wouldn't have to be near Quinn, she'd walked into Glee to see Rachel and Puck sitting very…very close together. Rachel was practically halfway in his lap, curled up against his shoulder as they laughed and whispered conspiratorially with each other. No one else in Glee really noticed besides Finn who looked constipated. Puck said something that made Rachel blush and put his hand on her knee. She ducked her head before giving him a shy smile.

Quinn felt like she would be sick.

He brushed some loose strands away from her hair and made a goofy face which Rachel laughed at heartily and gave him a flirty push.

Mr. Schuester walked in and said hello to her, she was apparently still standing in the middle of the room staring at them. Sam followed in after. He took her hand and was going to lead them to their seats, but Quinn stiffly pulled away and walked out.

"Quinn? Hey, Quinn! Where are you going?" Mr. Schue called, but she was already gone.

Puck and Rachel were still wrapped up together with googly eyes. Sam took one look at them before turning back to Mr. Schue and shrugged.

"She just hasn't been feeling good today," he said. "She might be coming down with something."
Rachel walked into the girl's bathroom a little while later after Glee was over and heard someone crying. Not expecting anyone to be there, she knocked on the stall door gently in hopes she could maybe help whoever was so upset.

"Go away!" the person snarled and she was stunned to hear who it was. Weren't the Cheerios supposed to be on the field by now?

"Quinn? Is that you? Quinn, open the door."

But she didn't.

Rachel looked around to make sure they were alone and leaned against the stall tiredly.

"I was going to wait and meet you after practice so we could talk."

The door opened suddenly and the blonde stepped out, looking an absolute mess. Her ponytail was half fallen out, her eyes were red and puffy, mascara ran over her cheeks. Rachel's chest tightened painfully at the sight. Quinn gave her one look before walking to over to get some paper towels. She stood in front of the mirrors, wiping her face clean without a word. It was clear she'd been crying for some time.

"Is this about Puck earlier?" she asked.

"What do you think?" she shot back, her voice hoarse from crying, and Rachel felt even worse.

Yes, she knew exactly what she was doing in Glee club earlier. All day she had heard nothing but the wild rumors of Sam and Quinn's sex life. As the day progressed, the stories became more outlandish. Sam had a fetish for doing it outside. Apparently the football field had already been christened a dozen times. Quinn wore a dominatrix outfit under her cheerleading uniform and had a leather whip in her locker.

Rachel was being driven to madness.

It was either break down sobbing or give Quinn a taste of her own damn medicine. So that's what she was going to do. Noah was the perfect opportunity. It'd worked before, why not try it again? Some harmless flirting would be enough to make Quinn understand just what she was putting Rachel through.

She folded her arms across her chest. "Well, doesn't feel so good, does it?"

"Let me tell you something, Rachel," she said sadly. "Something you really don't seem to get. I don't want this. I don't want to lie like this. I don't want to do this with Sam. I would give anything not to have to…" She shook her head. "But we don't get the best choices in life. I don't have any romantic feelings for him. Whenever I kiss him, however chaste and brief, I think of you. And he knows it too. It really sucks, okay? For all of us. I hate what it is I've asked you both to do. I hate it so much. But I don't know of any other way to protect myself. This is all I have."

She turned around, leaving the paper towel on the sink and stared right into her eyes.

"But what you did today with Puck…that was out of spite. It was malicious and cruel. Fawning over a boy you're genuinely attracted to? Don't deny it. I know your thing with him is physical. Whatever. You knew how it would make me feel and you relished it. So fine, Rachel," she said dully. "If doing
stuff like that makes you feel better, if it makes you feel better to hurt me, then do it. Punish me. I deserve it. Go ahead. Crush me all you want. I know it's only fair after what I've done to you."

Rachel didn't even realize she had been crying until the door swung closed behind Quinn.

She had just wanted her girlfriend jealous, to understand what she felt every time she saw her with Sam, but she didn't want this. Quinn was right. Rachel did it on purpose to hurt her when Quinn was only doing what she felt she had to. Hurting her girlfriend was the last thing in the world she wanted. And that's just what she had done.

She never tried anything like that again.

Though Rachel no longer tried the jealousy route, it didn't stop her from going for the jugular when Sam was involved and the boy was all too happy to return it. Despite the inner sanctum's squabbling, the plan had actually worked out well to knock Jacob's blog post out of the running. Quinn was apprehensive about what Sam was going to do with the knowledge she gave him, but the boy came through.

Apparently, he "accidentally" let it slip to Mike, who didn't believe him and announced it some of the other guys in the locker room after practice (mostly the Glee guys, with a few others). Puck still had his suspicions, so Sam just went over and whispered exactly what Quinn had told him.

Puck looked at him then back to the other guys.

"He's doing her," he said simply, officially convinced, and went off to change.

The guys stared at Sam in awe and thus the tides were turned.

The information with which Sam had convinced Puck did indeed remain a secret. How, Quinn would never know, but the school had left the Rachel tryst behind in the dust and jumped on the fact that ex-president of the Chastity club and teen Mom was now sexually active again. There was a school-wide pool going around to see how long it would take for her to get pregnant again. It was suspected, but not confirmed, that some of the teachers were putting down their money too.

It would have hurt a lot more to hear that if it hadn't meant that the heat was finally off her and Rachel. She was too relieved to be angry about the god awful insensitivity running through William McKinley. No more lesbian gossip and Rachel was still hers. She felt like she could take on anything knowing that they were safe.

Jacob had taken a huge hit with the fabrication of his so called "news". He was getting slushied and tossed in the dumpster almost twice as often as usual. The boy was bitter. Quinn felt vindicated.

But this feud between her ex-boyfriend-turned-gay-beard and current-secret-lesbian-girlfriend was driving her out of her freaking mind.

"That's it! We're going to T-Mobile!" she snapped, daring either of them to dispute it. "I want a cover for my new cell."

Neither did and Quinn stalked off in another direction, the other two dragged sullenly behind her.

Her decision to toss her phone in the field that night proved to be a very poor one. She told Rachel exactly what had happened after she left her house that night in a terror. The brunette insisted on a word for word recounting of how her conversation with Sam had gone, which Quinn obliged to the
best of her ability. She even told her about how after she hung up on Sam and tossed her phone, she'd sat on the hood of her car for a good long while before fishing out a flashlight from the trunk and went look for the cell. It proved to be useless in the dark. Rachel offered to go back with her in the afternoon to try and find it.

Find it, they did. Sitting in a watery puddle of mud.

As the blonde stared down at her ruined phone, Rachel curled her arm around her waist and brushed her lips against her cheek, whispering promises that everything would be okay. Quinn turned around and kissed her fiercely.

"You can't hook up with other girls."

Sam burst out laughing, but the look on her face quickly sobered him.

"Oh, you better be joking! I may be a good guy, Quinn, but like hell I'm gonna be a saint. Don't even try on this one. You can't order me away from other girls. It ain't happening."

"I'm serious!" She glared at him. "You can't! Do you have any idea what that would do to my reputation? I can't have my boyfriend cheating on me! I'll be made laughingstock. I'm Quinn Fabray, Captain of the Cheerios, and NO ONE cheats on me."

Okay, so maybe she had a touch of denial. Her two most significant exes had actually cheated on her…repeatedly. The point is that she wasn't going to let it happen again – real boyfriend or not.

"Do you even hear yourself right now?" he said in disbelief. "I'm doing my damndest to make sure your-"

"I understand that, I do, so if you hadn't jumped down my throat so quickly, you'd see that I have an alternative prepared. A compromise, if you will."

"You're going to hook up with me?" he said doubtfully.

She hit him with her book. "Stop it! Just shut up and listen you moron. You can't hook up with the girls in this school cause it'll get around eventually. You don't even really like anyone here, anyway, do you?"

He shrugged halfheartedly.

"So my proposal is that when you need to do…that sort of thing…do it with girls that don't go to McKinley."

"Are you joking?" he groaned. "Quinn! That's like next to impossible! I'll never get anyone. Outside of school, my options are the MILF's Puckerman does and skanky waitresses twice my age...with like teeth missing and all."

She pinched the bridge of her nose fiercely. "Sam, why is it that you never know when to shut your freakishly large mouth?"

"Hey!" His hand flew up to cover his lips in embarrassment.

"I'm trying to explain something to you here and you're making me want to slam a locker on your head."

"Jeez! Talk already then!"
"I know it's not fair to ask you not to date any other girls you might be interested in just because you're trying to help me out here, so I came up with something that would work for us both. You know Trinity High? Two towns over?"

"Our school rivals? Duh. Karofsky and 'zi got thrown out of one of our games against them for trying to stomp on the linebackers nuts."

Quinn rolled her eyes impatiently. "The Trixies, Trinity's cheerleading squad, is one of the Cheerios' biggest enemies...according to Coach Sylvester anyway. She had us all sign airtight contracts swearing to never make eye contact with them and if found guilty, we have to lose an eye ourselves...or stand on one leg for three hours...I don't remember which. Anyway, that's not important. Despite the so called "rivalry" between us, I actually am friendly with some of the girls on the team. We meet up every few weeks for coffee. My plan is to take you along on the next coffee date, introduce you as my very cute, jock, musically talented, single, friend, and get you invited to one of their weekend ragers. If you can manage to make yourself some acquaintances over there...you might just have a shot."

"What difference does it make if I hook up with girls from Trinity or girls from here?"

She gave him an exasperated look. "They're our rivals! No one from McKinley hangs out with the Trinity crowd so whatever you do with them will never get back to our school. You're free to do as you please."

"You think you can get me in? I heard they're pretty exclusive."

"Trust me," she said with a smirk and gave him a once over, "one word from me and you're in."

He ruminated on that for a few minutes as they walked down the hall, arm in arm, headed for lunch.

"Are the girls hot?"

Quinn looked to him with a slight narrowing of her eyes. "They're cheerleaders. What do you think?"

Sam was grinning from ear to ear when they walked into the cafeteria. Rachel took one look at them and went back to her conversation with Mercedes.

Later that day they were in Rachel's room again. Her fathers were out on their date night. As it worked out, their date night ended up being the girls' date night as well. Quinn really loved this room. It was a sanctuary. The rest of the house was a war zone, but not this room. This bright, yellow, color infused to the borderline point of painful and yet not so, room was one of her favorite places in the world. It screamed Rachel from every nook and cranny. How neatly it was kept, cleaned and organized in such a way that would make Miss Pillsbury proud, the Broadway posters, the DVD lined shelves, her bookcases of sheet music and diva biographies, the stand with her pink bedazzled microphone, the four poster bed with the bright orange floral coverlet and pink pillows...especially the four poster bed. The same one they were lying on right now.

She was most intently focused on those plush, full lips of her girlfriend's. God, how she loved this mouth. How perfectly it fit her own. How delicious those lips were...and that tongue...that tongue!

There was some muffled speech coming from the other girl, but it hardly registered. They were kissing now. That was more important. She interlaced their fingers and raised them above Rachel's head so she had the freedom to unashamedly rub herself against the length of the brunette's body.
Rachel moaned and hooked her leg over her waist. "Ohhh, but...oh!...wait..."

Quinn didn't hear a thing. Only the throbbing between her legs and the taste of Rachel in her mouth mattered.

"Quinn...I-I-I need to..."

Her lips muffled the rest of it with pleasure. It went on like that for a little while longer before Rachel gasped and finally pulled away long enough to get out what she wanted to say.

"I'm not having sex with you, Quinn!"

"Okay."

She didn't even hesitate, bringing their mouths back together.

"Are you listening? I'm dead serious about this. Not until I'm ready."

She just sucked on her throat, lashing her tongue out to taste the sweetness there. "Okay."

"QUINN!" she exclaimed exasperatedly and held her off, forcing them both to sit up.

"What?" she pouted with a whine, breathing hard. "What's the problem?"

"You're not listening!"

"Yes, I am!" she protested. "I heard you. No sex. It's not exactly news to me, Rachel."

"But you're just brushing it off like it's not a concern."

"It's not."

"It's not?" she echoed.

"Right. Hence the 'okay'."

She leaned back in to kiss her, but Rachel was adamant and ducked her attempt. Quinn was growing slightly annoyed. Why was she being so stubborn? There were things to do! Kisses to have! Touching! Lots of touching! They talked all the time. Did it have to be right now?

"You're aware that it may be a significant period of time before I'm fully ready to commit myself to you in that way?"

"Yessss." Quinn rolled her eyes. "Painfully aware."

"I don't appreciate the cavalier attitude you're taking here. It makes me think that you believe you can somehow get your way despite what I'm trying to tell you."

Quinn raised an eyebrow. "You think I'm planning to seduce you?"

Rachel didn't reply.

She smirked and leaned in closer, hovering inches away from her mouth, and licked her lips lasciviously. "Would it be possible for me to seduce you, baby?"

"No!" she insisted, but there was too much emphasis on it, and she grew red in the face.
Quinn chuckled knowingly and led Rachel to lie back on the bed, languidly stretching out on top of her. "Aw, don't worry about me. I promise to be a good girl. Remember my motto, 'it's all about the teasing, not the pleasing'. And I plan to do a whole lot of teasing..." She grinned and delved back into Rachel's throat.

"Yes. That was your motto and yet you still had sex with Noah."

Quinn froze. Tears leapt to her eyes so quickly she didn't even realize they were there. Rachel stared up at her in shock and covered her mouth, not quite believing the words that had come out of her own mouth. Rearing back like she'd burned, Quinn glared viciously at the other girl for a brief moment before she got off the bed and started putting on her shoes, gathering her things.

Her stomach felt like it had been twisted into a thousand knots. She felt cold. She knew she was trembling.

Was this happening? How could she... HOW COULD SHE?

"Quinn, wait, I didn't mean-" Rachel scurried off the bed and tried to stop her, but when her hand brushed Quinn's arm, the blonde spun around in a fiery rage, dropping her things.

"GET OFF ME!" she roared. "You do NOT get to touch me after saying something like that. What hell is wrong with you?"

"I don't want you with Sam!" she shot back angrily.

"What?" Quinn tugged her fingers through her already mussed hair in exasperation, blinking in confusion.

"I don't want you with him," she said plainly. "I want you to end it, the whole charade. It's gone far enough."

"What does Sam have to do with anything?" she cried. "He's just a friend, Rachel! A friend who's gone far and above the call of duty to help us. Why are you freaking? We already discussed this! In excruciating detail! You agreed! Why are you changing your mind?"

"I'm not having sex with you, Quinn!"

She was seconds away from pounding her head against the wall in frustration.

"For the love of – JESUS, RACHEL! I KNOW THAT! IT'S FINE! I don't get you! One minute you're telling me we're not doing enough and now is it too much? Just talk to me already because I really just might lose my freaking mind here."

"I'm not having sex with you," she repeated, "and you have a pseudo-boyfriend for all the world to see. Do you understand? If you're not getting that satisfaction from me then why wouldn't you just end up getting it elsewhere? He's attractive, easy to be around, and you certainly liked him enough to agree to date him in the first place. It wouldn't even be like cheating because again, he is your quote, unquote, official boyfriend."

Quinn took a step back as though she'd been physically pushed. "You think I'm going to have sex with Sam just because you're not putting out?" she said incredulously.

How were they actually having this conversation?

Rachel folded her arms across her chest and kept her gaze downwards. "It's a perfectly valid concern
especially considering our ages, the fact that we're in high school, our maturity levels, and that you've…"

Quinn's eyes grew cold, her voice even colder. Ice and fire. That was all she could feel. Now she was getting it.

"Oh, I see. Because I've screwed around before, that means I'll do it again? Once a cheater, always a cheater?"

Rachel swallowed but didn't respond.

"The hypocrisy should be slapping you across the face, but I guess you didn't think too much about that, hm?"

"That was different," she maintained. "I didn't have sex with Noah. It was just a stupid kiss. And I told Finn the truth. What would have happened if I didn't interfere with that little scam you had running, Quinn? You know as well as I do that had I never stepped in, right now Finn would still be thinking he had a child out there."

"Don't," she hissed warningly.

_That was too far. So...so far..._

"That's the difference. I make mistakes, but at least I'm honest about them. You lie as effortlessly as people breathe. Am I supposed to just ignore that? Pretend that I'm the only exception? I may be naïve and easily manipulated at times, Quinn, but I'm not an idiot. Look at what we are even. Just another lie. You would lie until your last breath if you could."

"If that's what you think about me, then why are you even bothering with all this?" she shot back at her bitterly.

"Because I love you!" Rachel exclaimed. "But it doesn't make me any less afraid of what you might do. If anything, my fears are drastically heightened due to the depth of my feelings for you."

"I guess you're just gonna have to trust me then," she said harshly.

"That's the problem, Quinn," she replied sadly. "I don't."

She took a deep breath. Pain rolled in with anger and together it formed a massive black hole sucking her in so that she didn't think she would ever breathe, see, or feel again.

"Well, doesn't that just suck for you?"

With that, she stormed out, slamming the door hard behind her.

Quinn opened her locker a few days later to see a note lying on top of her books. She saw Rachel's handwriting and her first instinct was to crumple it up and leave it in the nearest trash bin, but something stopped her.

She read it with extreme reluctance. The heavy paper, like one used for letters, was crushed in her vise like grip as she did. Rachel wanted her to meet her in the auditorium that afternoon after she finished Cheerios practice. Like hell Quinn was going to go.

The note got shoved to the back of her locker and fell to the bottom.
God, she was so stupid.

She showered and dressed after Cheerios practice, thoroughly determined to ignore her girlfriend's request, and what did she find? Instead of walking out to her car in the parking lot, like she should have, she was opening the door to the auditorium.

Rachel had such a hold over her. Quinn just didn't understand it. How did this girl manage to make her feel like this? Like she would do anything? Give up anything?

The empty auditorium was filled with the sounds a few simple scales being played on the piano. Rachel was sitting front and center, the lights shining down on her as she ran her fingers over the keys.

The anger whipped through her again so quickly, Quinn lost her breath at its ferociousness. She wanted to rage and scream and cry. But she didn't. She wanted to turn back. But something wouldn't let her do that either. Approaching the brunette cautiously from behind on the stage, Rachel didn't even turn around when she spoke, knowing Quinn was there.

"I thought three days was an adequate amount of time to give us both a chance to cool off so that we could rationally discuss what happened," she said calmly.

"There's no discussion to be had," she replied coldly. "I have no desire to speak with you. I only came to make sure you were aware of that so that you don't blow up my phone later worrying if I'm alive. Don't call me. Don't talk to me. Don't even look at me. I'm leaving now."

A few more notes played hesitantly on the piano before it stopped and Rachel's voice drifted softly through the space between them.

"Never knew I could feel like this,
Like I've never seen the sky before,"

Quinn stopped walking.

She couldn't believe what she was hearing. This song? Oh God! This song?

"Want to vanish inside your kiss,
Everyday I'm loving you more and more,"

She turned around, heart pounding. Rachel was looking straight at her, those perfect lips wrapping around the words with effortless beauty.

"Listen to my heart, can you hear it sing?
Come back to me and forgive everything!"

Her feet were moving of their own volition, until she was back on the stage again, at the far end watching as the diva sang to her.

"Seasons may change, winter to spring,
But I love you, 'til the end of time..."

Rachel was about to sing the next verse, but Quinn couldn't help herself. It was on instinct alone. She almost laughed at the look of shock on the diva's face.

"Come what may..." she sang softly, not much more than a whisper, and grew louder, stepping closer with each one.
"Come what may…
Come what may!
I will love you,"

"I will love you!" Rachel joined in eagerly, looking near tears now.

"Until my dying day,"

"…dying day,"

They harmonized together now. "Come what may… Come what may…"

Quinn sat down on the piano bench next to her as Rachel finished with a sweet lingering note.

"Come what may."

Sighing happily, the brunette looked up at her with shining, brilliant eyes.

"Come what may?" Quinn asked. "Are you sure?"

She nodded. "For better or for worse. Oh," she giggled, "we sound like we're getting married."

*Someday.*

Quinn sucked in a breath, feeling dizzy. She really had just thought that, didn't she?

"You know…y-you said you loved me in that song," Rachel pointed out timidly, avoiding eye contact.

"It's the song." She shrugged. "Not my choice."

"I see…" she frowned slightly and turned away to pointlessly shuffle some of the sheet music atop the piano.

Quinn's heart hurt to know that she had let Rachel down again. But she couldn't do it yet.

It just wasn't…

She couldn't go there.

"You're just lucky that's like one of my all time favorite movies," she grumbled, trying to take her mind off it.

Rachel suddenly beamed at her. "Really?" she said breathlessly. "Quinn, you are aware that it is in fact classified as a musical?"

"As shocking as this will sound, Berry, I don't mind musicals," she retorted. "Actually, there's a lot of them that I enjoy."

She opened and shut her mouth in a happy, but stunned disbelief.

Quinn laughed. "Oh my God, what did you think I watched? Sappy romcoms?"

"Horror," Rachel said bluntly. "Gory, slasher, sadistic, thriller films. The more blood, the better."

The blonde's mouth dropped open before she burst into a huge round of belly laughter that echoed through the auditorium.
"Am I honestly that scary?"

Rachel tucked her tongue between her teeth. "I refuse to answer that on the grounds that it may incriminate me in a court of law, but...am I right?"

Quinn glowered at her playfully. "I'm not sure if I should be proud or insulted."

"You're avoiding the question."

"Okay, fine, yes, I like horror movies too. Jeez. But that's not all I watch! I'm not some psycho obsessed with them or anything."

The diva grinned self-satisfactorily, pleased to have been proven right. "This is marvelous, Quinn! Now that I'm aware of this, our movie nights can be so much more integrated! Have you seen 'Funny Girl'? That is an absolute staple. What about 'My Fair Lady'? 'A Star is Born'? Or what about-"

"GAH!" Quinn held her hand over the babbling girl's mouth. "This is exactly why I never mentioned it! I said I liked some of them. Our movie nights are not going to be taken over by Audrey Hepburn and Barbra Streisand!"

"But Quinn!"

"Ah, ah, ah!" She held a finger up. "I will compromise at certain points, but don't you dare try to monopolize it based on this revelation."

Rachel nodded and took a few deep breaths to calm herself, but she was still practically bouncing in her seat. Quinn knew she was still plotting all the movies to force her to watch, whether by pleasant coercion or the simple chain her to the couch method...

"Bet you'll never guess what Santana's favorite movies are," she offered in an effort to distract the dangerously plotting girl.

"I'm going to take a wild stab in the dark and say that they contain something of a pornographic nature..."

Quinn snickered. "You'd think so, but under the water balloons she calls a chest, Santana Lopez is the sappiest girl of them all. Even the slightest of tragic romances will induce flood-worthy waterworks and romcoms are her holy grail."

"You're making that up!"

Quinn held up her hand. "Girl scouts honor."

"You would be a girl scout."

"And you never made it out of Brownies. You terrified your fellow troop members and the squad leader."

Rachel squeaked indignantly. "I was merely endowed with the healthy spirit of competition and determination to reach my goals! Just because the rest of them were too lazy and nearsighted to see what I was trying to achieve..."

"They had you impeached."

"I didn't even know you could be impeached from Girl Scouts! I swear there was some legal mishandling there!" she insisted with a huff and then rolled her eyes. "We're getting off track..."
They giggled.

"Thank you," Quinn murmured.

"I figured it appropriate," she replied. "It is 'the lover's secret song' after all. I found the themes akin to what we are currently experiencing."

"It's perfect – in a kind of obvious, sappy way."

"All musicals are, but that's what makes them so splendid. They know what they are without being apologetic for it and convey sincerity in such a raw, honest way that no one could dare disagree."

"Okay," she agreed with a smile. "So that's our song. But will you promise me something?"

"Haven't I already promised you everything?" Rachel said softly.

_How her heart beat that much harder to hear her say such a thing…_

She took a moment to compose herself and then finally got the words together. "When we leave here…when we are hundreds of miles away from McKinley High, my parents, Lima, Ohio, everything. When I'm in college and you're either on Broadway or at some amazing school for the musically gifted…"

"Juilliard," she answered for her automatically.

"And we're together..." Quinn gnawed on her bottom lip, looking up at Rachel through her long eyelashes, "I want you to pick a different song for us."

Her brow furrowed. "But why? I thought this one was-"

"It is," she reassured her quickly. "For now. But what's the point of a secret song when we're not a secret anymore?"

Rachel looked like she was about to cry again so she leaned in and kissed her sweetly, so that when she finally pulled away, there were no more tears, just her shy, radiant smile.

"So, do you promise?" she asked again somewhat anxiously.

"Promise."

Quinn took a deep breath before starting this. It had to be said. They had to move past this. What else was there to do?

"Y-you have every right not to trust me. I was wrong to get so upset with you before."

"Quinn, no, I-"

"Let me finish."

She nodded, biting her lip hard to keep quiet.

"It just really hurt to think that you wouldn't, but I can't deny it. I just want you to know that I'll do whatever it takes to help you to trust me. No matter how long. With this Sam thing, I know how difficult it must be to believe…but it is true. I just want you."

"We have a lot of history together, Quinn," Rachel sighed. "Most of it would be better forgotten…”
"Couldn't we forget?" she pleaded.

"I wish that were possible. But I can't. I love you, you know I do, but these insecurities, these fears, which are far from irrational, aren't just going to disappear tomorrow or even next week. You can't just apologize and make it all go away."

"You can forgive, but you can't forget." Quinn nodded in understanding.

"You've given me all the reasons in the world not to trust you, Quinn Fabray, but I don't care. I'm going to try anyway. Just...please don't break my heart." Her voice cracked over the words.

"I think I'm more in danger of that," the blonde muttered.

She rolled her eyes. "I find that rather impossible."

"No? I'm terrified that this will get to be too much for you, Rachel! That I'll have asked for too much. That you'll think it's not worth it anymore. That you'll leave me and go back to Finn or someone who can give you-"

"Shut up, Quinn."

"Excuse me?"

"I apologize for my bluntness, but just shut up. I'm not leaving you. And since you've established that you have no desire to leave me either, we're going to stop talking about this."

"Y-you're telling me to stop talking? You're telling me that Rachel Barbra Berry wants to stop talking?"

"Yes," she said simply, "I'd much rather we be kissing right now."

Quinn threw aside all incredulity and fused their mouths together.

Chapter End Notes

Come What May (reprise) from "Moulin Rouge"
"It's inflammatory! Defamation of character! I'll sue!"

That was the consensus of Rachel's ranting throughout the entire morning. Fortunately, Jacob Ben Israel had taken it upon himself to have the sense enough to be scarce that day. Quinn wasn't really bothered by it all, actually kind of amused...strangely enough. Sam strutted around the smuggest grin on his face that rivaled Puck on his best day. Who knew that agreeing to be a beard would reap such social benefits for him?

After he'd taken such a hit for the so called "lie" he posted about Quinn and Rachel, Jacob was bitter and wanted revenge. He didn't think it was fair that he was getting such a backlash for what he knew was true though had no evidence of. Since Quinn, Rachel, and Sam had taken to spending more time together. As in…a lot of time together. In school, outside of school, everywhere. They were the new three musketeers. Which gave him the perfect opportunity for yet another outlandish piece of gossip to spin McKinley High on its head. Also, it was his chance to get back at them for making his life hell (however inadvertently). The guy just couldn't comprehend the fact that he'd brought it on himself.

Late last night, everyone had gotten the update alert from his blog.

**SOURCES CONFIRM THAT TWO WELL KNOWN BLONDIES AND A LOUD MOUTHED BRUNETTE ARE INVOLVED IN A CLANDESTINE MENAGE A TROIS, BEING THE FIRST OFFICIAL TRI-AMOROUS RELATIONSHIP EVER IN THE HISTORY OF WILLIAM MCKINLEY HIGH.**

Cue social uproar.

The three were outside for lunch on one of the first few nice days of the season. They had opted for the lesser crowded picnic area by the football field rather than the concrete steps that mostly everyone hung out at when the weather was agreeable. None of them felt like being accosted by the rumor mill during their lunch break.

Gossip was in a full manic swing at the moment and the agreement between the three was to make no official comment on it. If people asked, don't deny, don't concede, don't answer at all. It left things ambiguous enough to keep people spinning for awhile until they tired of the idea and moved on to something new, but if they started denying the rumors, it could be construed as 'thou doth protest too much' and then that was a whole different game. Let the student body say what they will. The three of them had nothing to do with it.

At the moment, they were sitting in the grass with their bagged lunches. Sam was lying down with his head in Quinn's lap, the obligatory boyfriend/girlfriend pose, as he dozed lightly, while Rachel sat shoulder to shoulder with Quinn, brushing against each other every so slightly. Quinn had one hand over Sam's chest while using the other to eat her lunch.

Rachel knew she shouldn't be bothered by this, especially with how her girlfriend was barely paying any attention at all to the boy in her lap, she was smiling and chattering away with Rachel, hardly ever taking her eyes off her.
Logically, she knew this.

Yet in her heart there was an ever constant ache.

How badly she wanted to be able to touch Quinn freely as Sam did. To hold her hand. To kiss her in the hall. To be where Sam was right now.

It just wasn't fair. She had agreed to this, she knew that, she wanted to keep Quinn and thought she understood the score. Wrong. She did know it would be hard, but never did she think it would be this hard. Despite everything Quinn did (and she did try) to make it easier, to offset the pain, it wasn't enough. It would never be enough. Not until the day came where Quinn could admit who she was to the world and...who she was with. Until then, Rachel just prayed she had the strength to wait.

Because what was the alternative? Being without her? Quinn wasn't trying to hurt her. When they were together...Rachel had never known more happiness in her life, but it was times like these, times that came far too often, that had her sinking. And when she felt herself reaching that breaking point, Quinn would smile at her and whisper promises of days to come that reminded her of just what she was doing all this for. And so the cycle began anew.

"You alright?" Quinn asked softly, seeing that Rachel had been engrossed in herself for a time now.

"Fine," she replied simply, looking around at the few milling students that gave them some odd looks before heading back inside. Lunch period was almost over. "We really should stop spending so much time together, the three of us, we're only providing more fodder for the gossip vine."

" Seriously not having a problem with that," Sam said lazily.

Quinn rolled her eyes and clapped her hand over his mouth to keep him from saying anything else.

"Everyone knows Jewfro's gone off in the deep end with these accusations. No one believes a word of it."

It was true. After this most recent claim, Jacob's credibility was shot to hell. It stirred things up, had people gossiping and laughing about it as though it was true, but no one actually believed it. It was just simply fun to speculate.

"Sam here might be perfectly fine with gaining a reputation for having sexual liaisons with two people at once, but I don't appreciate being lumped into such base debauchery with him!"

"Hey!" he said, muffled, throwing off Quinn's hand. "Not cool, Rachel. What, I'm not hot enough for you? I thought you liked blondes..."

"Sam, be a good lesbro and go back to sleep!" Quinn said impatiently. She looked at the brunette imploringly. "Not cool, Rachel. What, I'm not hot enough for you? I thought you liked blondes..."

"Sam, be a good lesbro and go back to sleep!" Quinn said impatiently. She looked at the brunette imploringly. "It's just silliness, Rach. Nothing real is coming of it. Let them talk. Life in Lima is boring enough, why not let them make up some scandalous things about us? There's nothing better to do."

"You of all people know how hurtful rumors can be. Isn't that just the thing we're doing all of this to avoid?"

"Anything to distract them from the truth!" she retorted harshly.

There it was. Yet another denial. Yet another rejection. Yet another example of Quinn being ashamed of them. Of her. Now she was so ashamed that she'd rather the entire school believe they were all having sex with each other instead of just admitting that Rachel was her girlfriend? Why?
She started to get up to leave, but Quinn grabbed her arm, holding her there with a distressed expression on her beautiful face.

"Wait. I didn't mean it like that. Rachel...you know why I'm doing this."

"Do I?"

The blonde sighed resignedly and Rachel saw Sam lift his eyes to the sky, pretending not to be involved in the conversation when really he was hanging on every word.

"You still don't believe me?"

"No...I do," she replied hesitantly after a while. "But aren't you concerned about what your mother will have to say about this?"

Quinn chuckled. "No way. Even my Mom knows enough to know this is pure high school craziness. That is if she hears about it at all. This isn't 'your daughter's gay!' it's more along the lines of 'your daughter's a slut!' and that kind of rumor just doesn't go as far."

"No one's saying you're a slut." Sam frowned. "I didn't hear that! Who said it? I'll-"

"I'm apparently having threesomes on a daily basis," she replied dryly, looking down at him. "The sluttiness is implied."

"I hate this," Rachel muttered. "I just absolutely hate this."

"We only have a little more than a year left," Quinn reasoned gently. "Then we'll be out of here and we won't have to hide anymore."

"I know all this," she snapped.

"But it still hurts?"

"Of course it does!"

Quinn looked around to make sure there wasn't anyone looking, the rest of the kids had gone back inside already, and pressed a quick peck to her mouth. Rachel frowned, but settled back in, not looking to leave anymore.

The slight display of affection took her off guard. Quinn had never dared to be so free before, even if they didn't see anyone right now. If they did anything in the school, it was in secluded places, behind very closed doors. It seemed inane because it was so small, but Quinn really had never done anything like that before.

Deciding to test this new limit, Rachel picked up a grape and offered it to Quinn who just grinned and opened her mouth to accept it. After popping it past those perfect pink lips, she sighed in bewilderment and leaned her head against Quinn's shoulder. The other girl didn't refuse and instead rested her head on top of hers.

Rachel had no idea what to make of this.

What she did know was that right now Quinn was feeling safe. She loved safe Quinn. That was when she got her Quinn. Why she was feeling that way, Rachel didn't understand. Was she becoming more comfortable with them or was it this new piece of gossip about the three of them that was somehow making her feel more secure? She'd have to ask her about it later, but right now she
just wanted to enjoy being able to cuddle up to her girlfriend out in the open with nothing to worry about.

"Are you two macking on each other now cause I totally have rights to see it!" Sam twisted his head up at them.

Rachel just made a face while Quinn stuffed his unusually large mouth with a handful of grapes, effectively quieting him.

Sam was walking Quinn to one of her classes later that afternoon when he suddenly pulled her aside before they reached the classroom. Irritated, she was about to protest, saying she'd be late, but at the look on his face, she immediately silenced herself.

"Did you ever really like me?" he blurted out anxiously.

Her brow furrowed in confusion.

What kind of a question was that?

"Of course I like you! You're one of my best friends. What would make y-"

"No." He shook his head impatiently. "I mean when we were dating. For real. Or at least what I thought was real. When I first asked you out and all. Was it…" He shifted uneasily. "Did you like me even a little bit or was it just, you know, for whatever."

Quinn felt that painful knot in her throat again. How sick and tired she was of feeling that thing. Of feeling guilty. Of feeling ashamed. Of feeling sad.

"I did…like you," she said honestly, lowering her voice so they wouldn't be overheard. "It wasn't…the way you wanted, I guess, but I wanted to be with you because…Well, just because of that."

Sam looked confused, which she understood. It was confusing for herself even.

"Let me put it to you this way," she leaned in with a mischievous glint in her eye, "Of all the boys I've kissed, you're the best. No contest."

His eyes lit up at once and he pumped his hands in the air victoriously. "YES! I KNEW IT!"

Quinn shrugged, seeming to ignore his exuberance. "I'm not so sure what that says about you though."

"W-what do you mean?" he said, deflating slightly, his arms coming back to rest at his side again. "I'm an awesome kisser – that's what it means."

"I'm gay, Sam," she explained. "If I liked kissing you, then it might mean…well…that you kind of kiss like a girl?"

"WHAT?" he cried so loudly, it had the rest of the hall looking at them, Quinn didn't care.

"You have very soft lips! I like them!"

"You take that back, Quinn!" he growled.

"Take what back?" she said innocently.
"I do NOT kiss like a girl!" he insisted wildly. "I'm just the freaking champion of kissers that can even make lesbians enjoy it!"

Quinn laughed and started walking away towards her class as the bell rang.

"QUINN!" he whined and went after her, pulling her to stop. "Here, I'll prove it!"

He dove in for a kiss, but she grabbed his jaw before he got there, causing his lips to purse, and shook him teasingly.

"Don't even think about it, Evans." She patted his cheek kindly. "Just go put some chapstick on those lady frog lips of yours."

"NOT FUNNY, QUINN! NOT FUNNY!"

She sauntered off, still laughing, leaving an indignant Sam behind.

Rachel walked into the choir room about a half hour before Glee club began. She wanted the chance to practice a solo she was considering performing for the club as an option for Regionals. It shouldn't be an option so much as a given, but she was trying to tread lightly with the club these days. Things went more smoothly when she was less…forceful. If she could at least attempt a show of humility then it would go a long way. At least that's what Quinn said, so she was going to give it a shot.

Her hopes of a peaceful, relaxing rehearsal were dashed when she walked in to see that omnipresent blonde sitting on the risers, fiddling with his guitar.

"What are you doing here?" she snapped, unwilling to bother with an effort of civility if Quinn wasn't there.

"What does it look like?" he shot back without even bothering to look up.

"You can't be here. Glee club doesn't begin for another thirty minutes and I need the time to practice."

"Who's stopping you?"

"You!" She exhaled loudly. "I don't feel like having an audience at the moment."

"Well, that would be a first," he chuckled, strumming the guitar testingly before going back to work on it.

That only aggravated her all the more.

"Besides you can't be doing that. The random chords will interfere with my performance."

"And I care…because?"

"Just leave!"

"Nope. You don't own this room. I've got every right to be here. You wanna sing, sing. Don't let me stop you."

Rachel stamped her foot in frustration before going over to the piano, her eyes still viciously fixated on Sam who was nonchalantly tuning his guitar as if she wasn't there at all.
Never before had the choir room felt so stifling.

"Why are you doing this?" she said finally.

"Because it'll sound crappy when I play it?"

"No. Why are you…doing this. All of this. With her?"

Sam's fingers stopped moving, but he still didn't lift his head.

It was a few long moments before he started up again. "Because she asked me to."

"You want to be with her."

"Yes," he admitted with startling frankness, "but that won't ever happen. I've accepted it."

"Have you really? Why should I believe you? Isn't this is some way of yours to try and win her back?"

He looked up at her incredulously. "Uh…kinda the worst way to go about it, don't you think?"

"Why not?" Rachel replied. "You think somehow if you spend more time with her, play along with her game, that maybe she'll open her eyes and see that it's really you she wants? Fall back into your arms?"

Sam set aside his guitar, tension visibly rippling through his body.

"And why would you think that, Rachel? Because that's what you would do? Hate to break it to you, but I'm not you. I'm not trying to get Quinn back. I know who she wants and I respect it. Even if it hurts."

He shook his head.

"Look, I get it. It sucks to be you right now. You see me and Quinn walking around putting on a big show when it's supposed to be your show. I wouldn't want to be in your place. But guess what? I don't want to be in mine either. So why don't you pull your head out of your ass for at least five seconds and realize that you're not the only one getting a bum deal here."

She was speechless. Anger roared from a place deep inside her and she was torn between hitting him and storming out. Yet…as enraged as she felt, as pained as she felt, what Sam said was getting to her on some level. Reaching a place she didn't like.

"Life doesn't always give us the best choices. We do what we can with them. We're all in this together, Rachel, whether we like it or not."

She stared at him suspiciously. "Quinn said that too," she said quietly. "About life."

He shrugged. "It's just the truth."

"You expect me to believe that you're doing this purely out the kindness of your heart? With no ulterior motive?"

"I'd be lying if I said I wasn't getting some stuff out of it. One, I get to help someone I care about. Two, my rep has skyrocketed in this school since this whole thing started. I'm the one at the top now. Finn's been out of his mind about it. I'm the most popular dude in school. It's awesome."
Rachel scoffed in disgust.

"Hey, you asked," he said unapologetically. "But you know what? Even if I didn't get all those other things, I'd still be doing it."

"Because Quinn asked you to?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I care about her."

"You love her."

"That too."

"What aren't you telling me, Sam?" she insisted. "What are you two hiding? I know there's something you're not telling me."

The boy averted his gaze quickly, looking uncomfortable. "I don't know what you're talking about. And you shouldn't be asking me anyway. Quinn's your girlfriend, right?"

"So that means there is something?" she pressed.

"It means that if you're doubting her, she's the one you should be talking to, not me."

"I'm not doubting her!"

"Yeah, you are."

"What do you know?" she said grudgingly and played a few notes on the piano.

"Nothing, I guess. Just another pretty face, aren't I?"

Rachel looked up in surprise at the bitterness in his voice, but Sam had just gone back to his guitar.

They were quiet for a few moments as she processed their conversation in her head. It was the first time they had ever spoken about the situation so directly. All this time she'd been focusing most of her anger on Sam, blaming him somehow for trying to worm his way back into Quinn's affections, but now she was starting to see something else.

"I didn't…" she started to say, then took a deep breath and continued, "I haven't really thought about how this would be for you. Other than hating your guts, I haven't…thought about your feelings in this at all."

"No shock there."

"You really do love her," she murmured, as if realizing it for the first time.

"We've already been over that," he said tersely.

"And here you are, walking around with a smile on your face when all the while…"

"She wants you," he finished for her flatly.

"I'm sorry, Sam."
"Not your fault."

"And it's not yours."

"It isn't Quinn's either, so don't start!" he said so ferociously, it startled her.

"I-I wasn't going to say that."

"Sure," he scoffed disbelievingly and pulled one of the strings so tight it snapped.

Cursing profusely, he dropped his guitar on the next chair and gave up on it entirely.

She didn't want to leave it like this. Just dead air hanging between them. Sam was glowering at the floor like he wanted to take a jackhammer to it and she just couldn't think of a thing to say. How was it helping them to fight like this? It certainly weighed on Quinn. She could see how pale and drawn her girlfriend became whenever the two of them bickered. There was something so helpless in her when it came to the divide between Sam and Rachel. She wanted to be angry at the girl for it. She wanted Quinn to stand up, end the mockery, the insanity, and just accept it once and for all. But the way Quinn acted these days...it was like it wasn't about shame at all. Just fear. Always fear.

And that's why she couldn't be angry. How can you be angry at someone that's truly afraid? What she was afraid of, Rachel still couldn't narrow down. Was it everything? Was it one thing?

That wasn't something that could be helped at the moment. But Sam...

Sam was something she could change.

Even if only small in part.

If the tension between them lessened, the pressure on Quinn would lessen too, and who knows what effect that would have on the girl? Maybe it would help her focus more on herself and what she was going through with her own inner turmoil if she didn't have to stress at every turn over the two most important people in her life verbally assaulting each other at every given opportunity.

"So...I, um, heard that you have a date this weekend," she ventured awkwardly.

*That was polite, right? Inquiring about his personal life in a genuine, non-confrontational way?*

"A girl from Trinity after that coffee meeting Quinn took you on."

Sam just grunted noncommittally.

"Is she pretty?"

"I get it, Rachel!" he snapped, still heated over the broken guitar string. "The sooner I'm off on another girl, the sooner you don't have to worry about me somehow magically wooing Quinn back. As if I ever had her at all."

"I didn't mean it like that," she said tiredly. "I was just trying...small talk...you know? Baby steps?"

He looked at her warily. "You're trying to be nice?"

"Actually, yes."

Sam considered it for a minute before relenting. "Yeah...she's really pretty."
"Nice?"

"Totally. And smart too. I didn't understand half of what she was saying so I know that means she's smart."

Rachel gave him a small smile. "What's her name?"

"Anna," he replied. "She's also really into sci-fi, which is cool cause I've never dated a girl who was like that before."

"You share common interests, it sounds promising."

"I hope so." He shrugged and added, "She doesn't look anything like Quinn, you know."

"What does she look like?"

He thought about it. "Well, actually she kind of looks a little like y-"

He froze midsentence, eyes going wide.

Rachel was dumbfounded.

They both knew what he was about to say.

"Can we just forget I ever said that?"

"I think that would be best," she agreed. "Our relationship cannot possibly handle anymore awkwardness at the present time."

"Good," he shifted uncomfortably.

She ran her fingers aimlessly over the keys. "Why haven't we sung together yet?"

"Huh?" he said distractedly, still worried about the close call.

"You and me. We've never performed together. You're just as good as Finn and Puck and with a little bit of training you could be miles ahead of them. We should do a duet together."

"Have you lost your mind?"

Rachel rolled her eyes and put her hands in her lap. "I think Quinn would appreciate it if we could get along better. Besides, Finn and I are...a tad estranged at the moment so I would be very open to looking for a new leading man. Why haven't we sung together before?"

"Because you always sing with Finn," he said bluntly.

"Oh," Rachel nodded with a grimace. "Right. Well! That changes now. We'll put together a fabulous performance and shock everyone with our flawless harmonies and intense musical chemistry!"

"I thought we were hating each other's guts right now," he said sardonically.

"Bygones!" she insisted. "We do it for the music! For the team! To be perfectly honest, your raw talent far exceeds Finn and he's only gotten to where he is based on my intensive voice lessons. With my help, you can easily surpass him and it will be no problem convincing Mr. Schue to give you the leads more often! Everyone wins!"
"Except Finn."

Rachel waved it off as irrelevant. "He'll be fine."

Sam grunted reluctantly. "Okay. We'll give it a shot. But you're *not* bossing me around. And I'm not doing this for the team or for the music or whatever."

"Then what are you doing it for?" she asked quizzically.

"Quinn."

That was something Rachel could accept.

Fifteen minutes later, the diva was pacing back and forth in front of an increasingly annoyed Sam who was glowering up at her. They'd been battling it out for what song they would perform and neither was willing to budge. Rachel wanted an epic, passionate, Broadway selection that could help them healthily express their frustrations with the current situation while Sam was against any show tunes and wanted something off the Top 50 charts. It was touch and go for a moment there when he suggested "I Need a Doctor", but fortunately the crisis was averted when he immediately took it back with profuse apologies at the look on her face that was terrifying enough to make a grown man wet himself.

"Stop pacing already!" he complained. "You're making me dizzy."

"Pacing is known to be a helpful and effective method of processing one's thoughts, which I so clearly need seeing as how we are vastly opposing in our musical tastes. I have nothing against current popular music, but you need to broaden your selections beyond Billboard's 100."

"Stop pacing!" he said, louder this time.

Yet she still went back and forth in front of him, muttering to herself, as he watched from his chair. Finally he couldn't take it anymore and lunged for her. Rachel squealed in protest as he yanked her down onto his lap and held her there.

"What are you doing?" she cried.

"Seriously, you were seconds away from making me puke. How does such a tiny person contain so much energy? I'm surprised you've made it this far in life without spontaneously combusting."

Rachel rolled her eyes, but laughed anyway. "Let me go!"

"Only if you promise to stop moving around like that, you're wearing out the floor."

"Yes, yes, I promise," she said exasperatedly.

"Pinky swear it!"

She burst out giggling. "Shut up! I will not!"

Just then, Finn and some of the other Glee members started filtering in, throwing odd glances at the wrapped up Sam and Rachel. Finn glared murderously at the other boy. Mercedes and Tina were just slightly confused. When Rachel saw the reaction they were getting from the others, she decided to stay perched contentedly on Sam's lap, just to irk them further. She looked down at him with a teasing glint in her eye that let him know what she was thinking. He was all too willing to play along and settled his arms comfortably round her waist. When Quinn walked in, followed by the rest, she
didn't even bat an eyelash at their arrangement, but simply seated herself next to them. Rachel turned on Sam's lap and draped her legs across Quinn's.

"Having fun without me?" she asked.

"I thought I'd try the other blonde for a change, it is his turn after all," Rachel teased.

"Oh hell to the no!" Mercedes burst out from behind them. "I thought that threesome thing was supposed to be just a rumor!"

Sam, Quinn, and Rachel all started laughing. Mr. Schue walked in and Rachel took that as her opportunity to hop off Sam, but she ruffled his bangs affectionately, just to make the show even better, before sliding over to sit next to Quinn.

No one really paid attention to Mr. Schue's lesson because they were all too engrossed in whispering about the three people in the front row.

When Glee was over, Rachel and Quinn were some of the first to leave, but Sam dropped his bag and had to stay behind to pick up some of the stuff that had fallen out.

Out of nowhere, the towering Finn Hudson was suddenly inches away from his nose.

"Just what the fuck is going on here?" he growled. "What are you doing with them?"

"The hell, dude?" Sam stepped back incredulously, still gathering his things. "What business is it of yours?"

"You're messing around with those girls. It's not cool!"

"This jealousy thing is getting old, man," he sighed. "You haven't been with Quinn in forever. And didn't you dump Rachel?"

"Really, back off," Puck interjected, as he walked towards them. He could see the fight coming a mile away. "You're just pissed cause he's getting it on full saddle with your two ex-hotties while you barely touched second."

In a flash, Finn lunged for Sam, but Puck got in between them first and shoved him back hard, keeping himself between the two guys facing off.

"Don't do it, dude," he said warningly.

"What is your freaking problem?" Sam shouted from behind Puck, holding his hands out in disbelief.

"Sweet Jesus!" Mercedes exclaimed with an eye roll. They were the only four left in the choir room. "Sam, just please tell Finn you are not sleeping with Rachel and Quinn so we can all come back to earth."

"I'd just like to know why Finn seems to be so concerned with my sex life," he sneered. "Something to tell the people, Hudson?"

"YOU ARE NOT HAVING SEX WITH RACHEL!" he roared.

"And Quinn," Puck added. "At the same time."

Mercedes threw him an 'are you freaking kidding me?' look.
"So what if I was? What's it to you? She's not your girlfriend anymore, and in case you forgot, Quinn's mine. Time to face facts. So back the hell off."

Sam threw his bag over his shoulder and walked out in the opposite direction. Finn stood there fuming for a few seconds before the dam broke. He violently wrestled away from Puck's hold and went tearing out after the other boy.

"This is not going to be good," Mercedes muttered and she went running out the door with Puck while sending out a mass text to all the Glee members who had just left.

Sam was walking down the empty hallway unawares when Finn grabbed him from behind in a rage and threw him hard against the lockers, his fist connecting with the blonde's jaw. Ignoring the pain, Sam bent down and threw his entire body weight into his shoulder to knock Finn off balance and managed to slam him into the lockers on the opposite side of the hall.

Finn grunted as Sam punched him in the stomach and then he got an elbow smashed his into his nose. Swearing and bleeding, Finn tried to wrestle away and hit Sam again, but Puck jumped in then to tear Sam off, throwing him to the ground harmlessly.

In the madness, Finn went after Puck, but he just shoved the larger boy back again, yelling at him to calm down, but he was hearing nothing. Just absolutely out of control. Puck had to duck a swing at his head.

"YO! GET IT TOGETHER, DUDE! WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO DO?" he shouted as he fended Finn off.

The others were coming back now, Rachel and Quinn among them, and they all stared in shock at the brawl happening. While Puck and Finn were throwing punches at each other, Mike and Mr. Schue came running, having heard the commotion, and they were able to restrain Finn who still struggled against them, roaring at Sam for being a scumbag and a liar. Mr. Schue grabbed him by the collar and yanked hard, telling him to cool it.

Sam and Puck were pissed, but restrained, as they watched Finn be wrestled back and ultimately dragged off to the Principal Figgins's office.

Cautiously, Quinn and Rachel stepped up to the other two boys. Rachel reached out instinctively to touch Sam's rapidly bruising eye and insisted on taking him to get an ice pack from the nurse's office. He could only nod tersely, still breathing hard, high on adrenaline from the fight, and let her lead him away from the group.

Furiously, Quinn turned to Puck and demanded to know just what the hell happened. It took him a few minutes of swearing up and down, then kicking a locker, before he could adequately give her the details. Mercedes was already busy filling in the rest of the club. After thanking him for helping out, which he said was nothing because Finn was being a dick, Quinn left the others to go find Rachel and Sam.

She stepped into the nurse's office, looking round, but didn't see anyone. When she went to the back and pushed open the curtains, there was Rachel perched on Sam's lap again, this time holding an ice pack to his head.

"Is this going to become a habit for you two? Cause I'm starting to get a little annoyed," she said weakly as she walked in, arms folded across her chest.
"There are no other chairs, Quinn," Rachel retorted testily. "And you have got a lot of nerve to be jealous."

"I'm not jealous!" she cried. "Just…whatever, forget it."

She started pacing in front of them which made Sam groan and Rachel quickly stuck out her leg to stop her girlfriend from the dizzying maneuver. Quinn spun around heatedly to look at Sam.

"Puck said Finn provoked you."

"Yeah," he grumbled. "He's just really not cool with the possibility that I'm sleeping with Rachel too."

"Did you tell him we were?" the brunette snapped in annoyance.

"No!" he shot back firmly and then winced because it hurt his bruising eye. "I didn't deny it either. That's what we said. Just let them think whatever. If we start acting like we care too much, it'll only get worse. So I didn't confirm nor deny. Isn't that what we said?"

The two girls nodded reluctantly and Rachel sighed, gingerly holding the ice pack to his face. Quinn was still standing there in front of them, fuming over what had gone down just because that idiot Finn Hudson couldn't have enough brain cells to see the ludicrousness of what he was taking for truth.

Sam saw what she was doing and motioned for her to take his other leg so she could sit as well. Quinn heaved a sigh and took him up on the offer, settling down against him with Rachel on the other side.

The two girls exchanged a knowing look and Quinn lifted Rachel's hand away enough so that she could see the extent of his injury and frowned deeply. It was already turning purple. Rachel put it back on as Quinn leaned her head against Sam's.

"Thank you," she said softly.

"Yes," Rachel added genuinely, surprising Quinn, "Thank you. That was...you've done so much already. You don't deserve to have to deal with this."

"She's right," Quinn said mournfully. "Sam, I-I would understand if this has gotten to be too much for you. It's not what you signed up for. I-If you can't-"

The brunette watched the two of them with bated breath, waiting...hoping...praying that this would be it, but Sam only shrugged and glanced up at her.

"I signed up for everything, Quinn. Remember? Anything you need."

She breathed a sigh of relief and kissed his cheek. Rachel did her best not to let her disappointment show, but some of it came through anyway.

"I gotta say though, you're both idiots for dating that guy. What did you ever see in him?"

Rachel and Quinn looked at each other for a long moment as they genuinely tried to figure that out. What had they seen in Finn?

Finn had always been somewhat kind to Rachel when they were younger. She had always appreciated that. Quinn saw him as the quarterback, the popular guy, and the ideal boyfriend because
of how easily manipulated he was. But was that really all it was? Hadn't it started the moment she saw Rachel show signs of interest in him? Rachel was wondering the same thing. Hadn't her obsession with Finn begun the moment he started dating Quinn?

Their eyes widened simultaneously.

"I saw you," they said in unison.

Sam looked between them like they had both just sprouted ten heads.

Still trying to process the sheer revelation of the moment, they happened to glance down and see his bewildered expression.

"We were just idiots," Quinn explained simply.

"Really…really big ones," Rachel agreed.

"So…" Sam said with a heavy exhale and wrapped his arms around both their waists. "This wouldn't happen to help my chances to make good on that threesome rumor, would it?"

Rachel pushed the ice pack a little too hard in response as Quinn pinched his side and he yelped.

"Ow! Ow! Okay! Geez, can't blame a dude for trying."

Things changed for the trio after that. Rachel and Sam grew closer, no longer at each other's throats (to Quinn's immense relief). They actually ended up performing two different songs in Glee as a compromise. One was a Broadway selection and the other was something more contemporary (but was not "I Need a Doctor"). As it turned out, they sounded really…really good together.

It had taken some extensive persuasion on Quinn's part, which included a bag of Cool Ranch Doritos, to convince Sam to put up with Rachel's maniacal 'teaching' methods, but in the end she'd managed to get him to see that despite her girlfriend's over the top methods and overwhelming intensity, she knew what she was doing, and he could really benefit from it (if he managed to survive their encounters, of course). It turned out well because in the short time that Rachel worked with him, Sam had easily surpassed Finn's range and capability, just as she said he would.

Rachel found herself actually happier after all this, begrudging Sam's presence less in her life, not to mention that she was over the moon knowing that she had found herself a new leading man other than Finn. She didn't have to do much pushing with Mr. Schue to give Sam more leads as he saw the same thing she did. Thankfully, she could say for once that the man was not trying to ruin her life.

Finn was pissed as all get out, but Rachel simply passed it off as it was good for others to get an opportunity to shine as well. Besides, regarding their previous history, singing with him tended to be awkward now and that always translated into performances, which they simply could not afford.

It was actually the truth, though not in entirety.

She also made him swear never to attack Sam like that again. It wasn't good sportsmanship and he really had no claim on what she did or didn't do seeing as how they were no longer an item. If he continued to behave the way he was, she would rescind her offer of friendship. That was enough to get him to back off for the time being.

When Rachel came up with the idea of writing original songs for Regionals, she had Quinn and Sam's full support. When the vote came, both their hands were firmly in the air and they stared
daggers at the rest of the club just daring them to try and turn the diva down. Rachel could only feel a warm joy to know that she had such strong support behind her now. She’d never had that before outside of her fathers. When Finn saw Sam supporting Rachel’s idea so repletemly, he jumped in as well, insisting that it would be awesome for them to do and a surefire way to win. Every single member of the Glee club looked like they were seconds away from smacking him across the face.

Even Mr. Schuester looked a little exasperated.

Chapter End Notes

"I Need a Doctor" - Dr. Dre, Eminem, and Skylar Grey
"I hate your ballet class."

"That's disappointing because I happen to love it."

"It just means another night without you. I don't like it."

"I thought you hated it."

"You need to blow it off. We could go bowling!"

"You detest bowling."

"And that's how much I want to be with you."

"I'm sure we would be able to find a more pleasing method of entertainment for the two of us rather than bowling."

"Was that dirty?"

"No."

"It should have been."

"Must you always be so gutter-brained?"

"When it comes to you...there are days when it's all I think about."

"Quinn..."

"So you'll blow it off?"

"No! I cannot neglect my training! What are all my years of hard work for if I start slacking off now?"

"One night won't cancel out your years of dance experience, Berry."

"One night will turn into two nights, then a month. Then I'll never go again. I'll like being with you too much."

"So I'm supposed to feel guilty for that?"

"You're supposed to support me."

"Ohhhh, that. Fine, I support you."

"Thank you. Now what will you be doing in the interim tonight as I am unfortunately unavailable?"

"Sam's babysitting his little brother and sister tonight. I'll probably go hang out with them. He said Stacy's been asking for me."

"Oh."

"It's just babysitting, Rachel. No pretending, no façade, just Sam as my actual, honest to goodness
friend, no fake boyfriend stuff."

"Okay."

"Next time we do this, you should come too. I want you to meet them. They're so adorable, Rach. Sam's brother is like a little carbon copy of him. He tries all the dumb impressions too, but he does them better! Though it's not saying much."

"Fine."

"Would you rather me not go tonight?"

"Why would you say that?"

"Because you just went from normal/happy!Rachel to sullen/depressed!Rachel in a span of three seconds. Just tell me."

"Would my answer make a difference?"

"Yes. If you don't want me go there tonight – I won't. I understand. I just thought it would be something to distract me from not being with you. And I do love those kids."

"You really wouldn't go?"

"Of course."

"I don't want you to go."

"Okay, I won't."

"Just like that?"

"Just like that."

"Well, now you have to go."

"What?"

"You adore his siblings. You gush over them all the time, Stacy especially. Go. Have a good time."

"So that was a test?"

"It seems so. I didn't truly realize it until after you agreed…"

"I'm going to miss you."

"I'll miss you too."

"Next time, we'll all babysit together! You'll love them! Stevie gives the biggest hugs and Stacy even loves to si… On second thought, I take it back. You can't meet them."

"W-what? Why?"

"Well...it's just... Baby, Stacy's a little girl who loves to sing and dance in crazy little circles, but I'm afraid if you meet her, she'll have been kidnapped and shipped off to vocal training boot camp before the Evanses even come home."
"QUINN FABRAY!"

"Plus, you'll probably terrify them somehow. You don't exactly have the best bedside manner with kids."

"I'll have you know, I am absolutely adored by children!"

"Then why have I seen them running away from you, screaming for their parents?"

"That was ONE time! And he could have severely damaged my nose with that ball!"

"He was five, Rach."

"A perfectly reasonable age to have an adult conversation about the dangers of such behavior."

"You're proving my point for me."

"Now you don't want me to meet them?"

"I want you to hug Stevie and duct tape your mouth if Stacy offers to sing for you."

"Isn't that slightly extreme?"

"It's the only way I can see it working."

"We can discuss this at a later time. I have to go to my class now and dance out my frustrations with my very unsupportive and insulting girlfriend!"

"Hey! I'm behind you every step of the way...and checking out your hot ass while I'm at it."

"You must stop channeling Puck."

"I'm just expressing my desire to have my hands on your ass."

"Quinn!"

"Ditching me for dancing...this is so not approved."

"I'll call you later. Say 'hi' to Sam and the little ones for me. Have a good time. I love you."

"It would be better with you."

"Even though I'd have my mouth duct taped shut?"

"Yes, even then. I'd just find more creative ways to kiss you."

SheheardRachel's embarrassed giggling with pride as they hung up.

With a sigh, the brunette dropped the phone into her bag and got into the car. She was still smiling from their conversation, but it was tinged with sadness now that she no longer had Quinn there to keep the darker thoughts from invading.

She never said it. Never could say the words. Rachel had come out with it over two months ago and still said it repeatedly, giving Quinn every opportunity to return the sentiment. But she didn't. Quinn never said "I love you" back.
Oh, she'd said and done just about everything else, so that gave Rachel some encouragement as to the depth of her feelings that hopefully matched her own, but it didn't mean she didn't die a little inside every time she never heard those three little words returned. Quinn would say things like how beautiful she was, how much she wanted her, how much she needed her, how she wanted them together all the time, how she wanted a future with her, but never did she say actual words of love.

Of course, when Rachel had been the first to say it, she had no misguided notions that Quinn would burst out proclaiming it in return. It hadn't been about wanting to hear them back. It was about needing Quinn to know where she stood. But now that time was passing by, more and more of it ever still, it was starting to weigh on her. If Quinn didn't really love her, and how could she if she couldn't even bring herself to say the words, then what were they doing? Why was this torment that was both so wonderful and so heartrending at the same time still going on? Why didn't they just put an end to it and move on? But Quinn seemed to have no inclination towards that.

"Why" was a question Rachel found on the tip of her tongue every day now.

Just…why?

Quinn did go over to Sam's for a little while, but only to bring Stacy some of her old playthings and let Stevie squeeze her until she pretended she couldn't breathe anymore.

"Gonna surprise her?" Sam said as he led her back to the door a little later.

"We spend too much time apart."

"You're with her almost every night," he said amusedly. "Including weekends."

"It's not enough."

"Even after you discovered a way to sneak in through the back door after her Dads have gone to bed?"

"Shhhhh," she said laughingly, glancing over at the kids sprawled out on the couch, too involved in their TV show to be paying attention to them.

Sam rolled his eyes. "As if they know what we're talking about."

"Kids pick up on more than we give them credit for."

"Now you're worried about them finding out? Quinn, come on…"

She glared at him. "Not that they'll know about Rachel! Only the nature of what we're discussing."

"And what nature is that?" he teased.

"I don't kiss and tell, Sam Evans."

"You do more than kiss and then don't tell."

"GOODNIGHT!"

"Bye, Quinn!" came an eager chorus from the two on the couch who waved vigorously as she walked out, ignoring the laughing Sam.
It was her turn, and with her partner, Lindsay, they swirled out onto the floor in perfect unison, going through each dip, sweep, turn, with precision and grace that came from both their years of hard work. Lindsay wasn't as dedicated as Rachel, but she had the passion and a natural ability so they had grown up through the years taking these classes together. They'd never been friends outside of the dance circle, each of them traveling a half hour from opposite directions to get to the studio, but they were definitely friends in it. The 'dance' relationship was going on six years now.

Lindsay was a year older, about to graduate and head off to Ohio State. She wasn't the kind of pretty that would stop you dead on the street, but she was definitely the kind of pretty that grew more apparent the longer you looked at her. She was half-Jewish, a little taller than Quinn, with long, wavy dark hair that she kept in a tight bun until the very second class was over and she would release it with great vigor as though it had been cooped up for years rather than the two hours.

Rachel always envied how her hair would effortlessly shake down from its ties, a brilliant, glossy sheen, and somehow end up in the perfectly mussed-but-not-mussed way as though she'd just stepped out of the salon. Lindsay always joked that if Rachel had the voice to hold over her head, then she could at least have the hair to hold over hers. It was only fair.

Sweating from the workout, but pleased with how it had gone, Rachel guzzled down some of her water as she walked over to Lindsay who was pulling the bun out. There went the shining, wavy, glorious, hair. She tried not to let the envy wash over as usual, but it was fruitless.

"You can sing. You can sing. You can sing that hair into a frizzy split ended disaster!"

Lindsay chuckled as she noticed Rachel's glowering.

"Still with that?"

"It's not right for one human being to possess perfection like that when the rest are forced to endure mediocrity."

"I could say the same for you," she retorted easily.

Rachel only smiled.

"So how's that friend of yours?"

"Hm?" she asked distractedly from the floor as she changed into her regular shoes.

Lindsay lifted a long, taught, leg onto the bar and stretched leisurely. "Quinn's her name, right? Your friend, how is she?"

Rachel looked up at her curiously. "Why do you always say 'friend' like that?"

The other girl laughed and switched to the other leg. "You don't seriously think you're hiding anything?"

Rachel feigned ignorance and stood up. "I don't know what you mean," she replied, shrugging into her jacket.

Lindsay put both feet on the floor again and leaned in towards her with a mischievous grin. "Come on, Broadway…who do you think you're fooling? The way you talk about her…hell, I thought having to put up with you babbling about that Finn guy was bad!"

Rachel looked up at her for a long moment before finally relenting and covered her face in
embarrassment.

"Is it that bad?"

"Worse. But don't worry." She bumped her shoulder affectionately. "I'll still steal you away someday."

"You've been saying that since the day we met," Rachel said laughingly.

"Bound to be true eventually!"

"In your dreams!"

"Nu-uh, in yours!"

"Not anymore, Lindsay," Rachel said softly with her sincerity ringing true. "Maybe once…but definitely not anymore."

"That in love?"

"Like I never knew possible."

Lindsay chuckled gently at the dreamy look on the girl's face.

"She good enough for you?"

"She's…everything."

"I better meet her someday."

"I'll make sure it happens," she affirmed with a nod and added, "but you cannot flirt!"

"What?" she cried, as though incredibly offended. "I do not FLIRT!"

"It should be your middle name," she said dryly.

"I'm merely friendly. You can't fault me for friendliness! We could use more of it in the world!"

Rachel rolled her eyes in amusement. "Well, be sure to be less friendly should you two meet. Quinn tends to be the jealous type. She wouldn't understand this intriguing facet to your personality."

"Understand what? My undying passion for you? Come on, Rachel!" She curled her arm around her waist. "I got a backseat with your name on it."

"Such a tease!" She laughed and pushed her away lightly, slinging her bag over her shoulder. "Don't you have a boyfriend? What was his name? It started with a 'J', I'm sure…"

"So last year's color," she waved flippantly. "Looking for a girl this time round."

"Not this girl!"

"Deny it all you want, darling, but you're totally hot for me."

"I believe it's the other way round, darling," she shot back with a giggle and turned to leave, only to find herself standing in front of a stony faced blonde.

"Quinn!" she cried in surprise.
Lindsay looked up sharply at the name and her eyes widened, a smirk spreading across her face. "Ooooh, Broadway…you have got to be kidding me!" she said in absolute approval, looking the blonde over from head to toe.

"W-what are you doing here?" Rachel stammered, torn between shock and delight.

Quinn donned one of the fakest smiles Rachel had ever seen her possess and tilted her head. "I wanted to surprise you," she said in a sickly sweet tone. "I never get to see you dance here."

"O-oh," she replied, confused by the coldness she was encountering right now. Whatever was coming out of Quinn's mouth most certainly did not match up with the rest of her. "That was-"

"Who's your friend?" she interrupted, turning to Lindsay with interest, still in that too sweet tone that made Rachel's stomach churn nervously. It reminded her of the old days, the not-so-good days, when Quinn was…not her Quinn.

"Lindsay," she said awkwardly, "This is Quinn, the one I was telling you about. Quinn, Lindsay and I have been taking classes together for years now. She's a fantastic dancer."

With her eyes she pleaded with the other girl not to make things anything more uncomfortable, but Lindsay didn't seem to pick up on it…or care. She stepped forward boldly and held her hand out, which Quinn shook politely.

"It's lovely to meet you, Lindsay. I'm sorry I don't seem to recall Rachel ever mentioning you though."

The other girl only shrugged, not taking any offense. "That's alright, we do enough here to last us through the week."

No. No. No. Be good! Be good!

Quinn's eyes narrowed dangerously for a split second before it went back into the wide eyed saccharine innocence she portrayed before. Rachel knew what was going to happen.

"I saw you earlier through the window," the blonde said with a smile that could kill, "you are very good. I mean, if you didn't have that issue with your thighs and the slight skin problem, why you could be a professional! In fact, I could recommend some great remedies to help you out if ever you feel the need to put that little extra effort in…"

"Well…" Lindsay lifted her eyebrows in amusement and scoffed, chuckling as she picked up her bag. "At least you did warn me, Rachel."

"Quinn, what are y-!"

But the blonde wasn't about to let it end there.

"I think I've seen you around before. Yes! I knew you looked familiar! It was your mother that had an affair with Pastor Bruce Stevenson, didn't she? Tsk. Such a terrible situation for all involved. Did't your Daddy kick her out on the street for all the neighbors to see? Word does travel in circles such as ours."

The more she spoke, the paler Lindsay became. It was like the life was being drained right out of her. This was not the loud mouthed, prideful, vivacious girl Rachel knew.
"Quinn, stop it!" Rachel insisted, horrified. "What is the matter with you?"

But she ignored her.

"So messy. I'm glad to see you've overcome such terrible adversity, but I'm sure it's the stress from your home life that causes those unsightly breakouts. Do be sure to give me a call sometime about it. I'd love to help you out."

"Yeah," Lindsay mumbled finally. "It's great of you to offer. I gotta get going. Goodnight, Rachel."

"G-goodnight," she said helplessly. "I-I'll see you next week."

The brunette just walked away without another word. Rachel saw her eyes misting over as she turned away.

"Wonderful meeting you!" Quinn called out, grinning at the other girl's defeated departure, seemingly victorious in whatever competition she had made up.

As far as Rachel was concerned, Quinn had just come in dead last.

Quinn had found the studio easily enough. There wasn't anyone else there except for the two people lagging behind from the previous class. There was a one way window in the waiting area, allowing people to see out onto the dance floor while all that the dancers saw was a mirror on the other side. Quinn immediately found her girlfriend in the group, they were in the middle of a routine, and she smiled. Seeing Rachel always brought a smile to her face these days. Hell, even just thinking about her did that.

She settled herself into one of the chairs provided and sat as close as she could to the window to watch the dancers perform. The instructor's voice was faint but clear through the thin walls. She could hear the music as well.

Rachel was incredible. She watched in awe as the brunette glided across the floor with such grace and precision, it was unlike any of the dancing they ever tried in Glee. Picturing Finn trying to do this had her snickering to herself. Rachel spun out onto the floor with another girl and they moved together in perfect synchrony. Quinn found herself unconsciously leaning against the glass as she watched with rapture at her beautiful girlfriend dance. Rachel was focused, but not frowning, a smooth expression of concentration on her face as she let her body move, sometimes quick, sometimes achingly slow. Quinn found herself getting turned on. She had no idea Rachel was so flexible...

It seemed all too soon that the class was over and Quinn decided to wait outside the studio door to surprise her when she walked out. Maybe she'd want to get a bite to eat or something before going back home, anything to avoid the Berrys. Maybe she could convince Rachel to stay out long enough so that her Dads would be asleep before they came back and she wouldn't have to worry about running into them.

Those thoughts were immediately put on hold because as she stood near the door, still in front of the one-way window, she saw Rachel talking to one of the girls she had been dancing with before. They looked like they knew each other well. Everyone else was leaving, passing Quinn by, but the girls were lingering behind, chatting and smiling at each other.

Then the other girl put her arm around Rachel's waist and after that everything went blank.

Not just blank. Red.
"I have never been so ashamed in my life. You...you...how could you do that to her?" Rachel nearly screamed as she tore across the parking lot. "She's my friend, Quinn, and you practically crushed her to pieces with that thing about her family! How did you even... I can't even bear to look at you, I am disgusted."

"She was hitting on you!" she retorted huffily, a few paces behind the fast moving girl.

"That's just how she is with everyone! If you had taken at least three seconds to introduce yourself properly she would have started flirting with you too! For goodness sake, she once told my Dad that he should be wearing Juicy Couture with the kind of bottom he has! Although it was in a slightly cruder way, but my father was quite pleased with the compliment. You lost control!"

"She shouldn't have been touching you!"

"What does it matter?" she looked back at her irately. "Do you trust me so little, Quinn?"

"I-I do trust you," she stammered unconvincingly.

"How dare you behave like this! After all that I have put up with – your ridiculous charade with Sam – and you have the nerve to attack my friend because you were jealous? So I can't have a harmless flirty exchange with a friend I've known for years, but you can kiss a boy you have genuine feelings for right in front of me? I cannot fully express the depth of my desire to slap you right now!"

"I'm sorry, Rachel! I am!" Quinn exclaimed. "But how was I supposed to know it didn't mean anything? She was all over you and you were..." she trailed off uneasily. "You acted like you liked it."

Rachel barely even heard her and tore open the door to her car, throwing her bag in none too lightly.

"Do you know what the worst part about this is?" she snapped, turning back to her angrily. "I love you, but right now, I can't even bring myself to like you. You made me not like you. You made me think... God, Quinn! Who was that? She was supposed to be gone! That girl in there, with that voice, that's Quinn Fabray of two years ago, the one who hated me. The one who did anything she could to hurt me. I thought you had changed. I could have sworn..." Her voice trembled precariously before she composed herself and continued with the same intensity. "But tonight you proved me wrong. That girl still exists. She's never going away, is she? How... how can I love that girl?"

"Rachel..." she gasped, her vision swimming with tears.

"Don't cry!" she demanded furiously. "Don't you dare cry! You don't deserve to cry right now! I will not feel sorry for you! You were WRONG, Quinn."

"I know I was," she said shamefully. "I wasn't... myself. I lost it, okay? I'm human and I lost it. I shouldn't have said those things, but she was all over my girlfriend and I didn't like it! Don't I at least get a little bit of a break for that?"

"No!" she cried in utter disbelief. "You should have trusted me! You should have known it wasn't what it looked like! You should have walked up there and been your wonderful, charming self, and introduced yourself as my girlfriend. That's what you should have done!"
"That's all I want to do!"

"Then why don't you?"

"I'm scared," she admitted forlornly. "All the time. About everything. I don't... I am so tired of being afraid."

"Enough to be strong?"

Quinn looked at her warily and it was a few beats before she slowly answered, "There are different kinds of strength."

"So that's a no," she retorted bitterly.

"I wish you could understand..."

"Don't start that again!" she said sharply. "I'm so sick of that excuse. You were awful tonight."

"I know."

"You're going to apologize to Lindsay when you come with me to my class next week and you will explain precisely what the reason was behind you acting so shamefully."

"Rachel..." she started fearfully, but the brunette wasn't finished.

"And then you are going to tell her about what happened to your parents and how you can relate to everything she is going through right now and how sorry you are for using that as a weapon against her in your fit of insecurity."

"I don't know if I can-"

"She's not from Lima, Quinn," Rachel said firmly. "She doesn't know anyone there. You're going to admit to her what we are. No backing out. No excuses. You say the only reason why we haven't come out yet is because of your parents. Time to prove it. I deserve this. And so does Lindsay."

Quinn took a deep breath before finally giving her a tentative nod.

"You'll pick me up at six o'clock sharp."

"Okay."

"I think we're finished for tonight," she said tersely and started to get into the car.

"Rachel?"

She paused and looked at her. Quinn hesitated for a moment, glancing at the pavement before she made up her mind and stepped forward to close the distance between them. Rachel bristled to have her so close, but didn't move away either.

"I'm sorry I was that Quinn tonight," she whispered, looking down into her eyes. "I didn't want to be. I'm sorry I made you think... that I was still that person..." She choked back tears. "I thought I was losing you, okay? I looked at you with her and I thought... God, Rach, I always feel like I'm losing you or going to lose you or will lose you. It scares me more than anything because I know I don't deserve you and I can't help but feel like one day you're going to wake up and realize it too. I'm selfish. I don't want you to ever know that I'm not good enough."
It was like someone had thrust a hand inside Rachel's chest and squeezed hard. It hurt and she struggled to breathe. A part of her wanted to cry, but the other part was too angry to allow it. Yet hearing Quinn this way was a solid smack across the face. How could she forget just how insecure this seemingly flawless girl before her was? She knew better by now. Quinn Fabray always maintained a fearsome façade of power, beauty, and perfection. Even after getting to know her more, knowing that wasn't the reality at all, sometimes she still forgot. Quinn was that good at pretending to be something she wasn't. After all…she'd had a lifetime of practice. It was then that Rachel realized she was going to have to try harder not to be fooled by it. The less she was fooled, the less it worked, the less Quinn would be able to hold on to it. Slowly, but surely, Quinn Fabray would one day be the same person on the outside as she was inside. Rachel would be there for all of it.

"Baby…" she murmured sadly and took Quinn's hand which the other girl clutched fiercely, "we may be having a fight right now, it happens, but you're not going to lose me. What more do I have to do to make you believe that? I love you, Quinn. We belong together. You deserve not only me, but so much more from this world."

"No," she shook her head resolutely, "I don't deserve you. Maybe someday. Not now though. But if you can wait…like you said…then I'll make sure it happens. That you get all you should from me."

She wanted to dispute that, but Quinn wouldn't let her.

"I-I can't see you want anyone else, Rachel," she said despairingly. "It'll destroy me. Please tell me you'll forgive me for tonight? I'll get better at this. I won't... I'll try not to be that way. I really will. Forgive me?"

"Of course I will," she sighed, but saw the intense look of relief on Quinn's face and quickly followed it up with, "but that doesn't mean you get out of having to apologize and tell Lindsay everything!"

"Understood."

"I suppose…" she tried tentatively, "we could pick up some supper and go back to my place to do our homework? Friday night 'get-it-out-of-the-way'?"

Quinn looked so overblown with joy, Rachel knew she was doing everything she could not to kiss her right then. She almost didn't want Quinn to be happy, but that feeling didn't quite take root.

"I have my backpack in the car," she said with forced lightness, still keeping herself from looking too eager.

"Okay," she replied, trying not to laugh at the blonde's efforts to contain herself. "Then perhaps we can discuss what happened a little more."

Quinn nodded dutifully then she turned her head and scoffed.

"What?" Rachel frowned.

"It's just…all I wanted was to surprise you tonight," she grumbled. "To see you dance. It was supposed to be a good thing and I managed to mess up something as simple as that."

"Well...you had the surprise part down," she tried to joke, but it fell flat.

"I feel like I can't ever get anything right with you, Rach."

The brunette chuckled ruefully, much to Quinn's disbelief, and at the look on her face she held her
hands up in defense to explain.

"I think the same thing with you," she said with a mirthless smile. "From the moment we started all this, it's like no matter what I do, I can't get it right."

"Does that mean something?" she whispered fearfully. "Something bad about us?"

"Is that what you think?"

"I don't know what to think!"

"Quinn…maybe we just need to stop worrying so much about being right as we do about just being together. We can do this." Her eyes suddenly lit up and she grabbed Quinn's shoulders, pulling her in for a brief, but fierce hug. Quinn stared at her wide eyed when she was released, not at all prepared for this sudden turn. Rachel didn't care about her confusion as she squealed, bursting with joy. "I think we might have just come up with our original song for Regionals!"

"Huh?"

"No time to explain!" Rachel said exuberantly. "The sooner we get back, the faster we can write it! Follow me home?"

"I told you," Quinn smiled at her bouncing girlfriend, "I'll follow you anywhere."

It was past midnight when Quinn crept as quietly as she could down the stairs. They hadn't even stopped for dinner, Rachel was on a mission. She practically dragged Quinn into the house at a full run, ransacked her desk for a pad and pen and threw them both down on the bed to write the song she'd already half created in her head. Quinn came up with a few lines here and there and they talked the entire thing through. It was done within two hours. Rachel was so proud, giddy, and utterly exhausted that she passed out on Quinn's shoulder as soon as they put the finishing touches on it.

Rather proud and pleased herself with what they had come up with, Quinn tucked her girlfriend into bed and pried the pen out of her hand with hardly a stir from the brunette. She made sure to carefully place the finished work directly on top of Rachel's desk in plain view so that she wouldn't panic about where it was when she woke in the morning. Kissing her cheek gently, she took a moment to smile at how adorable Rachel looked curled up to a pillow that used to be Quinn's shoulder, before turning off the lights and shutting the door behind her.

She'd behaved so stupidly that night, but still Rachel forgave her, and she felt ashamed for it. Rachel shouldn't have to forgive her for things now. The past was the past, she could only hope to make up for it, but what happened now was entirely in her hands and she was screwing it up in every way possible. She didn't want Rachel to have to forgive her. She wanted to make her happy…happy and proud…like the way she was writing that song tonight.

If they could just get through this year…then Quinn would give her everything she ever asked for and more if possible. The longer she was with Rachel, the more determined she was for her future, their future. Nothing was going to get in the way of that. She would do whatever it took to make it happen.

"OH, MISS FABRAY!"

FUCK.

She'd been so close, almost halfway to the front door when that deep voice echoed behind her from
the den. Damning herself for getting caught, she turned back bravely with an unconscious straightening of her shoulders and entered the room where Leroy was on the couch watching TV. He had his feet propped up on the coffee table, but when Quinn came in he reached for the remote next to him, turned off the indistinctly chattering TV, and looked up at her with a plain expression.

"Skulking out of my house is hardly doing wonders for your reputation here."

Bristling, Quinn couldn't help herself. Her instincts for self preservation roared into full gear whether warranted or not.

"Better than facing the looks of disdain you and your husband seem to have specially reserved for me."

He stood up slowly, crossing his arms with feigned casualness. "I suppose it must come as a bit of a shock for you, to feel unaccepted, unwanted. Not the way your life usually goes, is it?"

It took every ounce of willpower she had not to burst out laughing at the absurdity of it. It would only make things more awkward if she did.

"I guess that's the way it must look," she replied carefully.

"You tormented my baby girl for years."

"I did."

"And we're supposed to believe you've suddenly changed? All better now? No more slushies? No more crude comments about her looks? The messages on MySpace? The drawings on the bathroom wall?"

Quinn could feel her throat closing in and shut her eyes tightly, trying to block out the memories.

_God, she'd been so cruel…_

How could Rachel forgive her, let alone love her? But she did...somehow, for some reason. And that was enough to make her feel strong enough to take on the large man before her.

"I'm not a different person, Mr. Berry," she said frankly, "But yeah…I've changed."

"And just what does that mean exactly?"

"Dad, no," Rachel's voice interrupted them and the girl stormed into the room looking angrier than Quinn thought she'd ever seen her be before. Her hair was mussed from sleep, but there was no trace of sleep in those fiery eyes.

"We're simply having a discussion, Rachel," he said calmly. "That's all."

"A discussion!" she all but shrieked. "She's my friend and you're treating her like…this has to stop! You…Daddy…enough is enough. Quinn isn't what you think she is. You have no idea what her life is like. If you did, you would be ashamed of the way you're acting. You _should_ be ashamed!"

"Rach, it's okay…"

"No! It's not okay!" she said heatedly. "I won't let him-"

"Let me talk, okay? Just…shh."
Rachel was still seething, but she quieted herself.

Leroy watched their interaction with a most curious look on his face.

"Despite what you may think, Mr. Berry, I do know how it feels to be unwanted. I'm just good at making it appear otherwise. I got pregnant last year. My father kicked me out. My mother stood by and watched. I was homeless for months, going from friend's house to friend's house, feeling more like a burden than a person ever wants to feel. But I didn't have a choice."

Leroy's arms fell from its defensive posture to hanging loosely at his side as he listened to her with something akin to regret washing over him.

"And to know what it is to be unaccepted? Well, I'm sorry to say that your home is just another place on a very long list for me. So, yes, I would rather skulk out of here and avoid confrontation for your daughter's sake. You don't like me. I get it, fair enough. I made a lot of mistakes in the past, but Rachel's my friend and if she wants me here, then I'll be here. Now, if you'll excuse me, I think I have some skulking to do."

She gave the still fuming Rachel a reassuring smile and was almost out of the room before he called out again, but this time there was none of the caginess in his voice that she'd grown so used to hearing him speak to her with.

"Quinn?"

She turned back reluctantly, not wanting any more of this tonight…or ever again.

"Stay a while?" He held his hands up with a light shrug. "I think there's some milk and fresh baked cookies calling our name."

Quinn stared at him with wide eyes. She had no idea what to make of this. To go from having him seconds away from ripping into her as she probably deserved, to offering her dessert like it was nothing at all? Like she wasn't completely despised? Like…he was giving her a chance?

"I-I can't, I have to-"

"Hiram won't be home. It'll just be the three of us. No inquisition, no judgment, just a friendly snack. Let's try to fix this, okay?" he said kindly. "Please?"

Quinn glanced warily at Rachel who had such a desperate look of pleading on her face that she couldn't bring herself to say no. So she sighed and nodded to Leroy.

Quinn left the Berry House feeling somewhat bewildered. It was the first time in…well, ever, that she had walked out through that door without feeling overwhelmed with shame or embarrassment or guilt. She just felt…okay.

Leroy had been true to his word, no inquisition. They all sat down, had some cookies, milk (soy milk for Rachel), and they just talked. It wasn't about the past or about Quinn and Rachel's newfound friendship. It was about classes, Glee club, college considerations, favorite TV shows, movies, and didn't Finn bear a striking resemblance to the monster in Frankenstein? That, of course, eagerly prompted Quinn to reveal one of Santana's nicknames for him, which had them all in stitches.

It was easier. Leroy was more open and accepting of her. He didn't have that guardedness she'd grown so accustomed to. It felt like she could breathe a little more around him. His attitude seemed to have shifted into a new gear that made Quinn think that maybe there was some chance of her being
accepted there one day, at least by him.

And most importantly, Rachel looked happy.

She went down the steps to the stone walkway feeling the slightest bit hopeful at how the evening had ended up despite the nightmare it had been a few hours ago.

Then she saw Hiram Berry walking towards her from the driveway and it all went to hell.

He was limping slightly, the way he always did, barely noticeable because he was a short man, but it was there all the same - the tiniest emphasis on one leg more than the other.

"Goodnight, sir," she said politely, but her mouth was so dry, she could hardly get the words out.

Instead of walking past him, as she had intended, Hiram stepped right into her pathway, forcing her to stop at once.

"What are you doing here?"

"I was…I was doing homework with Rachel," she mumbled, looking everywhere but at him.

"I see."

"I really should go, my Mom's waiting…"

"I'm tired of this charade, Quinn," he said curtly. "Sick and tired."

Her heart beat frantically against her chest. There was no kindness here, not like there was in that kitchen a few minutes ago. Out here, in the dark, standing head to head with Hiram, there was no acceptance, no hope. Yet, it was what she deserved.

"I've tried to allow this for my daughter's sake, hoping – no – praying that she would realize the truth soon enough and protect herself the way she should so that I wouldn't have to. But I see now that won't be the case. My daughter is too forgiving, too kind, too naïve. It's her nature. It's how we raised her. But no matter what I do and say, I cannot make her see the sad truth of this world. And you are part of that sad truth."

"Mr. Berry…"

"Oh, no, no," he shook his head, "you won't be speaking right now. This is me talking and you listening. I'm going to protect my daughter, Quinn, because right now she can't do it for herself. So here it is. You are not welcome in my house. You are not to come over here anymore under any circumstances, by Rachel's invitation or no. It is my home and I won't tolerate you in it. Furthermore, you will stay away from Rachel at school. You will no longer spend any time with her outside of it either. Your game ends now. Sorry to ruin your plans for what I'm sure was to be an epic farewell act to leave all of McKinley High talking for years to come about how you gave 'that Berry girl' what was coming to her, but alas, we don't always get what we want. If you continue to have any contact with my daughter, don't think for a second I won't hesitate to call up your mother - Judy is it?"

Quinn was shaking now. She couldn't breathe.

"And tell her just what fantastic friends you are with my daughter! I'm sure she'd be both surprised and delighted to hear it. It's not as though she has any idea the amount of time you two spend together, am I right?"
"Please..." Quinn whispered hoarsely, the word cutting through her throat like someone dragging a barbed spike.

Hiram's restrained fury seemed to unravel at the one word entreaty.

"You will leave my property this very instant," he growled, "or so help me God, little girl, you will regret it."

Quinn wasn't quite sure what happened after that. She knew she was in her car, she was trying to get away, but something went wrong. There was an enormous crash, her neck was killing her, and her heart felt like it was going to give out.

She stumbled out to see that she'd hit the gas too hard coming out of the Berry driveway and smashed into the neighbor's tree, caving in the trunk of her car. Glass and debris were littered across the ground.

It was just a fog, a thick, suffocating fog. She could hardly see, could hardly hear, could hardly feel. Rachel was somewhere in the distance shouting for her.

Quinn jumped back in behind the wheel and took off.

She didn't go to school the next day, explained to her mother when she went home that she'd gotten into a car accident, someone had rear ended her. They brought the car into Burt Hummel's shop early that morning and Judy took the day off so she could drive Quinn to the chiropractor for her neck and tend to her for the day.

Rachel had called her several times after the accident and then endlessly throughout the next day, but Quinn turned off her phone because her heart couldn't bear the pain of seeing her name on the screen yet again.

Sam came over after school to check on her. She didn't have to tell him what happened - Rachel had given him most of it.

"She's going out of her mind, Quinn," he said worriedly. "I mean, we know what she's like when she gets into those crazy-intense-should-be-in-a-padded-room states, but this is bad. Like, really bad. She said her Dads argued all night long, screaming at each other like she'd never heard before in her life. One of them even left to stay in a motel for the rest of the week. She knows her Daddy said things to you, but she doesn't know what. Jesus...what happened, Quinn?"

But she didn't give him an answer, despite all his pleading and cajoling, and he eventually had to give up for the day and go home.

When she'd been at the chiropractor's earlier, her mother was having a rant session with the doctor as he examined her. It was a mild case of whiplash and she'd have to come back a few times over the next month, just to keep tabs on it.

"If I ever find out whom it was that did this to you," Judy said fiercely, "I'll sue them for every cent they have! How dare people be so reckless! What if you had been seriously injured? And they just left you like that? I'll never understand..."

She went on like that for a while. Her doctor interjected his agreement here and there. Quinn was silent through it all, except for when she was forced into some reply, and it was always the same dulled one.
"Just a hit and run, Mom. That's all."
Quinn didn't want to go to school. She really...really didn't want to go. Her nerves were still raw from the encounter with Hiram. How was she going to face Rachel after this? She couldn't stay away, like she'd been not so kindly ordered to do; that wasn't an option. But what were they going to do? Would she have to tell her the truth now? It'd been just speculation before, but after that night...she knew for certain now. In her head, she knew it wasn't right that she carried this guilt, but she did anyway. It was almost compulsive. Guilt by proxy? Guilt for her own actions? Did it matter? Guilt was guilt.

Hiram Berry was right - she was a part of the sad truth of the world.

She just didn't want to be anymore.

How was she going to look Rachel in the eye, knowing how badly she'd upturned her life, her family, and not start sobbing right then and there? She couldn't ask for forgiveness again. She just couldn't. What was she going to do?

Quinn slipped through the halls as inconspicuously and quickly as she could. It was cowardly, she knew, but she was so afraid to see Rachel right now. She wasn't in control of her emotions. She'd begged her mother not to make her go in today, but Judy wouldn't have it. She didn't want Quinn falling behind in her classes. No amount of pleading or promises to make up all her work helped.

The parking lot was crowded as all the kids were making their way across to push inside for yet another boring day at McKinley High. As Quinn walked up with the rest, she saw the front doors of the school and nearly had a panic attack. She didn't know what to do! She wasn't ready to confront this yet! Rachel was in there...she'd want answers...she'd want to console Quinn, she'd want...

God, all she needed was a little more time to figure this out! But time was a luxury she didn't have. It took all she had to put one foot in front of the other and get through those doors.

*Locker, books, class. Run.*

But she wasn't fast enough.

"Hey..."

It was such a soft utterance. Quinn could just picture what she looked like standing there behind her, head down, nervous and sad.

*God, she would look so sad...*

Already the tears came bursting through and Quinn hid her face by way of the locker door.

"Don't," she whispered desperately.

"Quinn, please, I'm so worried-"

"No, stop," she begged. "Please, Rachel. You don't understand. I can't...do this now. If I look at you right now, I'm going to cry. So please...don't make me do this...just not here. *Please.*"
Behind her, she heard what she knew was a choked sob and tears streamed down her own face, but she still couldn't turn around.

Turns out she was wrong. She didn't have to actually see Rachel to cry; that had been more than enough.

Wiping her wet cheeks with her sleeve, she cringed when Sam suddenly put his heavy hands on her shoulders, but the initial reaction passed and she spun into his arms so that he could shield her again.

As he always did.

"You made her cry," he said tersely.

"I'm a bad person," she muttered into his chest. "It's what I do."

After that encounter, Quinn couldn't stand to be in school for another second and skipped the rest of the day. To hell with what her Mom said! She went home and passed out on her bed, but even then, it was fitful. Apparently, she couldn't have a reprieve in sleep either.

At least Sue had given her a week's leave from the Cheerios after her mother and her doctor firmly stressed how any strenuous activity could seriously injure her right now. Sue wasn't happy, but she had the sense enough not to risk the physical condition of her Captain, particularly with Nationals so close. She needed Quinn and Quinn knew it.

When her Mom came home, she fussed and fretted over her endlessly. Quinn reached a point where she couldn't bear another moment of her mother's stifling, overbearing 'TLC', and excused herself, saying she was going to see Sam for a while. Her mother had no objections.

"Just not too late, Quinny."

She wasn't going to see Sam.

Instead, she ended up right where she had left off earlier, McKinley High. The school was dark as athletic and other club activities were over for the evening, but the doors weren't locked yet. It was a strange, yet oddly free feeling to walk down the dark, empty halls of her high school, the one she was supposed to own, the one where she instilled fear and awe at the same time, the one where none but two people knew her for who she truly was.

Finding her way to the choir room, she was both surprised and not at all surprised to find Brad practicing on the piano.

"Seriously? This late?"

He glowered at her and she wisely chose not to question it any further.

"Well...since you're here...one more time?"

Brad only shrugged. Quinn knew what he was thinking. She'd been rehearsing the song for two weeks now. She was more than ready to perform it, but every time her chance came, she'd chickened out and gone back to practice it some more. She wanted it to be perfect, not a single mistake. There just couldn't be, not when it came to Rachel. Then all this happened.

Now she just wanted to sing it for its familiarity, its comfort. She needed something like that right now. So Brad began to play as she stood there dancing her fingers across the piano top lazily.
"I could put it down to being tired
Or coming home to an empty house
A passing moment, a little mad
No one around to stop me writing to you."

Rachel came in through the door just as Quinn had started to sing, pausing there in naked astonishment to see her girlfriend at the piano with her back to her. Instead of letting her presence be known, she just stood there and listened.

"I never wanna say it's love
But it's really what I'm thinking of"

The brunette sucked in a breath.

"I could apologize
And say 'tear it up
And put it down to the pills I've taken'
Seeing my friends with their lives moved on
Well I've been gently drifting"

Quinn stepped away from the piano and made her way to the risers, weaving her way slowly through them, running her hand along the back of the chairs as she sang. She never saw Rachel. Her hips swayed softly with the music. She was in her own world. A better one than the where she was now. One where she was on Rachel's arm for everyone to know. One where she was accepted. One where she was loved. One where she never had to be afraid.

"I never wanna say it's love
But it's really what I'm thinking of
I felt the same today
As I was feeling yesterday
It'll be the same tomorrow
From then on, it won't change
I never wanna say it's love
But it's really what I'm thinking of"

The music trailed off as Brad took his fingers off the keys and then it was her turn to finish alone. Quinn turned around, having reached the top of the risers, and finally saw the girl in the doorway. Their eyes met and she wavered slightly, but it didn't stop her from the last verse. Quinn's sweet voice crested out through the choir room without a single other sound to distract from it.

"I never wanna say it's love
But it's really what I'm thinking of."

After Brad left the two of them alone, Rachel finally broke away from the door.

"That was lovely," she said carefully as she approached her.

"I was…" Quinn swallowed thickly and averted her gaze. "I was going to sing it in Glee."

"Yeah?"

"F-for you."

"Where everyone would have thought it was for Sam," she said flatly.
She shrugged helplessly. "It would have been for you."

Just then, Rachel burst into a flood of tears.

"Quinn," she sobbed. "Are you alright? What happened? No one will tell me, you haven't answered any of my messages, and I've been so-

She wrapped her arms tightly around the smaller girl and buried her face in the dark hair. Rachel clung to her for dear life.

"I'm sorry," she croaked. "I'm sorry for putting you through so much. I know it's all my fault. I just couldn't handle-

"What did he say to you? What did my Daddy say?"

"It doesn't matter."

The embrace was roughly broken apart as Rachel forced herself away with angry, wet eyes.

"Don't you dare pull that! My fathers are keeping secrets, Quinn! They've never kept anything from me before. Our honesty policy was perhaps borderline inappropriate and now...it's become nonexistent. I've been struggling with it because even though I'm angry with them for not talking to me and being...the way they are right now...I know I'm keeping things from them as well. So it would be hypocritical, but you... YOU do not get to keep secrets, not from me."

"I love you, Rachel."

It came out without a single thought in her head, just like that. After all this time of trying so desperately to keep it bottled up, to keep it buried, it just came out. She just couldn't not say it anymore. The wall that had kept her at bay had suddenly crumbled all at once, without warning. And here they were. She really wasn't trying to avoid the question or skirt giving Rachel her answers, she just felt...like this was something Rachel deserved to know. After all Quinn was putting her through, she at least deserved to know that truth. She deserved to have Quinn risk her feelings and put it out there. How often had Rachel done that for her?

"W-what?" the brunette stammered, staring at her with wide, unblinking eyes.

Quinn was suddenly disappointed in herself for letting it come out so unceremoniously, without some kind of romantic build up. It should have been a bigger moment, a grand gesture, with candles, flowers, music, an elaborately home cooked meal, and prefaced with a love ballad. Rachel loved grand gestures. At least there had been a song, anyway, however accidentally that came about. That had to count for something. Rachel deserved to know. After all Quinn was putting her through, she at least deserved to know that truth. She deserved to have Quinn risk her feelings and put it out there. How often had Rachel done that for her?

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"I love you," Quinn repeated plainly without a hint of doubt or hesitancy, never taking her eyes off Rachel. "That's a secret I've been keeping. I couldn't say it before. I've never said it and really meant it. It was always just...expected. You know, you reach a certain point in a relationship, and usually they'll have said it to me, so I had to say it back and it was just...routine. But this time," she murmured, "for the first time in my whole life, I really mean it. I've wanted to tell you so badly, but I'm always afraid that you'll go away, that you'll break up with me, and if I told you the truth about how I felt and you left me, it would be worse so I tried not to let myself feel that way, but it didn't
work. It just…never worked. So there, it's not a secret anymore."

Quinn could swear the pounding of her heart was echoing through the room.

She did it. She finally did it. A part of her felt slightly nauseous, while the other was relieved. She'd told the truth, all of it, put herself out there to be crushed, no going back now.

She almost laughed.

No going back now? Who was she kidding? This had been set in stone from that first kiss in third grade. There was no going back from that.

Rachel looked up at her through thick lashes with big brown eyes of unadulterated shock.

"Say it again," she said in barely a whisper.

"A-all of that?" Quinn stammered nervously. "I don't think I can remember-"

"Just those words. The important ones."

"Oh," she breathed with relief. "I love you, Rachel Berry. I'm sorry if I ever made you think I didn't."

Rachel kissed her.

"Again."

Quinn was smiling now. "I love you."

Rachel kissed her harder.

"Once more?"

"Do you want me to record it for you?" she teased.

Rachel gasped delightedly. "That's a brilliant idea!"

"I was kidding!"

"Still brilliant."

"Just kiss me again," she said with roll of her eyes.

"Only if you agree to let me record it."

"You're going to be creepy and listen to it a hundred times a day," she said with an exaggerated huff.

"No! Only on the days I don't have you there to tell me in person."

"That's still creepy."

"Tell me again."

"Don't you want to wait till we record it?" she said teasingly.

"Absolutely not! Say…it…again."
"I'll say it as often as you want for the rest of our lives." She grinned widely. "I love you, Rachel."

That kiss left them both breathless.

"I love you too, Quinn," she murmured and her gaze flickered up to meet the hazel waiting for her, "But you still have to tell me what Daddy said."

She knew it was coming. So she took a deep breath and prepared herself.

"Did your Dad really kick him out?"

Rachel swallowed thickly, tears in her eyes again. "Yes... I've never seen them so upset with each other before. Not even when Dad lost their tickets to a Madonna concert when I was six."

She ran her fingers through Rachel's hair soothingly, threading through the dark, silky locks without a word.

"Tell me," Rachel insisted gently.

"He forbade me to see you anymore," Quinn replied dully, still looking at her hair and not her face, "banned me from your house."

"I see." She nodded, seeming to have expected as much.

"And if I didn't stay away from you, he would call my Mom and tell her about us."

At that, Rachel gasped in horror. "He WHAT?" she screeched. "H-how does he even know about us?"

Quinn shook her head, even though it hurt her neck to do so. "He doesn't. Just telling my Mother we're friends... he knows it wouldn't go over well with her."

Rachel started to cry again and she buried herself in the Quinn's arms. "I'm so sorry for what he did to you. That's not my father, Quinn, not the one I've known for 17 years. What he's doing... he's a stranger to me. I don't know my own father."

"He's just trying to protect you," she replied quietly.

"He's not giving you a chance. All my life, I've been raised to be understanding and forgiving of others, to believe that people can change, that forgiveness is one of the greatest gifts a person has to offer..." She sobbed with a hiccup. "How is this happening? I don't understand."

"Shhh..." Quinn murmured, holding her closer, and pressed her lips to her temple. "It's going to be all right."

"Are you going to break up with me now?" Rachel asked despondently.

The blonde pulled away sharply to see her face, though not enough to lose their hold.

"I just told you that I love you!" she snapped. "How could you POSSIBLY think that?"

"Daddy threatened to tell your Mom," she said gloomily with a halfhearted shrug. "If asked before this thing with you started, I would have sworn on Barbra herself that he would never do such a thing, let alone threaten..." She swallowed painfully. "But with the state he's in, I just don't know anymore. I don't know anything. He could, in all honesty, follow through. So why aren't you breaking up with me?"
"I told you!" Quinn said heatedly. "I love you! I may deserve a lot of things for what I did to you in
the past, Rachel, but I'll be damned if it means I never get to be with you. Maybe it should mean that,
but I don't care."

"It doesn't," she said firmly.

"Then don't ask me that again!"

"You're angry," Rachel said wonderingly and tilted her head slightly. "Why?"

_Because I'm the reason you're doubting yourself. I promised myself I would never be that for you,
not like it was with Finn, or Jesse, or Puck. I was going to be different._

"I'm not giving up on us," she said tightly. "So you can't either. Okay?"

Rachel smiled and cupped her face in her hands, stroking her cheeks lightly with the pad of her
thumbs, and Quinn could feel herself starting to calm at the soft touch on her skin.

"Okay."

Quinn huffed slightly and put her hands on her girlfriend's hips, pulling her in a little closer. "What
are you even doing here at this hour?"

Both girls were red eyed and positively drained from all the emotional turmoil they'd been put
through in the last two days. Right now, they just wanted to be near each other. Rachel wrapped her
arms around Quinn's middle and tucked herself into the crook of the blonde's neck.

"Forgot my IPod. It's been an off sort of day…" she sighed, her warm breath tickling the sensitive
skin at Quinn's throat. "Didn't want to wait until tomorrow and risk it being stolen, that is, if it hasn't
been already. What are you doing here?"

Quinn held her tighter. "I didn't know where else to go."

A few days later, Sue made the Trio choose between the Cheerios and Glee. Quinn was absolutely
devastated. She loved Glee. She loved being there and she knew how much it meant to Rachel, but a
cheerleading scholarship would give her more opportunities and that meant a more secure future...
Everything she was trying so hard to achieve. The big reason was to leave Lima and find a better life
for herself; the even bigger reason was to be with Rachel. It was true. At this point, she felt like it
was the only reason that she was doing it now, the only reason that gave her the strength enough to
go on like she was. Just getting out wasn't enough, but getting out so that she could be with Rachel?
That was enough to make her endure anything.

She'd already made up her mind when they first started dating that if Rachel got out of Lima and she
didn't…Quinn would end it. It would break Quinn's heart like it'd never been broken before,
probably end any chance of true happiness she'd ever know, but she'd do it because she would never
be the one to hold Rachel back. When she told her girlfriend about her choice of the Cheerios over
Glee, she expected a huge argument, a massive, angry, wounded, outburst from Rachel, but it was
nothing like that at all.

Instead, Rachel kissed her, said, "It's your choice, Quinn," and quickly brushed away the few tears
she shed before starting on a different topic of conversation, one that the blonde wasn't even
cognizant of because she was too dumbfounded by Rachel's response.
All day Rachel had been in her head. It wasn't in the usual way, but it was the image of her defeated expression, her disappointment that plagued her. Quinn was minutes away from boarding the bus for the National Cheerleading Championships while at the exact same time, the other Glee girls were on the field to help the boys win their game, not to mention perform the halftime show as well.

She watched Sue bark and rant at the younger Cheerios, herding them onto the bus, and she just suddenly didn't understand it anymore.

She wasn't going to let Rachel down again. She could make it without a scholarship. Glee was more important. Rachel was more important. And so she walked away from the Cheerios with Brittany and Santana in tow (mostly cause neither of them wanted Brittany dead from being shot out of that cannon). Sue Sylvester screamed after them, but Quinn only felt lightness in her heart. She'd made the right choice. Plus, she loved hearing Brittany mouth off to the Coach.

Why had they waited so long to do this again?

Quinn ran onto the field in her costume and zombie make up to cheer on her tiny, tiny, girlfriend surrounded by hulking football players. Seeing the danger surrounding the brunette, she swore she'd castrate any one of those idiot jocks if they hurt Rachel somehow. Sam saw her on the sidelines first and nudged Rachel with a whisper. She spun around wildly, having some difficulty seeing with the enormity of her ill fitting helmet, but managed to push it back enough to see Quinn with her pompoms and the beaming smile Rachel gave her made her choice that much more worth it.

They won Regionals because of Rachel's song 'Get It Right' and everyone knew it. The diva tried to give Quinn credit for co-writing it and praised the rest of them for coming up with the amazing 'Loser Like Me'. All were shocked to hear such modesty and team spirit coming out of Rachel Berry's mouth, all except for two.

Quinn stood in the wings with Sam as she watched Rachel perform her solo and every so often, the brunette would look back to her as she sang with a smile. Quinn didn't even realize she was crying until Sam wiped away her tears and brought them out on stage for the group performance.

She was shocked that she managed to remember a single step or line because of how wrapped up she was in the sheer wonder of Rachel Berry. She made it through somehow though and after they left the stage, having been announced the winners, Quinn immediately found an empty room and pulled Rachel inside to make sure her girlfriend knew just how truly extraordinary she was.

It was the day after Regionals that Rachel had her dance class. Originally, the deal was that Quinn would pick the diva up at her house, but since then, things had obviously changed. Quinn didn't want to renege on any terms - she'd promised after all - and she wanted to keep her promise, but she knew she couldn't just show up at the Berry home with Hiram practically waiting by the phone.

Rachel was no longer on speaking terms with her Daddy, though he had come back after a week of staying in a motel. He got the fiercest silent treatment Rachel Berry had in her to give. The husbands were working through their issues, doing their best to keep a cordial attitude when Rachel was around, but she didn't care. Her Dad was who she spoke to about anything necessary or unnecessary. He even knew she was still spending time with Quinn, but didn't object, and certainly didn't tell Hiram about it. Rachel was relieved for that small assist from her father. At least she hadn't completely lost all touch with both her parents.

Since her Dad knew about Quinn, it worked out just fine. Hiram always worked late on dance class nights, so Quinn was able to pull up right outside to take Rachel without fear of retribution. But
when Leroy came out the door with Rachel, it sparked an internal panic. As Rachel got in the car, she watched him go around the front to the driver's side, where he motioned for Quinn to step out.

Rachel had explained to her repeatedly how her father did not agree with what Hiram did and would have no part in keeping the two of them from spending time together, but Quinn still felt like a nervous wreck getting out to stand in front of him.

"How are you doing?" he asked gently.

"Getting by," she replied with a shrug.

"I trust Rachel has given you my side of things?"

"Yes, sir."

"Leroy."

"Yes…Leroy," she said uncomfortably.

"Give this some time to calm down, Quinn. My hope is that we'll all reach a point where we can sit down and discuss this – all four of us. But I want to personally apologize for his behavior that night and the way he treated you. It was wrong and-"

"Leroy?" she interrupted him tentatively. "If it's alright with you…I'd just rather not talk about it."

He looked disappointed, but nodded all the same. "Sure, Quinn. But please know that my husband and I are on different ends of the spectrum here. I believe your intentions towards Rachel are borne of sincerity. You really care about her, don't you?"

Quinn was desperately trying not to cry. "I-I really do."

Leroy suddenly wrapped his arms around her and squeezed lovingly. It took all Quinn had to not fall apart right then and there.

"We'll get through this," he said quietly.

When Quinn got back into the car and Leroy went back into the house, they sat there together quietly for a little while.

"Baby?" Rachel asked after some time had passed and the blonde had yet to look away from the steering wheel.

She seemed to snap to attention at that and looked at Rachel with red eyes, but a genuine smile.

"We are going to get through this."

With that, she started the car and drove Rachel to her class. They held hands the whole way.

Rachel was the slightest bit late, due to a combination of Leroy's talk and traffic, so she had to rush in without saying anything to Lindsay. Quinn seated herself behind the window as she did the last time and watched the whole rehearsal. Lindsay seemed standoffish towards Rachel even in routine and the instructor reprimanded her for it. Rachel couldn't do anything but wait until class was over and then immediately sought out the girl. Quinn watched them have a tense conversation, Lindsay at first unwilling, but Rachel pleading, but it didn't take very long before that changed into willingness and relief respectively.
The two girls were the last to leave the class again and Quinn stood up from her chair when they came out. Lindsay seemed to have a new, stony mask on to face Quinn. She hadn't been prepared before. Now she was. Quinn understood that all too well. She asked Rachel to give them a minute alone. It really was something that needed to be between just the two of them. Rachel was at first resistant about leaving them, but Lindsay took hard eyes off Quinn long enough to nod her approval to Rachel. With no other choice, she left the two behind in the studio to wait outside.

Rachel was pacing outside the doors. Exactly ten minutes had gone by. She knew because she checked every thirty seconds. Quinn had promised to be on her best behavior…but still she worried. Maybe they had differing opinions of "best behavior" as they did on so many other subjects.

She paced faster.

It was just over twelve minutes when then other two girls finally walked out, both smiling, to Rachel's cautious relief.

"So you're actually trying to convince me that that the carpet matches the drapes?"

"This is all natural! But don't think I don't know this is just you trying to get a look."

Lindsay guffawed. "Well, score one for Fabray! Guess I wasn't being as subtle as I thought."

"Somehow I get the feeling that subtlety isn't in your nature."

"Well, it is such a waste of time…" She shrugged in agreement. "Now, that was a 'no' to the look, right? I mean, how am I really going to be convinced if I can't see it for myself?"

"Lindsay!" Rachel cried, having overheard enough to know she didn't like what Lindsay was implying.

"Alright, alright!" She held her hands up in forfeit, looking between them. "A girl's gotta do what a girl's gotta do, you know. Besides, I'm sure Rachel here will be able to confirm for me sometime soon."

Rachel blushed a furious scarlet while Quinn lifted an eyebrow wickedly. "Oh, soon, I'm sure."

The two of them laughed, Rachel's cheeks were still burning, and Quinn squeezed the other girl's shoulder meaningfully. "See you around, Linds." She turned to Rachel and gestured towards the parking lot. "Meet you in the car?"

She obviously knew that Rachel wanted a chance to talk to Lindsay alone and make sure that the blonde had made good on her promise and not said anything more to hurt the girl. Nodding tightly, Rachel watched her walk off until she was out of earshot and then stepped towards her friend anxiously.

"Okay. Tell me everything. What did she do? If she was rude again, I so apologize-"

"Relax, Broadway." Lindsay smiled and pulled her into a brief hug. "Your girl was fine. She did and said all the right things this time around."

"Really?" Rachel replied skeptically, ignoring how her heart beat faster to hear Quinn referred to as 'her girl'.

"Yes. Really," she retorted playfully. "She explained her deal, how bad you guys have had it lately,
her own parents and that saga. She was good, Rach. Promise. She apologized for everything. *Profusely.* It was overboard, to be honest, but I know that was your doing."

"I just wanted her to be clear in conveying her sincere regrets-"

"Yeah, yeah, I got it." She waved her off. "Point is we're good, okay? Besides, how can I resist a chick that apologizes in the nicest way possible and then still manages to scare the shit out of me by telling me to keep my hands off her girl? She's alright in my book."

"She did what?" Rachel shrieked.

Lindsay was laughing again. "You have seriously got to chill. You think I don't get those threats on a daily basis? Please, my day isn't complete without at least three of those. And your Quinn's is, by far, going on my top ten."

"But she threatened you?" she squeaked, horrified.

"In a very nice way this time!" Lindsay insisted. "I was left feeling thoroughly frightened, but at the same time impressed. She's something else…won my respect in spades."

"I don't think I quite understand this…” Rachel shook her head. "Why are you okay with her threatening you?"

The other girl gave her a scathing look of disbelief. "You think I wouldn't do the same if you were mine? Quinn apologized, told me the truth about what was going on, but made it very clear that she's with you and that's that. Should I tread my dainty little toes over the line…she'll have something to say about it. Rather, something to do about it. All's fair in love and war, Broadway. You got a girl who's fierce and protective. She just hasn't gotten all the steps right yet. I wouldn't worry about it. She seems like the type who learns fast."

"When she wants to…” Rachel grumbled.

Lindsay kissed her cheek. "Be happy, babe. You got it rough now, but now isn't forever."

As the girl walked off, Rachel called after her uncertainly, "She was really okay?"

She looked back with a roguish grin. "Truth? If you didn't already have your claim, I'd totally be all up in that."

Rachel groaned, rolling her eyes. "That means virtually nothing. You flirt with everything that *breathes.* And, yes, I'm including animals, reptiles, and various other species of the non-human variety."

"Oh, fuck off," Lindsay shot back mildly while walking away. "I didn't mean *flirting.* With her? *That* would be something else. Better hold on tight, Broadway!"

"YOU STAY AWAY FROM HER!" she shouted in a fiery burst of jealousy and then blinked in surprise at what had just come out of her mouth.

Lindsay was almost halfway across the parking lot by then, streetlights shining down, when she turned around with a victorious grin and held her hands up to the sky.

"NOW THAT'S WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT!"

Rachel got into the passenger side of the car where Quinn was waiting and she turned down the
music when the brunette got in.

"Well? Did I pass, Miss Berry?"

"You're mine, right?"

Her brow furrowed. "Huh?"

"You're mine, aren't you, Quinn?" she asked pleadingly. "No matter what the rest of the world thinks, I still get to call you mine?"

The blonde tilted her head at her knowingly, seeming to want to say more, but instead it was a simple, yet resolute, "Yes."

Rachel gave a curt nod, staring out the windshield. "Good."

"Is everything okay?"

"Lindsay can't have you!" she burst out petulantly and somehow managed to stomp her foot in the car.

Quinn snorted with laughter at her girlfriend's indignant posture; she had her arms crossed tightly with a fierce pout. It reminded her of a toddler who didn't want to share her candy.

"Well, she can't have you either."

"So she can have her perfect hair and explicitly flirtatious personality," Rachel sniffed haughtily. "I've got the voice and the girl."

"Yes, you certainly do." She nodded, biting her lower lip in amusement. "God, you were so right about her! She's like the female version of Puck!"

"But not nearly as sexually promiscuous."

"Are you serious? From the way she talks…"

"It's mostly talk." Rachel shrugged. "She finds flirting the best way to release her sexual tension without resorting to full on contact nearly as often. I suppose the best way to describe it is that her sex life is somewhat akin to Heather Carlson's. Hardly meeting Brittany and Santana's level, but definitely not like-"

"Me?"

"I was going to use someone else as an example, but very well, since you volunteered…"

Quinn laughed. "She talks a major game though."

"I told her the first day we met that she was just like someone else I knew..." Rachel smiled fondly at the memory. "Perhaps if she wasn't only half Jewish then she would be the complete alter ego of Noah Puckerman."

The blonde looked at her curiously. "Did you just say that Jewish people are sluts?"

Rachel's mouth fell open incredulously. "I'm fairly certain that was not my point in the least."

"Well," she shrugged simply, "If it were true, we would have slept together already."
"Okay. That's it!" the diva snapped. "You are no longer allowed to spend any period of time that goes beyond five minutes with either Puck or Lindsay! They're a bad influence!"

"Or a very good influence…." she teased, blatantly licking her lips.

Rachel blushed again, for what felt the hundredth time that night, and turned away from Quinn so that she could get her breathing under control again.

"Thank you for apologizing to her."

Quinn only shook her head. "It was the right thing to do."

"Lindsay said you threatened her to back off of me."

"I did..." she said with some caution, yet didn't try to shy away from it.

"Was it because you think I'm attracted to her?"

Quinn sighed and trailed her fingers over the wheel, taking a long pause before answering. "Maybe a part of me worries about that," she admitted, "I can't help it, but I really just wanted her to know you were taken. That's all."

"And I couldn't do that myself?"

"With a girl like that? Sometimes they need to be told by someone else before it gets through."

Rachel settled herself down into the passenger seat more comfortably. "You impressed her."

She smirked. "I'm an impressive girl."

The brunette made a face. "And not at all lacking in humility."

"Guess I'm picking up a few things from you, hm?" she retorted.

"Oh, this one you already had." She wagged her finger at her reprovingly. "No blaming it on me."

"Rachel?"

"Yes?"

"I'd like to kiss you now."

"By all means..."

A few days after Regionals, Rachel already had Sam preparing for Nationals because she knew that their best bet would be to have a duet for the opening. Initially, he protested, wanting to relax and revel in the win, but Rachel was on a mission so he gave in rather than spend any more energy in a futile resistance. Rachel always got her way when it came to this. She'd accept no less. Besides, it wasn't like she was wrong necessarily...

"She could have at least given me the week!" he grumbled to Quinn who only smiled and shook her head soundlessly.

The plan was that they would practice with as many duets in Glee as possible, hopefully working in concordance with whatever assignment Mr. Schue gave them. That way not only would they have
more experience in singing together, but everyone else would get to see how well they worked together also, thus leaving them with little argument when the time came to propose Rachel and Sam to sing the lead duet at Nationals.

Meanwhile, the last two weeks had been difficult for Rachel and Quinn. They'd had to become even more creative with finding ways to spend time with each other now that Quinn was officially banned from the Berry house and technically couldn't be with Rachel at all...anywhere... Rachel hated being secretive with Hiram, but she was still so angry. She certainly wasn't going to abide by his demands, no matter how vehemently he pressed it, even if he was her father. Who knew Rachel Berry could be such a rule breaker? Dating someone Daddy didn't approve of... There was irony in it somewhere, but they didn't see the humor because of the exceeding emotional mess. However, she did still tell Leroy when she spent time with Quinn. So it wasn't a complete rebellion...

Even though Leroy was aware of the truth, he couldn't do anything to change Hiram's mind so instead he simply did nothing when Rachel reported to him. He hadn't been able to convince his husband to lift the ban, but it didn't mean he was going to impose it himself. That was Hiram's doing, not his, and he had made his position abundantly clear.

However, even with Leroy on their side, so to speak, the girls were still forced to come up with ways to get around Hiram who practically had Rachel on lockdown. Thus...improvisation!

Tonight was one of those nights. It was Saturday and Sam was babysitting. Quinn had already brought up the idea before, and so it was set. Rachel told her father she was going to help her friend from Glee watch his brother and sister as they rehearsed. She'd eagerly mentioned Sam, her new leading man, many times to her parents before, so Hiram didn't bat an eye and told her to have a good time. Leroy kissed her goodbye and whispered that she should say hello to Quinn for him.

The girls pulled up at almost exactly the same time in front of the Evans house. Rachel literally skipped over to where Quinn was getting out of her car and kissed the blonde deeply. Glassy eyed and a bit off balance from Rachel's talented mouth, Quinn let the brunette entwine their hands and lead her up to the front door.

She rang the bell, but never took her eyes off Rachel, who giggled bashfully at the attention.

"Why are you looking at me like that?"

Quinn licked her lips ever so subtly, still tasting that kiss, and gave her an adoring smile.

"You just look beautiful tonight."

"I thought you didn't like this sweater," she said suspiciously. "I wanted to wear something different for you, but it's laundry day and-"

"Who cares about the sweater?"

Sam flung open the door suddenly.

"FINALLY!" he cried and made a wild grab for Rachel's hand, yanking her into the house. Quinn was stunned and alone on the steps, entirely unacknowledged, and forced to be the one to close the door behind them.

_Uh... when did she turn invisible?_

Bewildered, she found them already in the dining room poring over a bunch of sheet music Sam had laid out piece by piece. His guitar was lying on a nearby chair.
"See, I've got that down," he gestured to the guitar, "I've been practicing mad crazy, but it's here," he pointed to a spot on the paper which Rachel nodded at, "that I keep messing up. I can't get my voice to go there, Rach! I've been doing the exercises you told me and everything! I just can't get it."

"Calm down." The brunette patted his shoulder reassuringly. "You can do this. There's absolutely no reason why you can't. I know what you're capable of, Sam. You're just not used to this register, which is what the vocal exercises are for. Once you grow more accustomed, you'll hit this note every time without a second thought."

"I've tried!" he exclaimed helplessly, tugging his fingers through long, messy blonde hair.

It was getting a bit too long actually. Quinn made a mental note to remember to tell him to get it cut soon. It didn't matter if he was a fake boyfriend, a real boyfriend, or just a plain friend - he still needed to cut his hair.

"Have you gone through all of the exercises? From start to finish?"

"Yes!"

Rachel gave him a look.

"Okay, so not all. Like most of them…"

Another look.

"Fine! Half! But they're super long and take forever…"

"If you want results, Sam, you have to make the effort. I didn't just wake up one day and start singing like I do now."

"No, she came out the womb doing it," Quinn said jokingly, finally inserting herself into the conversation.

She'd been watching their exchange with undisguised amusement until then and stepped up behind Rachel, slipping her arms easily round the shorter girl's waist, and rested her chin on her shoulder. Rachel glanced back with a sweet smile before refocusing on Sam who was still despairing over the failed attempts.

"We're doing this on Monday in front of everyone and I'm gonna screw it up!"

"Now, I'll have none of that Sam Evans!" Rachel said sternly. "We'll work on it tonight, okay? I promise you, I won't leave here until you're hitting that note like you could do it in your sleep!"

He was apprehensive, but nodded all the same.

"If I can't get it…"

"We won't do the song," she assured him.

He exhaled heavily, relieved.

"But we are doing the song because you can do this. So stop whining and let's get to work!"

Quinn took that as her cue and kissed Rachel on the cheek before leaving the two to rehearse by themselves as she went off in search of the younger Evenses.
"QUINN!"

Stevie saw her first and nearly knocked her over when he jumped full force into her arms. Stacy heard her name and came barreling around the corner to attach herself to Quinn's leg. She laughed and hugged them both the best she could.

"Miss me guys?"

"Lots and lots!" Stacy chirped.

"Well, you two certainly like me more than those people in the dining room."

Sam and Rachel's voices sounded throughout the house accompanied by Sam's guitar. Stevie dropped down from her arms and Stacy perked up curiously.

"Who's that with Sammy?"

Quinn kneeled down before the two of them with a mischievous grin.

"That is Rachel Berry. Wanna sneak in and watch?"

The two small blondes nodded eagerly and Quinn took both their hands for them all to go back into the other room and listen to Sam and Rachel's most recent duet.

"If she says anything when you sing for her later," Quinn whispered in Stacy's ear, "Just ignore it, okay, sweetie?"

Chapter End Notes

'Never Wanna Say It's Love' - Dido
They walked out of the Evans house after politely saying goodnight to Sam's parents who were beyond pleased to see their younger, rowdier two children sound asleep in their beds, the house straightened up, the kitchen cleaned, and the three teenagers sitting around laughing and singing while Sam played his guitar. It was the first time Rachel had ever met Mr. and Mrs. Evans and she could tell they were every bit as kind and good as their son was. They seemed excited to meet her because apparently Sam had mentioned her a few times in passing...his new friend in Glee that he sang with a lot.

The only downside to the entire evening was that ever-present reminder that Quinn wasn't hers to claim to the world yet. After the Evenses hugged their son's girlfriend hello, Sam introduced Rachel as Sam and Quinn's good friend. For as used to it as she should be by now, it still made her stomach turn as she watched the parents cooing over Sam and Quinn – the perfect couple – and how everything was going for them.

Quinn explained to Rachel beforehand that Sam had to lie to his parents as well because they went to church with her parents. If he'd given them a half lie...or even the whole truth...who knows what would have happened? What could have slipped out? Their lies could implode before their very eyes.

The blonde bit the inside of her cheek fiercely as she told Rachel how difficult it was for him to deceive his parents like that. She hated that he had to do it and that he was doing it for her. She didn't cry, but her voice trembled as she said, "I'm screwing everyone up." Rachel couldn't do much else but hold her. She didn't refute it in any case, because it was true, Quinn's needs were putting a heavy strain on both Rachel's and Sam's lives. Only the fact is...they were willing to do it for her. She had asked them and they had agreed. Whether it was the right thing to do, the healthy thing, the smart thing, the less hurtful...they had agreed and it was indeed their choice. Quinn did not and could not make it for them.

They were halfway down the front walk when Rachel reached out and took Quinn's hand. The blonde smiled and pretended not to notice.

"That was nice. I had a wonderful time."

"Good."

"You were right about his siblings, they truly are adorable. Stevie is beyond charming while Stacy is just simply precious."

They stopped at the side of Quinn's car, the blonde leaning against the hood, while Rachel stood in front of her. They had their hands entwined.

"I was proud of you for keeping quiet when Stacy sang," Quinn teased, "though I saw that vein popping out..."

Rachel sniffed and tossed her hair back. "I admit it was quite a feat to keep my opinions to myself, but as you said, it would have been inappropriate to so harshly critique a child of that age who obviously will not be pursuing a musical career."
Quinn giggled and pulled the brunette a little closer.

"You..." Rachel started tentatively and then seemed to screw up the courage enough to say what she wanted. "You're so good with those children, Quinn. They're absolutely in love with you."

The blonde looked at her hard for a long moment and then yanked her hands away.

"Don't."

"I only meant-"

"I know what you meant," she said harshly and stood up, putting some distance between them, "and I'm telling you don't."

...As if that had ever stopped Rachel before. She pushed forward anyway, despite her increasing nervousness about how upset her girlfriend was.

"Quinn, you never talk about it. It's not good for you to keep all these things bottled up. Look at what it did to us..."

"What part of 'DON'T' do you not understand?" she snapped and threw open the car door. "It's really freaking easy, Rachel. I tell you not to talk about it, and then you don't talk about it. See? Easy!"

"I just want to help."

"WELL, YOU'RE NOT!"

"Quinn..." she murmured, wounded, stepping back.

Rachel hadn't meant to hurt her, she only wanted what she said, to help. Quinn always kept things buried too deeply, so deeply that even she didn't understand how badly it was affecting her. She wasn't listening to what was inside her, what she was feeling and thinking. And, the result was, predictably, misplaced anger, feelings of chaos, loss of control. All Rachel wanted to do was help her see that. Pushing things away, keeping emotions locked up, was no longer an option, not anymore because Quinn had her now. Rachel wanted to be the one Quinn would open up to, she wanted to see inside the mystery that Quinn consistently proved herself to be. Rachel didn't want to learn about her piece by piece, little by little; she wanted the door flung open and to be able to walk inside to the mind and soul of Quinn Fabray. Would she ever get to have that?

The blonde sighed and took a deep breath, leaning her head against the car door. She didn't say anything for a few long moments, her gaze fixated far off on nothing in particular. It was with a heartrending sadness that Rachel heard her speak again. As the anger dissipated, she started to see the real Quinn coming out again – her Quinn - the one that she hid so deeply beneath that HBIC Fabray façade she wore.

"I can't do it. Don't you see? There's a reason why I don't talk about it."

"You've mentioned your pregnancy in passing several times before, why not?"

"That was different!" she cried. "It wasn't real then, you know? It was just this weird, awful time in my life where my body wasn't my own and bloated up horribly, giving me stretch marks I'll never get rid of. But to talk about after...that's different. I-It became real. So I can't talk about it, Rach."

Her voice cracked, but there were no tears. Only a harrowing weariness that Rachel knew was too profound for someone so young. "It's the only way I can live with myself."
She didn't know what else to do as she looked at the blonde who was physically only a few feet away, but looked as if she wanted to get in the car and drive away as fast as possible. Quinn had wrapped her arms around herself as she stood in front of the open car door. It looked like it was taking all her self control not to do it. It meant something that she was actually fighting that feeling. So with a heavy heart and invisible tears for her love's pain, Rachel closed the distance, pushed Quinn's soft locks back from her face, and kissed her.

Quinn resisted a little bit at first, but Rachel was stubborn, and soon she had melted into her arms.

"I won't talk about it," she murmured against her lips, "But I will always be here if you decide someday you do."

"I love you," Quinn whispered.

Rachel smiled and kissed her again.

"Right back at you."

"Do you believe me yet?"

"What?"

"Do you believe that I love you?"

Taken aback by the sudden turn of events, Rachel stared at Quinn agape for several long moments before turning her eyes downcast in a sort of shame.

"I'm...I'm...I'm trying to," she stammered out at last and looked up at her in disbelief. "How did you even...?"

"I know you." Quinn shrugged as if it didn't bother her in the least, when the reality was just the opposite. Yet, she put on a brave front. Sometimes it felt like that was all she ever did – put on a front. It became difficult, if not impossible, to know the difference between the two after using it for so long.

"I understand," she said casually, but it didn't have that flippant tone that would usually accompany it. "It's only fair that you would doubt me. I'll just wait until you do believe the truth someday."

"It helps to hear you say it..." Rachel mumbled shyly, "even more when you show it."

"Then that's what I'll do."

"So you'll say it again?"

Quinn laughed and brought their mouths together, kissing her deeply and lovingly in such a way that it made Rachel feel like all the time in the world existed just for them, just for this. With her head spinning, her heart racing, her body alive with desire, they broke apart and Rachel had no idea how much time had passed, only able to stare at Quinn in amazement.

"I love you," the blonde said again huskily and then her swollen lips quirked into a half smile. "Like that?"

"Yeah..." Rachel replied hoarsely and gulped. "J-just like that."
Quinn spent most of Monday afternoon giggling. It seems Rachel's reassuring, patient attitude had a very specific time limit. By the time Glee rolled around, the diva's gentle encouragement was nowhere to be seen - every time Sam would throw her nervous puppy dog eyes, she would glare at him with a fearsome 'mess this up and I will destroy you and everything you love' face, which only made him fret all the more.

He was sweating when they walked into Glee and Quinn refused to hold his gross and clammy palm, but when they sat down next to each other, Rachel speaking with Brad on the other side of the room, she kissed his cheek and patted his leg.

"You're going to be fine. I heard you guys do this plenty of times. You sounded amazing. Stop psyching yourself out."

"She'll KILL me if I screw up, Quinn!" He glanced between her and Rachel.

"You're worried about what Rachel will think?" she said incredulously.

She thought this was about looking like an idiot in front of the Glee club, not about Rachel's opinion…

"You know what she's like!" he insisted. "If I miss a beat, a note, anything, she'll have the police at my door for 'misrepresentation' or something. I don't want to go to jail!"

Quinn was at an absolute loss. "What the hell are you talking about? Where did you even get that?"

"It's what she said!" he explained, lowering his voice, as his eyes darted nervously over to Rachel, who was still standing by the piano, unaware of the fact that she was the topic of conversation. "If I mess up, she'll sue! Blackmail! Slap me with a lawsuit. Put out a hit on me. Anything! She's been off the charts scary, Quinn…" he whined.

The blonde started giggling uncontrollably - much to Sam's consternation - and it took her a while to get it back under control. Really, all she could do was kiss his cheek again and reassure him that everything would be just fine. Rachel would never put him in jail.

Sam wasn't convinced.

Mr. Schuester walked in and started the lesson so Rachel left Brad after what looked like some very stern instructions – Brad was glowering – and she joined Quinn and Sam on the risers, seating herself next to Quinn. The boy gulped and gave her a panicked side-glance which Rachel only narrowed her eyes at and crossed her arms impatiently.

"SCREW THIS UP AND DIE, BLONDIE."

Okay, so Rachel didn't say that, but that was the feeling Quinn got anyway.

She couldn't help it, the giggles started again. She had no idea that getting these two together as friends would result in such ridiculousness. A few members of the Glee club looked at her strangely so she fake-coughed and tried to compose herself, sitting up straighter.

Mr. Schue talked about Nationals and that they needed to start preparing. Dancing wasn't their strong suit (an understatement, Quinn thought, looking across the room at Finn in disgust), so he wanted Brittany and Mike to help them come up with some practice routines and really step up their game in that area. Quinn couldn't agree more and apparently so did Rachel because she was nodding alongside her vigorously.
"But before we get to that, I know Rachel and Sam have been working on something for us so why don't you guys come on up?" Mr. Schue waved them forward and went to take his seat.

No one but Finn really seemed have a reaction to hearing that Rachel and Sam were going to perform together again.

"Didn't you just sing with him like, last week or something?" he grumbled as the two made their way to the middle of the room.

"Actually, it was two weeks ago, Finn," Rachel replied politely, "and is there something wrong with that? I happen to think our voices fit together quite well."

"Totally," Brittany agreed, jumping in. "It was a surprise, you know, cause he's so blonde and you're so Jewish, but it majorly works."

"I'm with my girl." Artie nodded, sitting next to Brittany. "You guys sound mad good."

This only pissed Finn off even more and Santana was starting to look testy now.

"Well, thank you both very much. It's generous of you to point it out because it is, in fact, entirely true. Now, Sam?"

The boy looked like a deer in headlights the second she said his name. With a roll of her eyes, she pointed to his forgotten guitar off to the side of the room while tapping her foot. Realizing it now, he scrambled for the guitar and slung the strap over his shoulder before uneasily coming back to Rachel.

Quinn gave her girlfriend a reproving look from the risers, conveying wordlessly that she needed to take it easy on the poor guy. Rachel saw it and reluctantly caved, muttering something under her breath before she pulled Sam down to whisper in his ear just as the piano started.

Whatever she said seemed to calm him down, because a little bit of color came back to his cheeks, and he took a deep breath, breaking into a smile. He started to play his guitar and Rachel looked back at Brad one more time before getting ready for her part.

It was then that Quinn realized that the music playing wasn't the song she heard them rehearsing Saturday night. This was something new. Frowning, she leaned forward in her seat, wondering just what was going on.

"They say that home is where the heart is,
I guess I haven't found my home.
We keep driving around in circles,
Afraid to call this place our home."

Sam tilted his head and came in closer to Rachel as she sang. A bittersweet look passed between them, but then Rachel smiled and the tinge of sadness wasn't so strong anymore. Then Sam joined in with her, in a higher key than Quinn had ever heard him reach before.

"And are we there yet?"

The rest of the club was equally shocked; there were impressed murmurs echoing throughout the room. Sam strummed his guitar slowly and watched Rachel as he sang to her and only to her. The intimacy between the two could have easily made anyone believe there was something romantic underlining this, but all Quinn saw were the two people she loved most in the world singing beautifully. Sam sang softly:
"They say there's linings made of silver,
Folded inside each rainy cloud.
Well we need someone to deliver,
Our silver lining now."

There was something special about this for them. Rachel touched his cheek in a gentle caress. Instead of singing a song, it was as though they were confiding in each other, a conversation no one else was really meant to hear.

When she took over again, her voice high, sweet, and strong, Quinn could feel Rachel carrying her away.

"And are we there yet?
And are we there yet?
And are we there yet?
And are we there yet?"

Sam left her to set aside his guitar and came back with his arms unburdened. He harmonized just a second or two behind her, rounding it out with two distinct voices that complemented each other.

"Home, (home), home, (home).
Home, (home), home, (home)."

As Sam sang another solo part, he took Rachel's face in his hands, leaning in as if he was trying to tell her something important.

"They say you're really not somebody,
Until somebody else loves you."

Rachel bit her lip shyly and pulled his hands away.

"Well, I am waiting to make,
Somebody, somebody soon."

Quinn's heart beat faster.

They sang the chorus together this time, Sam echoing her.

Not once during the whole song had either of them even bothered to look at the audience. Quinn felt a cold streak of jealousy through her veins, but willed herself to keep it under control. She wasn't jealous because she thought there was anything between the two other than friendship.

She just wanted to be the one up there with Rachel.

"Where you will lie on the rug,
While I play with the dog?"

Rachel took Sam's larger hands in hers and looked up to listen to him.

"And you won't be too much,"

He shook his head reassuringly with a wide grin, and then they harmonized radiantly, eyes never leaving the other.

"Because this is too much."
Because this is too much for me to hold.
This is too much for me to hold.
Home, (home), home."

Rachel took her hands away and turned towards the audience at last. Quinn grew warm all over and her stomach flip-flopped when the diva focused in on her. There was something in the way Rachel looked at her, the way Rachel always looked at her, that had time slowing down and speeding up simultaneously, a way that had her whole world turn inside out and perfect, a way that made her feel special and loved, a way that made her feel like she was the only person in the world, the only one Rachel would love more than anything.

Quinn wanted to leap off the risers right that second, take Rachel in her arms, and never let go.

The diva looked to Sam with a soft smile.

"And are we there yet?"

"And are we there yet?"

Together they finished in a flawless, sweet note.

"And are we there?"

Rachel glanced at Quinn and a singular thought passed between them.

'Someday we will be.'

The music slowed to a stop and Sam wrapped his arms around Rachel in a loving hug, partly because it felt like the right thing to do in that moment, but also because he was so overcome with relief that he hadn't messed up. Rachel squeezed him back to let her know how proud she was.

The Glee club was quiet at first - unsure of just what exactly happened. It wasn't because Sam and Rachel weren't good, it was because they were great. Nearly every single one of them looked back at Quinn anxiously to see how the HBIC would react to such an emotionally charged, intimate performance her boyfriend had just participated in.

"And that," Rachel said to the stunned club, bringing their attention back as she left Sam's arms, "is what we, in the business called show, say is chemistry!"

Mr. Schue stood up clapping, looking just as blown away as everyone else was. He ran up to them bubbling with praise, squeezing both their shoulders excitedly. By then, the club figured out that Quinn wasn't going to be throwing a hissy fit so they applauded, showing their full admiration.

"Damn, guys! That was hot!"

"It was so sweet, I loved it."

"Off the chain, yo!"

"That was better than anything you ever did with Finn!"

"No way! Rachel and I are totally better than that."

"Dude, get over it. Evans kicked your ass."

"You looked amazing together!"
"You sounded amazing!"

Rachel was beaming as she took her seat by Quinn once more and Sam rejoined them on the other side as well. After Mr. Schue started talking again, making plans with Brittany and Mike for their "dance boot camp" the rest of the club had focused in on that, leaving Rachel and Sam finally safe to look at Quinn, which they did simultaneously.

"Did you like it?" Rachel whispered.

"We wanted to surprise you," Sam added.

"Surprise me?" she echoed in confusion.

"Yes," Rachel replied, still whispering, and nodded. "That was for the three of us. Weren't you listening?"

"I listened," she said coolly.

Sam's face fell. "So you didn't like it?"

"Shush!" Rachel swatted him. "She loved it."

"How do you know?" Quinn snapped.

The brunette leaned in, looking round to ensure no one else was paying attention to them. "I saw you, Quinn," she said huskily. "I saw the way you were looking at me. Come on, tell the truth..."

At that, Quinn couldn't hold it up anymore and her mouth curled up into a broad smile.

Rachel just smirked in satisfaction and settled back into her seat. Quinn couldn't find it in her to take her eyes off of Rachel, but she bumped her knee with Sam's so that he would know the truth as well. The boy sighed in relief and slung his arm over the back of her chair, finally relaxing after what seemed like days of being on edge. The three of them were quiet as they listened to the rest of the lesson and watched Mike and Brittany start to come up with some basic routines for them.

"I gotta put the ax in my truck before football practice," Sam explained as he was rushing out at the end of class.

"I'll walk you," Rachel said brightly, collecting her things. "Quinn?"

She shook her head. "I have to go to my locker. Meet you by the gym?"

Rachel nodded and Sam took her hand as they walked out, it just seemed natural. Quinn watched them go with a frown.

She wasn't jealous.

Why wasn't she jealous? If it were anyone else…

But it wasn't anyone else. It was Sam. And even though she knew how it looked, how any normal person would probably feel about seeing their significant other so cozy with someone else, she just couldn't feel anything but happy. Things were finally calming down…well, calming down in the sense that life wasn't feeling like a black pit of despair at the moment.

"How can you let them do this to you?"
Quinn was broken out of her thoughts and looked up to see an infuriated Finn Hudson standing over her.

_Ugh, not with this._

"Excuse me?"

"Look at them!" he gestured to the empty doorway where Sam and Rachel had just left. "They're practically shoving it in your face. How can you stand for it? The Quinn I know would never let someone do that to her!"

"Finn..." she sighed, rubbing a spot on her forehead where she could feel a headache beginning to form. "Are you talking about Sam and Rachel?"

"OF COURSE!"

The rest of the Glee club, who hadn't noticed the conversation before, went quiet. All eyes and ears were on them eagerly now. They wanted to see how this would go down, most of them had been thinking something along the same lines as Finn, but no one had the guts to say it to HBIC Fabray's face.

"Who else would I be talking about? Sam's messing around with Rachel behind your back!"

"Oh, for the love of..." Quinn raised her eyes to the ceiling, trying to keep her temper under control. Finn was one of the last people she ever wanted to talk to these days. "They're just _friends_. Sam's my boyfriend, Rachel's my friend, and now they're friends. That's ALL."

"Yes...I'm still stuck on exactly the how the miracle of all miracles occurred when sworn enemies turned into besties overnight..." Kurt interjected loftily.

"It wasn't overnight!" Quinn barked, causing the other boy to raise his hands in surrender, and then she refocused on Finn. "Enough with the little boy tantrums, they just make this even more ridiculous than it already is!"

"He just walked out of here holding hands with another girl!" Finn insisted.

"Yeah? So? Did I miss the memo where that means they're hooking up?" she retorted sarcastically.

"You seriously don't think anything's going on with them? Open your eyes! They're singing together all the time! A-and Rachel's all _googly_ over him! She won't come back to me, but she keeps saying there's no one else. I know she's lying. She's into him, Quinn! And he's not saying crap about it. He's supposed to be with you! How can you put up with it?"

"This conversation is so beyond..." Quinn couldn't help it, she started laughing, much to Finn's bewilderment. "I'm leaving. You need to get over her, Finn. Face it, Rachel doesn't want you anymore and you can't stand it. That's what has you so pissed off and just because _you_ screwed up, doesn't mean you get to take it out on me."

She grabbed Mike's hand as she started for the door. The boy looked shocked, but Quinn ignored it and looked to Tina. "I'm holding your boyfriend's hand - does that mean we're hooking up on the side?"

"Not a chance," she replied.

"Oh, would you look at that!" Quinn turned back to Finn. "Two people holding hands without it
meaning anything but platonic affection! And here you thought that was impossible…"

With that, she stalked out still holding Mike's hand with Tina following, leaving behind a very, very angry and confused boy.

Quinn walked down the hallway in a rage, her fury growing with every step rather than dissipating as it should. Something on her arm suddenly yanked her to a halt and she whirled around, eyes flaring. A thoroughly baffled and frightened Mike Chang stared at her with Tina next to him furrowing her brow.

"Uh …" he gestured down to their linked hands, which Quinn had completely forgotten about. Unknowingly, she had just half dragged the boy down the hall without so much as a word.

Mike breathed a sigh of relief when she finally released him and shook his sore hand. Apparently, she'd been holding on to him tighter than she thought.

"Are you alright?" Tina asked.

"Just peachy!" she spat and spun on her heel, leaving the couple behind to scratch their heads.

Sam and Rachel waited near the boy’s locker room. Practice was going to start soon and he had to get suited up, but he wanted to keep Rachel company until Quinn got there. He had his arm over her shoulder as he tried to show her the right finger position for a guitar note. Rachel laughed as she tried to imitate his claw like hand and then narrowed her eyes in that well known expression of determination, her tongue peeking out a bit as she tried to match him. Sam chuckled and moved her fingers for her until she got it right.

Quinn wanted to rip his throat out.

"GET OFF OF HER!" she roared, storming up to them.

She hadn't meant to yell it like that, or actually say it out loud at all, but she did. Anyone milling around in the hall right then heard her loud and clear. They turned around to stare.

Quinn normally would have found the scene endearing, wonderful even. The two of them getting along so well? It was more than she could have ever asked for. She loved that they were growing so close, that they were ALL becoming such good friends. That Rachel and Sam weren't just friends (or barely tolerant acquaintances) by proxy anymore. Yes, she would have been happy to see such a thing…if it weren't for Finn still in her head, taunting, sneering. In his obnoxiously moronic way he'd managed to get under her skin big time.

Sam immediately took his arm off Rachel and stepped away, looking freaked out. Rachel knew better though.

"What happened?" she asked.

"Nothing!" Quinn snapped and glared at Sam. "What the hell do you think you're doing? Your hands were all over her!"

"I was just showi-"

"I don't care! You stay away, you hear me? I've had it with you pawing at her all the time!"

"What the-!"
She cut him off with an impatient wave of her hand. "Don't you have somewhere to be?"

"Yeah, actually, I do," he said none too kindly, glaring back at her now. "I just didn't want to leave Rachel alone."

"Well, she's not alone anymore, is she? GO. NOW!"

Rachel's mouth dropped open at the blonde's behavior while Sam clenched his jaw.

"You know what," he growled, "do us all a favor, Quinn, and remove whatever it is you've got stuck up your ass!"

Sam stormed off, disappearing into the boy's locker room, and Rachel just crossed her arms wearily with a look that Quinn knew to be disappointment.

"I'll simply repeat... 'what happened'?"

The blonde just shook her head, feeling the eyes still on them. She'd just gone and made things so much worse now. Tomorrow her jealous 'lover's spat' with Sam would be all over the school. It would be all but official that he was cheating on her with Rachel because of the way she reacted now.

This was one of those times she really wanted to put her foot through a wall again, but she remembered how much it hurt last time, and it just wasn't worth it. Instead, she simply left to go to her car without saying a word to Rachel, who remained at her side as they walked through the parking lot.

They had planned to go to the mall after school today. Quinn feigned needing some new clothes when really she just wanted to cajole Rachel into trying on some decidedly scandalous things and model them for her in the dressing rooms, perhaps even make Jacob's crazy 'caught naked in Nordstrom's after being too loud' rumor just a little closer to the truth.

Instead, Quinn was just sitting in the car with Rachel, doing nothing, saying nothing, going nowhere.

"Do you plan on explaining yourself any time soon or will you just be brooding for the rest of the afternoon?"

"Finn was being stupid."

"That is hardly an acceptable explanation."

She groaned and relented. "He thinks Sam's cheating on me with you."

"And here I was under the impression we were participating in an equal, tri-amorous relationship," Rachel teased.

It wasn't funny.

"Quinn!" she cried, eyes widening when the blonde didn't react. "You don't mean to tell me you actually believe Sam and I."

"Of course not!" she exhaled. "It has nothing to do with that."

"Well, what is it then? You're not angry with Sam."

"What? How do you know?"
Rachel was right, Quinn wasn't angry with Sam, but her actions had obviously indicated otherwise so she was curious as to how the girl was so certain…

"I can tell." Rachel shrugged. "You have a way of taking out your frustrations on other people, however unwarranted and inappropriate. It couldn't hurt to perhaps consider that a working point in your personality. That said, I don't think Finn, no matter what happened between you two, is truly behind this either. And you're not angry with me otherwise we would be having a very different sort of conversation. So who is the recipient of your ire, Quinn?"

Me.

Always me.

"Quinn?" Rachel prompted again when she didn't respond for a while.

How badly she had wanted to tell that gargantuan ape of her ex-boyfriend today, at that very moment, to claim Rachel as hers.

'She's in love with me, Finn! Not Sam! She loves me. Rachel's mine and you can't EVER have her back!'

How close she'd been to screaming those very things, shouting it in front of the entire Glee club so they would all know the truth. She loved Rachel. Rachel loved her. No one was going to come between them. It'd been on the very tip of her tongue. How dangerously close…

It was too dangerous.

"I think we should go to the mall," she said and started the car, driving out of the parking lot before her girlfriend could protest.

"You're going to have to apologize to Sam."

"Whatever."

Even as she said it, guilt was gnawing away her in the pit of her stomach. Sam didn't deserve her outburst today, he never did. Just after having to lie to Finn and everyone so bluntly again, not being able to claim Rachel as hers, seeing Sam with his arm so casually draped over her girlfriend made something snap inside her.

Even Sam got to touch Rachel more freely in public than she did. How was that right? She was so tired of all of this. She loved Sam, but she wanted to be the one to have Rachel in her arms without having to worry about the consequences. She wanted to sing a duet with Rachel and be able to touch her like that in front of everyone. Sam and Rachel could put on a show and have it mean nothing, but Quinn couldn't even have half of that. It just wasn't fair. None of this was ever fair - to any of them.

Where was that silver lining they sang about? When would they be there? How much more of this could Quinn take? How much more before Rachel gave up and finally left her like she deserved?

She glanced out of the corner of her eye at the brunette who had been watching her every move.

"A little groveling wouldn't hurt," Rachel said.

"I don't grovel."

"Fine, then just a sincere apology, because he's done so much for you, Quinn, and you just-"
"I KNOW!"

The diva let them lapse into silence for a moment after that outburst before speaking again carefully. "Perhaps we shouldn't do the mall trip today. Your mood isn't quite on par with such a social outing."

That got Quinn's attention and she looked at her. "Y-you don't want to hang out?"

"Not if you continue to behave in such a manner."

"I'm sorry," she said with a groan, "I'm just a little frustrated, but I'll get over it, okay? We don't have to go to the mall. We could do something else if you want?"

"Do you think you can calm down enough to be pleasant company?"

"Promise."

Rachel considered it for a moment and then said, "All right, we continue on with our shopping plans."

Quinn nodded and they drove in silence for a little while. Rachel gazed out the window while Quinn focused on the road. It wasn't uncomfortable, per se, but it wasn't their usual ease either.

"I'll call him tonight," Quinn said finally.

"A gift would be appropriate as well."

"Chapstick?"

"Perfect."

And with that, they were back to normal.

To hell with Finn.

Chapter End Notes

"Are We There Yet?" by Ingrid Michaelson
Sam and Quinn had made up by the next morning, following a humble conversation over the phone that night. Sam forgave her after a bit of grumbling, but he said he understood. She still bought him Chapstick though. They had to put on a more affectionate show than usual for the masses just to quash the rampant rumors of a love triangle explosion among the three of them. Rachel swallowed it like a bitter pill and tried to avoid the two as much as possible that day. It only got worse when they were in Glee. While they were practicing their dance routines for Nationals, Finn managed to backhand her accidentally – sending her sprawling backwards onto the stage floor.

Quinn had to be held back by Sam as she ranted and raged at the hulking teenager for being so careless. Finn tried to bend down to check on Rachel, but Puck yanked him away, just as Quinn managed to get loose from Sam, saving Finn from having his eyes clawed out. Sam and Quinn tended to Rachel, who was in shock and terrified about what it meant for her nose, together. It was her worst nightmare come true. Sam wanted to go with them to the doctor, but Quinn insisted on taking Rachel alone. Finn tried to go too, demanding that he had a right to see whether or not she was okay, but Mr. Schuester quickly took him aside, out of harm's way, and murmured about how that wouldn't be the best idea and just to let it be. He, like everyone else, saw how dangerously close the two protective blondes had been to physically attacking Finn.

When they found out Rachel's nose was indeed broken, the typically quiet and calm doctor's office was filled with the sound of Quinn's outrage. She roared about how she was going to "murder Finn-cept" and various other violent things until the diva managed to calm her down a bit with reassurances that she would be fine and Finn did not need any of his body parts removed or time in prison for assault.

Then the doctor made the mistake of mentioning a nose job.

Rachel had never seen a grown man run away so frightened before.

The next day, Finn apologized profusely from five feet away, which was as close as Sam and Quinn would allow. Though trying to be brave, Rachel really was concerned about what her nose looked like and said after the doctor's appointment that perhaps she should give it serious consideration and that "some mild alterations" wouldn't be such a bad thing. However, as soon as she said that, Quinn was aghast and made her swear never to change a thing.

"But I love your nose!"

"I don't approve of lying, Quinn, however well-meaning it may be."

The blonde let it go, but she spent the next day pulling Rachel into secluded areas as often as she could, just long enough to place a gentle kiss to the tip of her broken nose before breaking apart again. Rachel was a little confused at first, but her heart melted every time Quinn made the endearing gesture, and she didn't care about why anymore – just as long as long as Quinn kept doing it. During lunch, they ducked into the auditorium where Quinn devoted the entire time to carefully kissing every inch of Rachel's bruises, especially her broken nose, telling her how beautiful she was, and she never wanted her to change a thing because this was the face she loved.

"But it could improve my voice, Quinn."

"Or ruin it! Julie Andrews?"
"She lost her voice after getting her tonsils removed. Perhaps you need to study your anatomy lessons better because this," she pointed at her nose before pointing to her throat, "is not my tonsils."

Quinn huffed. "They'd be messing with things that don't need to be messed with. Besides, that's not why you want to do it."

"It's a reason!"

"Not the reason."

"I could be prettier..." she reasoned timidly. "You m-might find me more attractive."

Quinn abruptly burst out laughing, which made the brunette feel that much worse.

"God help me if that happens!"

She saw Rachel's bewilderment and it only made her laugh harder.

"My body can't handle being any more attracted to you, Rach," she explained when she finally calmed down. "I'll die."

The brunette blushed to the very tips of her toes and Quinn smiled broadly, grateful that she had won the battle.

Rachel's nose soon healed and any talk of "alterations" was firmly forgotten.

Hiram Berry went to Cleveland for a week on business, leaving just Rachel and Leroy at home. Rachel didn't know whether or not to ask her father if it was okay for Quinn to come over because it might have been pushing it too far. Leroy was actively not involving himself in Hiram's decision to ban Quinn from the house (and from Rachel altogether), but that didn't mean he was going to go so far as allow it behind his husband's back. That was a line Rachel knew he wouldn't cross. As of right now, Leroy was Switzerland.

So even though her Daddy was gone for the week, she was disheartened that they still had that boundary. Before the disastrous falling out Quinn had with Hiram, the blonde would sneak in late at night after her parents had gone to bed just to spend the night with Rachel. Then she would slip out the door again and drive her car up from where she parked it a few houses down and pretend like she was just there to pick Rachel up for school in the morning.

Now they hardly had any alone time together, save for the fleeting stolen moments in dark corners at school and if they happened to be alone in the car driving somewhere. Sam was a welcome addition and a great friend to them both, but his necessary presence in public only took away from the precious little time they had alone together to begin with. Rachel begrudged him slightly for it, but it wasn't personal as it had been before. She didn't blame Sam, she blamed the situation.

Singing with him in Glee had helped the two of them so much. When they got together in private to practice that song for Quinn, it'd only served to bring them closer together.

He'd been so nervous before that performance and she couldn't deny her hand in it. It wasn't like she was trying to upset him! She'd just been intent on having it perfect for Quinn and was unused to relying on others for such emotional performances. When she sang for someone, she sang alone, and she could rely on herself more than anyone. Having Sam there changed the dynamic and opened up a whole host of things that could possibly go wrong, but when Quinn gave her that look just before they started, Rachel knew she was being cruel, so she pulled him down to whisper in his ear.
"Relax, Swayze. We're singing for Quinn, that's all that matters… You'll be wonderful."

During one of their rehearsals, Sam had divulged his utmost secret to Rachel. She didn't have the heart to tell him that Quinn had already let it slip and that the two of them had a good time laughing about Sam, lemon juice, and Patrick Swayze in *Point Break*.

"At least he didn't pick Keanu to imitate," Quinn pointed out, which had them off again giggling about Sam good-naturedly.

No, Rachel simply pretended like it was the first time she'd ever heard that information and played her part perfectly.

"I think it works for you," she said with a smile and ruffled his bangs, which were thankfully shorter again since Quinn had finally gotten him into the salon for a haircut.

When Sam and Rachel were alone together, they didn't talk about Quinn a lot. Instead, they focused on other more neutral topics and discovered that they actually got along quite well. The only time they ever discussed her at length was during the process of choosing the song to perform and even then it had been difficult. They both loved her, they both wanted her, and neither felt like they had her.

In spite of it all, the three were growing closer as the weeks went by. Every day it seemed like they were able to settle into this strange, unusual groove that worked just for them. There was less animosity, less jealousy. It really was just like they were all best friends, except for the fact that Sam and Quinn would always hold hands and Rachel would only occasionally get to link arms with her girlfriend. It hurt less now though.

Maybe it was because Rachel trusted Quinn more, at least a little bit. Maybe, however bizarre it sounded, she was unconsciously starting to accept Sam as an integral part of their relationship. Perhaps Jacob Ben Israel hadn't been too far off in his threesome accusation. Sometimes it really did feel that way and she didn't mind it as much as she would have thought.

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"Baby girl!" Leroy called from downstairs.

Rachel stuck her head out the door. "What is it, Dad?"

"Don't do that," he groaned. "Get down here. I refuse to have conversations with you by screaming up the stairs. We are civil human beings!"

Rachel rolled her eyes, but giggled to herself as she bounded down the stairs to meet her father in the kitchen.

"We weren't screaming, Dad," she said innocently. "We were merely speaking with raised voices for clarity, that's all."

He gave her a look and then went back to packing his gym bag.

"Going somewhere?" she asked, seating herself at the counter with her chin propped on her hands.

"Yes, remember the tournament I told you about last month?"

"The volleyball tournament?" She gasped and covered her mouth. "It's today? Dad! I'm so sorry! I'd forgotten all about it! I'm an awful excuse for a daughter."
"Oh, just about the worst a man could ask for," he snorted, rolling his eyes, and Rachel pouted.

"Did you want me to go with you? I'll get my 'I love my Dad' t-shirt right this very second and be there to cheer you on with every bit of enthusiasm you deserve!"

He chuckled. "That's sweet of you, hun, but it's a long tournament. The ride there alone is three hours one-way and it actually goes on for two days."

"Two days?" she repeated in surprise, her eyebrows rising to her hairline.

"Yup!" He clapped his hands and rubbed them together eagerly in anticipation. "That is if the team lasts long enough through the rounds. We could make it to the finals! No, forget that! We're gonna win it all!"

"You think you've practiced enough?" she said skeptically.

Leroy gave a small gasp of indignation and put his hand over his chest. "Why, daughter! From whom do you think you learned that stellar work ethic of yours?"

"Why, father!" she faux-mocked. "I thought it was all my own doing!"

He snorted in disbelief. "We're ready! Ready to kick some geezer behinds! As long as my knee holds out, George's sciatica doesn't act up, and Rob doesn't give anyone a black eye…"

"Robert Fallin has a temper?" Rachel inquired disbelievingly, having met the man several times before.

"Nope," he continued to gather his things, not bothering to look up, "just that big of a klutz."

Rachel laughed. "So you're leaving me for two days? And you just happen to choose now to tell me? This is very poor parenting, father. I'm thoroughly disappointed."

"Ah!" He held his hand up in admonishment. "If you'll recall, I informed you of this event nearly a month ago and it is you, my terrible excuse for a daughter, who so shamefully let it slip your mind."

"Point well taken," she groaned.

"And it's only one night. I wrote down the hotel name and number, as well as all the contact information for the tournament and left it on the fridge for you along with some money for food if you need it, though I did just go the grocery store yesterday. Of course, I have my cell phone-"

Rachel opened her mouth to interject, but he beat her to it.

"…And my charger and the car charger. Who do you think you're talking to here?"

"I just can't seem to win today, can I?" She frowned and then gave him a dazzling smile to which he only stuck his tongue out.

Leroy swung the bag over his shoulder. "I gotta run, sweetie, already a bit later than I hoped to leave. Call me if you need anything. I should be back late tomorrow night, I'll call before then to give you a better ETA, and if your Daddy…"

Rachel's light demeanor vanished into coldness the second Hiram was mentioned and Leroy thought better of it. With a sigh, he left it at that, and kissed her on the cheek goodbye. Rachel walked him to the door, bubbling over with encouraging platitudes and waved goodbye from the front stoop as he drove away. As soon as her father was out of sight, she ran back inside for the phone.
Not twenty minutes later, Quinn pulled up into the driveway.

Quinn went inside without knocking as Rachel had told her to, feeling anxious at first, because Hiram's car was still there even though she knew neither parent was home. When she went further into the house, hearing the absolute silence, she started to feel a little more at ease. They had the whole place to themselves? For an entire night, even? Quinn's nerves started to fade and giddiness took over.

She bounded up the stairs to Rachel's room and took a deep breath when she walked in. God, she'd missed this room, the way it smelled, the colors, its cheerfulness, the way Rachel's presence suffused every nook and cranny, how safe she felt in here, how safe she'd always felt here, from the very first time she'd ever crossed the threshold.

It'd been far too long since she'd been in this room.

Rachel wasn't in there at the moment, but Quinn didn't worry about it. Instead she plopped down on the bed, hugged one of the pillows, burying her face in the pink fabric and inhaled Rachel's scent. It was like with every breath, instead of filling her lungs, it went straight to her throbbing core.

Oh, for God's sake…how could she be so turned on already?

Just the idea of getting a chance to be alone with Rachel after going so long without privacy had Quinn's heart bursting out of her chest when she got the call. It was fairly simple: No Dads, alone for the night, don't bother knocking.

Quinn was out the door before she even had a chance to tell her mother that she wouldn't be coming home tonight. Well, that was what phones were for, right?

The mattress dipped under another's weight and dark hair fell across her face.

"I missed this," Rachel said huskily against her ear. "Seeing you…in my bed…"

Quinn grew flushed and warm all over.

God, she sounded so sexy.

Smiling, she rolled onto her back to meet those large brown eyes she loved.

"I missed this room."

"The room?" Rachel frowned slightly. "What about the girl to whom the room belongs?"

"Oh, her too."

"Quinn," she pouted with those perfect, full lips that Quinn could never get enough of, "Is it absolutely necessary to start off our extremely rare alone time together with sarcasm?"

"Who's using sarcasm?" she replied with wide eyed innocence. "I'm being honest. I really missed it."

"Perhaps I should leave you alone with the room if that's what you missed so much!"

"Nu-uh!" Quinn grabbed her before she could pull away and flipped her over in flash so that Rachel was pinned beneath her. "You see…" she murmured, nuzzling Rachel's throat, but not letting her lips touch just yet, "the best part of the room is this girl right here."
"Oh, smooth, Fabray, very smooth."

"Shut up, Berry. I'm in your bed again…what are you going to do about it?"

Rachel gnawed on her bottom lip for a moment before meeting Quinn's eyes again, a slight edge of nervousness in there now. There was something different about this; they could feel it.

"Kiss you?"

The blonde grinned wolfishly. "That would be a start…"

Quinn was on her hands and knees, hovering above Rachel with that oh-so-familiar eyebrow raised in challenge. So the brunette lifted herself on her elbows and stretched up to meet Quinn's mouth. They kissed slowly and gently, lips barely brushing, until Quinn could bear no more of it and deepened it without warning. Rachel gasped at the force of it and fell back onto the pillows with Quinn's weight fully on top of her.

Fisting her hands in the free flowing blonde locks, she broke away long enough to say, "Have I told you – how much – ah! – I love your hair?"

Quinn smiled and sucked gently on her neck in response, cupping Rachel's breasts firmly over her sweater. The brunette moaned and arched up into her touch. She loved the feeling of Quinn's hands on her, kneading and gentle, but knowing. Knowing just how to tease her, just the right amount of pressure, in such a way that Rachel sometimes had to bury her mouth against Quinn's shoulder just to keep from begging her to take her then and there.

"Only every day since I stopped wearing the Cheerios uniform."

"Oh…” she said absently, more focused on where Quinn's hands were going now, drifting across her belly and over her thighs. The diva wore a skirt so Quinn soon found naked flesh and reveled in it. "G-good, I didn't forget."

Quinn found her lips again and shifted so that one thigh pressed high and firm between Rachel's legs. The brunette ground down on in it involuntarily, moaning into Quinn's mouth. Then her eyes flew open in embarrassment as she suddenly realized that by doing that, Quinn would be able to feel how wet she was. The blonde was wearing a sundress, so her smooth legs were bare as well.

Whimpering slightly, Rachel tried to move away from Quinn's leg enough to save herself, but then there were hands cupping her face and she looked up into hazel eyes, heavily darkened with lust. Rachel felt another flush of wetness between her thighs at the sight.

How badly she wanted this… How badly she knew she couldn't let herself have it…

Quinn loved the way Rachel always responded to her, with such eagerness, willingness…desire. It made her think she'd do anything to please her, anything to bring Rachel pleasure, with no regard for her own. What was she compared to this? Rachel's flushed skin, heating to her touch, the heaviness of her breath, the way she keened and whimpered whenever Quinn took it just a little further than their comfort zone. What was the throbbing between her thighs, the ache of her hardened nipples begging to be touched, when it was Rachel she wanted to pleasure?

She left Rachel's face to circle her hands high on the brunette's thighs, her thumbs brushing against the sensitive flesh, but she could bring herself to go no further. Wetness on her leg was evidence of her girlfriend's arousal and it was driving Quinn mad. She was so turned on, her body feverish with want and need. It'd been so long since they had a chance to be alone, since they'd been able to hold
each other like this. Quinn wanted Rachel, she wanted to make love to her right this very minute, but she knew the other girl wasn't ready for that.

What was she ready for though?

"Rach, I need rules!" she gasped out suddenly.

The brunette kissed her soundly before replying. "Rules?"

There was more kissing and Rachel's hips thrust up against her. Quinn stifled a groan, pulling away momentarily.

"Yes, rules, as in boundaries, limits. We've established no sex, but I need your no fly zone."

Rachel giggled breathlessly. "That sounds absurd. Did you learn that term from Noah?"

"Seriously," Quinn panted. "I need to know so I don't...go too far."

Sensing the need in the other girl, Rachel struggled through her lust-addled brain for coherency before she finally had an answer.

"N-nothing below the waist."

*That was good! That was a line in the sand! That helped!*

"Okay..." Quinn laved over her pulse point before nipping lightly. Her heart pounded frantically against her chest, the nerves coming on now, though she tried not to let it show. "So that means if I wanted to...say...take your shirt off right now, that would be all right?" She tugged at the hem to further her point.

Rachel looked up at her with wide, unblinking eyes as she nodded. "Y-yes."

She pulled the diva's sweater off, tossing it aside without a second thought, and focused in on the delicious sight. Rachel's flawless skin, tanned torso, the delicacy of her collarbone, the swell of her breasts hindered only by a lacy, navy blue bra. This wasn't *entirely* new for them. They'd gotten here a few times before.

"And... " she uttered with a hint of breathless wonder, trailing fingers lightly over the curve of her bra where the fragile flesh of her breasts was exposed, "I also get to take this off?"

Rachel was panting harder now, her eyes unfocused, but still she didn't shy away or hesitate.

"Yes."

That was something new. She hadn't seen that much of Rachel since their first night in this bed. It struck her how extraordinarily different things were now from that night, how different *they* were, and how different *she* was.

Quinn's mouth went dry while her heart thumped loudly in her chest. She didn't go to remove it right away though, content with kissing the exposed cleavage, her tongue darting out to taste the sweetness there. She brushed her thumbs over the straining nipples that poked angrily through the fabric and, without thinking, closed her mouth over the fabric, teasing the points with her teeth. Rachel writhed against her, running her hands up and down her back before coming back to stroke through her blonde hair again.

They had recently discovered the diva's penchant for Quinn's hair now that it was so readily
accessible without the need for the tight, slicked back, cheerleader ponytail. When Rachel expressed her fondness (and possible borderline fetish), Quinn had taken extra care when doing her hair every morning before school. She got up an extra half hour early just to curl it because she knew how much her girlfriend liked it that way.

"Quinn?" Rachel moaned into her mouth.

She had to force herself to listen because it kind of sounded like this was the third or fourth time Rachel was attempting to get her attention and she hadn't heard earlier.

"Hm?"

"What do you want?"

"You," she replied easily.

"I'm...I'm not ready."

"I know. It's okay, baby. I told you, I'll wait as long as you need."

"B-but what if I could...do something for you now?"

"Do something for me?" she echoed curiously.

"If you'd like, we could..." she swallowed thickly, "find a way for you to have release?"

"Are you talking about dry humping?"

"Quinn, don't be crude!" Rachel exclaimed.

She sighed with a roll of her eyes. "I'm simply being direct and to the point. I thought you would appreciate forming clear parameters and guidelines in our sexual explorations."

The brunette's eyes lit up in amusement. "Baby...I think you just sounded like me there..."

Quinn's mouth fell open in shock before she winced at the realization. "God help me, I did. That's it! We're spending less time together."

"Like hell!" Rachel snarled fiercely and dug her nails into Quinn's back, much to the blonde's surprise, whose eyes widened at first then she chortled with laughter. "If you think you're going to spend even an iota less time with me, I'm breaking up with you!"

Even in jest, however, the simple mention of Rachel breaking up with her had Quinn's stomach clench painfully before she reminded herself that wouldn't happen. At least, she prayed it wouldn't. 'It was only a joke' she repeated in her head and forced herself back into the playfulness of the mood.

"But then we would never see each other!" Quinn wheedled.

"Then I suggest you take it back!"

"I take it back! I take it back!"

Giggling, Quinn trailed open-mouthed kisses down her trim stomach before stopping just below her bellybutton and she looked back up at the brunette.

"Now about the humping..."
"Quinn…" she whined.

"What else would you have me call it?"

"I don't know. It just sounds so…"

She slid back up to Rachel's mouth, kissing her thoroughly. "Let me remind you that you are the one who is proposing that I hump your thigh until I come. Turning into a prude now isn't going to help matters."

Rachel exclaimed angrily in protest and rubbed her thigh against Quinn's soaking core, causing the blonde to shut her eyes tightly with a yelp, biting down on her lower lip.

*That felt so fucking good…*

Quinn could feel the pressure coiling low in her belly and even though that usually meant they were supposed to stop now before it got worse, she couldn't bring herself to. She just wanted more.

"So much for being a prude," Rachel retorted smugly. "All I meant was that just because we're not having sex doesn't mean you can't find some release in the meantime."

"I-I don't know…" Quinn said breathlessly. "Are you comfortable with that?"

"Is it something you want?" she countered without answering.

"I want *everything.*" Quinn tucked some of the thick, shining brunette hair behind her girlfriend's ear with a loving smile. "But I'm okay to wait. I'd rather…I'd rather it be *both* of us than just me…d-do you know what I mean?"

Rachel nodded shakily and without breaking eye contact, Quinn reached behind her and undid the bra clasp, finally letting the garment fall aside. Quinn could see Rachel trying to fight the urge to cover herself so she took her hands again and kissed her.

"You're perfect."

Quinn moved down to her jaw, throat, neck, collarbone, until she reached the splendid globes she'd hardly taken the time to fully appreciate in their first sexual foray. It felt like a lifetime ago and her memory had not served her well. Rachel was even more beautiful than she remembered.

The diva's chest heaved nervously, causing her breasts to bounce with each inhale and exhale.

"I understand I'm considerably smaller than-"

Quinn looked up at her sharply. "You're *perfect."

She leaned down and took one dusky nipple into her mouth, swirling her tongue around the pebbled point before suckling gently, teeth grazing ever so lightly. Rachel squirmed beneath her. Quinn didn't realize it, but she was unconsciously rocking her hips against the brunette as she explored this new wonder. She switched to the other side, releasing one of Rachel's hands so that she could tend to the abandoned breast at the same time, circling the wet nipple with her fingers and squeezing as she used her mouth on the other. She cupped her fully, testing the weight and size, marveling at how perfectly Rachel fit into her hand. Like Quinn, and only Quinn, was made to touch her like this. Rachel was making the most amazing sounds…little ones, from deep within, the back of her throat, like she would never sound in anything else. Not even on stage.
"S-so since we've established that everything above the waist is acceptable for me, does the same apply for you?"

Quinn reluctantly left her newfound pleasure and returned to the sweet, swollen lips waiting for her.

"Rachel..." she murmured against her mouth, "There's a lot of things I haven't been able to give you...at least not yet...but this isn't one of them. Whatever you want, you can have it."

"I want to see you," she whispered.

As soon as she said that, it was like every ounce of confidence had been suddenly drained out of Quinn. She'd been so sure about her desire for Rachel that it tended to have her forget about her own insecurities. Now they were bearing down from every corner to smack her squarely across the face. Fear kept her frozen there, fear...shame...embarrassment. She didn't want to expose herself like that, not when she was so unhappy with her body.

But how could she deny Rachel now after she'd just promised...

The brunette immediately picked up on her hesitation, knowing just what was stopping her. Quinn had mentioned her self-consciousness before about the stretch marks she hadn't been able to get rid of after being pregnant. Rachel lifted herself onto her elbows, looking up at Quinn with swollen lips, bare breasts, and this look on her face...of desire, of acceptance, of pure, unadulterated love. It was the sexiest, most incredible thing she had ever seen.

"You are, and always have been, the prettiest girl I've ever met, Quinn. Did you know that? Do you know how long I've thought that, even before we..." she trailed off shyly. "There is absolutely nothing wrong with you and if you think that I--"

"My body isn't like what it used to be before."

She raised an eyebrow. "Then it must be better now, because I've gotten some glimpses, and I'm afraid there is just no possible way to improve upon that kind of perfection."

Quinn blushed, and even though it helped to hear that, it wasn't enough.

Rachel was still looking up with those large brown eyes of hers that she could melt in and rubbing her hands in soothing circles on Quinn's bare thighs. Quinn couldn't help it, she rocked her hips a little closer, urging those hands higher to where she so desperately wanted them to be.

Rachel smiled. "I believe you when you tell me you're attracted to me, Quinn. Not at first, of course, but I know it now. Why can't you believe me when I tell you how beautiful you are?"

With her heart in her throat and her body shaking, Quinn knew she had to let go of her fears. Rachel deserved that much...that much and more. So with trembling fingers, she pulled her dress over her head with Rachel's help and removed her bra. She did it quickly, like pulling off a band-aid. It hurt less that way, no stopping halfway.

Rachel's eyes went wide and Quinn was shocked to see how dark they had become. The brunette licked her lips unthinkingly.

"Quinn...you're a goddess."

"Don't do that," she muttered uncomfortably.

"Don't tell the truth?"
Rachel pulled her into her lap and immediately latched onto one breast, palming the other with nimble, knowing fingers. Quinn gasped at the new sensations and held Rachel there, wrapping her arms around the smaller girl. She shivered with pleasure as Rachel's hot mouth worked her aching breasts that had waited so long for proper attention to. Proper attention is exactly what Rachel had in mind.

It felt so good.

*Rachel* felt so good.

The pressure was getting worse. Feverish and soaking between her legs, Quinn yelped when the brunette grabbed her ass and yanked her closer.

There was only so much of this a person could take without getting any relief and Quinn was about to lose her mind. She was desperately doing everything she could to keep within Rachel's nothing-below-the-waist boundary, but it was becoming damn near impossible as they rubbed against each other greedily.

"W-we should stop..."

She tried to slow their kisses, pulling back slightly.

"Don't even think about it!" Rachel growled and before Quinn knew it, she was flipped backwards, now at the foot of the bed, with Rachel pinning her wrists to the mattress, grinding hard against her. She moaned at the brunette's attentions and gasped when Rachel's hand slipped beneath the fabric of her panties.

"Ah! Y-you just said-"

Rachel cut her off by kissing her again, her fingers dipped inside the slick wetness for the briefest of moments before there was a knock on the door and they both shrieked in surprise, tumbling off together onto the floor with a thud.

Leroy came in with a frown. "Baby girl? I heard-"

"DAD?" Rachel squeaked. "You scared me!"

They both desperately tried to find a way to cover themselves.

"Um, Rachel, honey, what are you doing down there?"

"L-L-Looking for my earring!" she stammered. "I dropped it!"

That was when he saw the top of a blonde head peeking out over the side of the bed. "Oh…” he said knowingly. "Is that you, Quinn?"

"Yes, si- Leroy," she answered shamefully.

"Would this be you hiding from me?"

"Maybe?"

"Good. Keep doing that. I never saw you. You were never here. Clear?"

"Crystal."
"What are you doing back so soon?" Rachel asked, her voice still unusually high.

"Forgot my knee brace, have you seen it?"

"B-basement! You took it off after a workout."

"Ah-ha! I knew it! What would I do without you, darling? Don't worry, I'm off again." He disappeared from the doorway for a moment, but before Quinn and Rachel had a chance to even draw a breath of relief, he reappeared. "Remember, Quinn was never here. I never saw her."

"Saw who, Dad?"

"Exactly!"

Then he was gone again. They held their breath this time, but he didn't pop back, and they started to breathe easier. Then a few more minutes passed and they heard the car engine start, before driving off into the distance. Only then did they finally collapse onto the floor.

Quinn burst into hysterics while Rachel looked pale and traumatized.

"That was so close!" the blonde gasped through fits of laughter. "Can you imagine?"

"This isn't funny, Quinn!" Rachel whined. "He could have seen…oh God! It would have scarred him for life!"

The parental interruption was a bit of a mood killer, so they got dressed again before heading downstairs to decidedly more neutral territory than any room with a bed in it. Quinn put on music while Rachel ordered them dinner and they spent the next hour dancing around with each other and singing until it arrived.

After they ate and the two of them cleaned up, Rachel suggested watching TV in the den. Quinn noticed that she was nervous about having to go back upstairs together, but didn't comment on it. They had gone further than they both thought they would, and she knew that had to be making Rachel anxious. She vowed to herself that they wouldn't do anything else tonight. When she got into bed with Rachel, there would be a sweet kiss and cuddling, but not an iota more. Rachel needed to feel comfortable and Quinn wanted to prove to her that she could be trusted not to step outside her boundaries.

Quinn left the kitchen first and plopped onto the couch, stretching her legs across the cushions. Rachel joined her a few minutes later. Instead of sitting up so they could be side by side, Quinn pulled one of the throw pillows under her head and scooted back to make room for Rachel to lie down in front of her.

The brunette grinned at the gesture and eagerly snuggled into her girlfriend's waiting arms. Quinn dropped a light kiss to the exposed skin at her shoulder and curled her arm around Rachel's waist, pulling her back so that they molded into each other. Rachel sighed contentedly when Quinn rested her head against hers and picked up the remote, but before she turned the TV on, she changed her mind and put it down again.

"I admit, though potentially traumatizing, humiliating, and subject of thousands of billable hours in therapy, it was rather fortuitous that Dad interrupted us when he did."

"Oh, you mean because you completely lost all self control and tried to ravage me?" Quinn teased and nipped at her neck.
Rachel turned around to face her and Quinn could see a bright red staining her cheeks.

"Y-you were right before," she said nervously, ducking her head. "We need more rules. My desire for you proves a formidable opponent, Quinn. I need to make sure I don't let myself go like that again and do something I'll regret. Promise you'll help me with this? Unless we discuss it previously, without the heat of the moment as influence, promise you won't take advantage?"

That threw Quinn for a loop.

She stilled for a moment and then leaned away as far as she could in their cozy position so that she could see Rachel's face more clearly.

I don't understand…

Rachel seemed completely comfortable with everything they've been doing so far. Was she not the one who pinned Quinn to the bed with her hand down her panties? God! She'd even just admitted to wanting to have sex with her! That was what she said right? She wanted it, but Quinn had to stop her?

What kind of ridiculous reasoning was that? Even for Rachel this was overboard!

What was stopping her? Rachel didn't have religious qualms about sex before marriage. She did say once that she wanted to wait until she was twenty-five, but surely that was different with Quinn… wasn't it? Oh, God! Was that it? Did she still want to wait that long?

Her heart bottomed out at the thought.

How was she going to survive…seven…no…eight! Eight years of being with Rachel like this and never…

SHE WAS GOING TO DIE.

That was just the end of it - death by sexual frustration. It was something Puck could probably identify with. He always referred to himself as a sex shark. If he stopped, he died. Quinn always thought he was just a pig for saying it, but she was really starting to understand him a little bit more now.

How was she going to survive eight years in this constant state of…

FUCK!

"S-so this is about you still wanting to wait until you're twenty-five? You wouldn't want-"

Rachel looked at her in surprise. "You knew about that?"

"I may have overheard Finn complaining about it." She shrugged noncommittally, averting her gaze as her mind raced.

Quinn knew Rachel wasn't ready and she was more than willing to wait as long as she wanted, but…GOD! That was a really damn long time!

"No, no." Rachel shook her head. "I gave up on that a while ago. I realized it was hardly realistic that I'll be able to wait so long…all things considered… However, I still plan to win a Tony Award by the time I'm twenty-two, but engaging in intercourse with you probably won't interfere with that."

Quinn's head snapped up to face Rachel again as she could feel the hope pouring back into her body,
hope and relief…very, very intense relief.

*Wait, did she say "probably"? PROBABLY? What the hell…* 

*Oh, whatever.*

There were more important things to focus on… Like the fact that it wasn't going to be eight years! She could deal with that!

Then the confusion came again.

If the 'wait until she's twenty-five' thing wasn't what was stopping Rachel…then what was? They've been together for several months now, they've known each other nearly all their lives, and it wasn't like she *didn't* want to…Quinn could most definitely attest to that after their encounter earlier.

"Well, what is it then? What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong."

The way the brunette chewed on her bottom lip told Quinn otherwise.

"B-but before you seemed so…well, you were okay with it, right?"

Rachel turned even redder than Quinn thought possible.

"*Yes,*" she managed to choke out, "I w-was, I mean, it was… it was…" She stopped to take a deep breath before blurtting out, "I'm just not prepared to take that step yet, Quinn!"

As she looked into that beautiful, blush stained face, into those wide, dark eyes, Quinn figured it out.

It was like someone had poured a bucket of ice water over her head, freezing her from head to toe.

She got it now - why Rachel was so uncomfortable, why she was saying one thing and yet acting in another.

Rachel was ready to have sex, more than ready probably, but she wasn't ready to have sex with her.

She still didn't trust Quinn, she didn't trust them, she didn't trust the simple truth that Quinn wanted her and only her…or that Quinn loved her.

It took her a few moments and a yelping sound before she realized she had rapidly disentangled herself from Rachel and leapt off the couch.

"Oh, Quinn, don't-"

"So when will I have proven myself?" she spat bitterly, not able to look Rachel in the eye as she straightened her clothes. "When I start introducing you as my girlfriend? Then you'll have sex with me? Will I have earned it then?"

"*No!*" Rachel stressed, shocked, and sat up. The blonde was standing in front of her with her arms tightly folded across her chest. "I'm not trying to give you a- an ultimatum, Quinn. It's not like that."

"Yes, it is," she said flatly.

She didn't know whether to be hurt or angry so it ended up being some strange amalgamation of the two that really just made her sad more than anything else.
"And, frankly, it really hurts, Rachel. I was okay with waiting as long as you needed, but you want this too! You're holding yourself back from us when I've given it everything…"

"Given it everything?" the brunette echoed in disbelief, starting to get angry now. "YOU are the one who's still toting a boyfriend on her arm for everyone to see like some accessory piece! YOU are the one who refuses to let anyone know about us, our friends, our family…no one! Given it everything? You've got it the wrong way around, Quinn. I'm the one who's been doing the giving here! Just for your sake and your feelings and your perfect reputation and status. How can you honestly stand there and have the nerve to tell me otherwise?"

Quinn wanted to scream.

She wanted to scream and slap Rachel silly until she got it into her thick diva head.

Instead she was just holding back tears.

How could Rachel still not understand all that she was risking? Her whole life… Her family… Everything! For her! Just for her! Okay, so Quinn hadn't told her everything yet, but she'd done and said everything but! Why couldn't Rachel…

"I-I wish," she stumbled over her words thickly, trying not to cry, "that you could actually find it in you to have more faith in me. It's like you're still just waiting for me to screw you over when…all I want to do is love you."

She was picking up her things along with her jacket and making her way to the door with Rachel's desperate pleading behind her.

"Don't go! Let's just talk about this. Don't run away. I didn't mean it like that. Quinn, I love you, you know I do!"

She grabbed the blonde's arm to stop her, but Quinn just shrugged her off.

"I can't do this right now, okay?" she said dully. "I have to go. I'll see you later."

"Quinn…"

But she was already gone.
Come to Blows

After the blonde left, Rachel was at such a loss. She wanted to tear out after her, searching high and low for wherever Quinn might have gone because it certainly wasn't back to the Fabray house. She understood Quinn well enough to know that much. But she couldn't go looking for her. What would she have to say? What could she offer in defense? There was no defense. Quinn was right, plain and simple. Rachel had been holding out, not because she didn't want to make love to her, not because she wasn't physically or emotionally prepared for that step, but because she was trying to protect herself.

They weren't public. Quinn had a pseudo-boyfriend. How could she trust that this was real...as much as she wanted to? As much as she wanted to believe Quinn when she said, "I love you," a part of her just couldn't accept it. How could she love her so much and still keep her hidden away like this? It'd been months since they started this, months from the very moment Quinn found her in the auditorium after Finn had so publically and devastatingly broken up with her.

The blonde had approached her silently, almost cat-like, but maybe it was just because Rachel was crying so hard that she didn't hear the footsteps. It was a visceral shock to her system when she felt another warm body pressed against her side. She had gasped and looked up to see Quinn Fabray, one of the last people she wanted to see, right up there along with Santana or Jacob Ben Israel. She couldn't bear the inevitable gloating, the smug 'I told you so’ look on her face or perhaps with Quinn it wouldn't have been a look, but actual words. Whatever it was she had planned, Rachel was in too fragile a state to handle it. So she wiped away her tears and prepared herself to tell Quinn to leave her alone.

It never happened.

Before Rachel could say a word, those lips were pressed against hers again, for a startling third time in her life.

She didn't really remember everything that came in the weeks afterward - it was a jumbled blur in her head. She only remembered abstract thoughts, feelings, touches, desire... It wasn't until Quinn came to her house that night, practically kicking down the door, when things became less of a haze and coherent memories once again.

With nothing else to do, no other idea, Rachel jumped onto her elliptical for a second workout of the day trying to distract herself from thoughts that threatened to drown her. The way Quinn had walked out of there, the crushed look on her face...knowing she had been the cause...it was unbearable. Rachel never wanted to make Quinn feel that way, to feel rejected, to feel untrustworthy. She wanted to trust what they had, truly she did, but how could that be true when what they were was some shamefully hidden secret?

Images flashed into her mind unbidden, soft hands on her stomach, the hot breath against her ear, the tongue on her...

Rachel desperately sped up the intensity of her workout. She realized the irony of trying to run away from something on an elliptical machine, but it was helping. Soon she couldn't think of anything else.

It wasn't until her lungs burned and her legs trembled, threatening to give out on her, that Rachel was forced to let up. Though it was the time she normally would have taken to stretch, as every responsible person should do, Rachel just collapsed onto the floor. While she was flat on her back,
staring at the ceiling, she realized she was almost in exactly the same spot she had been in earlier, only Quinn was next to her and both of them were topless. She turned her head to see where Quinn had been, remembering the way she had laughed so hard after her Dad left, the sound of her voice, so delighted, so happy, so carefree. The way her lips curved, her eyes shining, her blonde locks messy and sticking to her forehead. She was so beautiful. She was always so beautiful. How could someone like that love her? Or even just...desire her...the way Quinn seemed to?

Quinn was right. Rachel had been giving her an ultimatum, though she hadn't done so knowingly. She'd never even thought about it that way until the blonde had put it into words that she herself couldn't. Rachel knew she was holding back because she was afraid, but the real reason hadn't truly come out until now.

Yes, Rachel wanted to have sex with Quinn. She wanted it desperately, needed it to a point of severe embarrassment, but she hadn't allowed herself to give in.

Because she didn't trust Quinn, not completely.

They couldn't go on like this. It'd been months now that they were together and this was the point where she chose to give everything or...to end it. She needed to decide that either this person was trustworthy enough to make the commitment or decide they're not and then...well, how could she continue after that?

It was with a sweaty desperation that Rachel scrambled to find her phone. It was buried at the bottom of her purse and took a lifetime, it seemed, until she wrapped her fingers around it.

"Quinn!"

"What?"

"You didn't go home, did you?"

"No."

"Where'd you go?"

"What does it matter?"

"You can't leave me all by myself in a house without anyone around to fend off the burglars."

"No one is going to break in, Rachel."

"I…I…please come back. I hate the way we left things. I'll never sleep tonight without you here. I don't…we can't just let this stand. I can't bear it."

"I told you…I just…need some time."

"And I need to talk to you."

"You always need to talk."

"This is important!"

"I know it is. I just…don't know if I'm ready to hear what you have to say."

"Do you think I'll break up with you?"
"I always think that."

"Quinn…please?"

"A-are you going to break up with me?"

"Of course not."

"So you just want to talk?"

"…And have someone here to fend off the burglars."

"NO ONE IS GOING TO BREAK IN!"

"Better safe than sorry! Bring a weapon! I have Daddy's golf club."

"I am not bringing a weapon! You're being a paranoid freak!"

"Cautious, Quinn, I am merely being cautious."

"Mentally challenged more like."

"Does that mean you'll come back?"

"I'm not bringing a weapon."

"That's okay! If anyone sees the ex-Head Cheerio that'll be enough to have them running for the hills."

"Flatterer."

Rachel took the quickest shower of her life, jumping in the moment she got off the phone with Quinn who very reluctantly agreed to come back to the Berry house. It was getting late, but Rachel didn't care. They didn't have school tomorrow and Quinn no longer had Saturday Cheerios practice to deal with. She quickly threw on some pajamas, shorts and a tank top, before blow drying her hair as quickly as possible in front of her vanity mirror. She wanted to look nice for when Quinn came back, at least, not a complete mess like she felt inside. Her heart raced while the blow dryer roared in her ears. Rachel could have simply chalked up the increased heart rate to her rushing around like a madwoman, but she knew the truth.

She was trembling at the thought of what she was going to tell Quinn.

Quinn crossed the Berry threshold for a second time that night, hesitating at the door before taking a deep breath and letting herself inside. She locked it behind her, just for Rachel's peace of mind, and made her way towards the stairs. Instead of going up right away though, she stopped in front of the bottom step and looked up nervously. She could hear the faint sound of a hair dryer from Rachel's room. Quinn had come back, at least, not a complete mess like she felt inside. Her heart raced while the blow dryer roared in her ears. Rachel could have simply chalked up the increased heart rate to her rushing around like a madwoman, but she knew the truth.

After she had stormed out of the Berry house, she hadn't really gone far. She was halfway to Sam's before she realized…she didn't want to talk to him. She didn't want to talk to anyone but Rachel. Instead, she just pulled over, turned the car off and stayed there. Where else was she going to go? Home? Ha! The last place she wanted to be.

Honestly, running out like that had just made her feel worse. She should have stayed. She should
have talked to Rachel about this. Was it blackmail? Yes. In a sense, anyway, but the way Rachel had
looked at her…Quinn knew she hadn't meant to do it.

How could she blame Rachel or even be the slightest bit upset with her when she didn't have the
nerve to tell her the whole truth? It was stupid, but she almost wished Rachel was actually psychic
and could find out for herself instead of Quinn having to say it.

No…

Even then, Quinn didn't want her to know, even if it meant this. It would be worse if she knew.

Rachel wanted Quinn to come out, to admit to the world that they were in love, and it was the one
thing Quinn couldn't do, not yet. Not that she didn't want to. Every day she spent with Rachel, the
more she fell in love with her, the more she hated the lies they were hiding behind…lies that ate
away, lies that sunk deeper, lies that she couldn't bear, but it had to be done. What other choice did
she have? The lies kept them safe.

Rachel didn't know how important they were. Sam did. Sam knew and every day he would urge
Quinn to just tell Rachel the truth, once and for all. But even he couldn't understand. If Rachel
knew…she wouldn't…she wouldn't…

Quinn rested her forehead against the banister.

She wasn't upset with Rachel for not "putting out" or any other crude way of saying it…God, not
even close. She meant it when she said she was okay to wait (eight years would have been a bit
much, but still…), but just hearing that Rachel was holding back, holding her at arm's length still,
when Quinn felt like she'd been scrubbed raw with how much she had managed to open herself
up…how much she had let Rachel inside in a way she had never done for another human being in
her life…

Now she found out that Rachel wasn't doing the same.

Could she blame her? Of course not.

But it still hurt. It hurt like hell and there was nothing Quinn could do about it.

When her foot touched the first stair, her heart started to race. Rachel was up there right now, just at
the top, waiting for her, and she wanted to talk. There was something she was going to tell her,
Quinn had heard it in her voice when they spoke on the phone.

She just didn't know if she could hear it. Rachel said she wasn't breaking up with her, but…that
could have been a ruse just to get her back. No, even Rachel wouldn't do that. Besides, she could
have just ended it over the phone anyway.

So Quinn made the climb, her body feeling heavy and sluggish with each step. When she reached
the top, she was physically trembling.

Rachel's door was open and when Quinn walked in, she saw the brunette shaking her hair and
running her fingers through the dark locks as the blow dryer roared. Knowing Rachel wouldn't be
able to hear her over the noise, Quinn came up behind her and gently touched her shoulder.

Before she could say a word, the diva screamed and whirled around. Out of the corner of her eye,
Quinn saw a shiny, black object flying at her head. Her vision flashed white before she went down
like a sack of bricks.
"QUINN!"

The blonde held her head in her arms as she pressed her face into the floor, groaning in pain.

"DAMMIT TO HELL, RACHEL!"

Rachel, horrified by what had happened, dropped to her knees beside her with her hands on Quinn's back.

"Baby, I-I'm so sorry… I thought you were… You scared me! I didn't know… Are you alright? Should I call an ambulance? Did I break anything? Are you bleeding? You might have a concussion! We should go to the ER and have you looked at. I'll take you right now, we shouldn't wait."

"Stop – talking," she growled.

Rachel immediately quieted.

"Goddedd…that hurt."

"Are you-"

"I said no talking!"

"But I'm just so sorr-"

"BE QUIET!"

Rachel was silent again, brushing away the few tears that escaped. The blonde finally managed to roll onto her back, still holding her head, wincing at the motion.

"Is it bad?" she asked, lifting her hands for a moment so Rachel could see and indeed there was a glaring red mark forming over her temple. "I feel a bump so it's probably showing…"

"Oh, Quinn!" she gasped and started to cry.

The blonde opened her eyes as best she could, her vision still a little blurry from the throbbing pain in her head, and managed to curl her arm around Rachel's waist and tug her down on the floor with her.

"Don't do that," she pleaded wearily. "It was an accident. Don't cry. You're making my head hurt even more now."

"I can't believe I hit you…"

"Well, you are crazy after all."

"How many fingers am I holding up?"

"Three."

"Do you hear me okay?"

"Unfortunately," she growled.

"I'm SO sorry, Quinn," she dropped her voice to a whisper.

"It was an accident."
"Are you sure you don't want to go to the hospital?"

"I'm sure I want an ice pack and your bed."

"I'll go get one for you right now! Do you want me to help you up first?"

"No. No, just leave me here for a minute."

"Okay!" She nodded frantically, relieved to finally be able to do something productive, and headed for the door. "But you can't fall asleep! Do not fall asleep, Quinn! If you have a concussion then you could slip into a co-"

"Rachel?"

"What is it? Do you need anything else? Are you experiencing any nausea? Because that's a sign of-"

"No," she said calmly, a clear contrast to the diva's spinning top impression, "just wanted to clarify that I need an ice pack and your bed…with you in it. T-that's doable, right?"

Rachel scrambled back down onto the floor to press a quick kiss to her lips.

"As if I would have it any other way."

Lying on the floor was making her dizzy so Quinn squeezed her eyes shut and tried to will the vicious throbbing pain in her head to go away. Rachel had gotten her but good with the damn hair dryer. The entire left side of her head was killing her. She realized that the floor was actually a lot more uncomfortable than she thought and heard Rachel's bed calling to her from above. Rather than sit up, she rolled over and pulled herself up by clawing the bedspread until she finally made it to the top. The room started spinning worse than ever so she quickly found the pillows and closed her eyes in relief.

Yes, the bed was definitely the better option.

Oh, damn, her head really hurt.

There were footsteps on the stairs and when they reached the room, Quinn didn't have to open her eyes to know when to cut Rachel off before she managed to say a word.

"I'm not sleeping."

There was a heavy sigh and then the mattress dipped under another weight. She felt something cool and covered with a cloth on her head, right above the throbbing.

"Is this okay?" Rachel whispered.

Quinn responded with a hum. With all the heat radiating from her head, the cool contrast felt good.

"Did I take too long? I would have helped you up. I knew I shouldn't have stopped for the water…"

"Shhh, I'm fine, just changed my mind and decided the floor wasn't as nice as this would be."

"I-I brought you some ibuprofen."

"Thanks."
"Can you sit up?"

"Can? Yes. Want to? No."

"It'll help the swelling."

Quinn kept her eyes closed as she propped herself up on her elbows, as far she was willing to go, and let Rachel feed her the medicine and hold the glass to her lips for her to drink until she finally got to lie down again.

Rachel left her side again, but before Quinn could protest, she felt her shoes being tugged off. Her socks followed. Before long, she had been tucked into the bed with the covers over her without ever having to do a thing. She snuggled further down into the pillows with a contented sigh. Rachel's scent surrounded her and she could have sworn it actually helped ease the pain…

"Quinn?"

"Yeah?"

"Why won't you look at me?"

"Things spin when I have my eyes open."

"Oh," she said quietly.

"Lay with me?"

As soon as she said it, Quinn had Rachel wrapped around her, warm and wonderful in her arms, and she smiled despite her aching head.

"Guess we're even for that time I punched you."

"Don't say that! I feel so terri-"

"I love you."

Rachel nuzzled her throat with a tiny huff of exasperation, knowing exactly what Quinn was doing – trying to distract her.

"I love you too, though you probably don't believe me since I just tried to break your skull with a scalding hair dryer."

"I believe you," she replied easily. "So how long are you going to make me stay awake before you're convinced I won't slip into a coma?"

"All night?"

"Rachel!"

"Okay, okay, just a few hours then."

Quinn groaned. Sleep sounded so good right now.

"Alright, then I guess this is your chance to tell me why you wanted me to come back."

There was a long stretch of silence and the arms around her tightened their embrace. She almost
opened her eyes just to see what was going on with Rachel when she finally got an answer.

"It can wait until tomorrow."

"Is it something I should be worried about?"

Rachel chuckled softly against her. "No, not at all. I'm...I'm glad you came back, Quinn."

"I'm not."

"Hey!"

"Well, you knocked me out with a blow dryer!"

"By accident!"

"Still! You need to work on this paranoia issue. It's reached dangerous levels now. This bump should tell you that."

"I am so, so sorry, baby."

Quinn held her closer with a smile, even though her eyes were still firmly shut.

"I'm glad I came back too."

"Yeah?" Rachel whispered hopefully.

"Aside from the head injury? Yes... It means I get to spend the night with you again. How long has it been?"

"Too long."

The last thing the blonde remembered before she finally fell asleep was Rachel on number seventeen of her top thirty reasons why Quinn should watch Funny Girl.

She woke to the feeling of warm lips pressed against her shoulder. The feeling became more real and less of the dream as those lips found their way up her neck and over her jaw before brushing against her mouth.

It was perfect.

Then the pain came roaring back as she stirred into consciousness. The dull ache pressing against her skull was a thousand times worse than anything she felt during her worst hangover.

Not so perfect.

"How are you feeling?"

"Like I got conked on the head by a psychotic Broadway diva wannabe."

"I don't appreciate that characterization," she huffed. "I am CERTAINLY not a mere 'wannabe', but a star in the making. There is a hugely significant difference between the two, as one implies-"

"So the psychotic part you don't object to?"

She glowered at her. "I'm offended by everything you just said. Really, Quinn! So I was a bit
"jumpy… I mean, I did warn you I was afraid to be alone!"

"Oh, so it's my fault?"

"Of course not, it's just…okay fine! A psychotic person conked you on the head, but she's all gone now."

"Good, cause she hits hard." Quinn sighed. "So it looks like I didn't slip into a coma."

"Please don't joke about that," Rachel whispered. "I woke you up three times last night just to be certain."

"Oh, I didn't forget. Trust me. I was equally pissed off with you each time."

"I was trying to keep you alive!"

"So you say…" she mumbled with a groan and turned over on her side.

When she finally opened her eyes, she found the room still dark. Rachel had thoughtfully pulled the shades. It was a relief for her pounding head.

"Why are you already dressed?" Quinn wondered aloud with a frown. "What time is it?"

"Almost 8," she replied, glancing over her shoulder at the clock.

"Rachelllllll," she groaned. "We've had this discussion! Now that I'm not on the Cheerios anymore, I do NOT wake up before ten on the weekend!"

"I know, I know," she rolled her eyes and kissed Quinn's cheek with a smile. "You can go right back to sleep again, baby. I just wanted to get breakfast for us. What would you like? I have to go out since we don't have much in the way of non vegan food here…"

"You're going to Charlie's for me?"

"Where else would I go?"

"Best girlfriend ever…" Quinn muttered into the pillow, still half asleep.

"I think I lost points when I clobbered you over the head with a blunt object last night."

"This will make up for it."

"My thoughts exactly! Now, would you like your usual?"

"Please."

"Coffee?"

"Desperately."

"Decaf?"

"I'm sorry, did I get it wrong? Were you the one who sustained a head injury last night?"

"Just making sure…" Rachel giggled and ran her fingers through Quinn's hair. "Now you can go back to sleep."
"Luff' you," she mumbled, already drifting.

"I love you too."

"Rach?"

"Hm?"

"You didn't just wake me up to see what I wanted for breakfast. You were checking again to make sure I wasn't in a coma, weren't you?"

"I'm keeping you alive!"

"Just go get the food."

Quinn wasn't really able to go back to sleep after Rachel left. She tried for a while, but her head was pounding too much to let her back into that painless slumber. When she heard Rachel moving around downstairs, she decided to give up on it altogether and slowly pushed herself up off the bed. She did it slowly, no sudden movements, and everything seemed to hold together well enough. At least she wasn't dizzy anymore.

When she finally got to her feet, she looked down to see that she was still wearing the same dress from yesterday. Feeling gross, she decided to get in the shower first. It felt good to have the water sliding over her body, but she used the gentlest touch to wash her hair. Clean and refreshed, Quinn was loath to put on the dress again so she opted to snag some of Rachel's clothes. They could never exactly share much because anything of Rachel's was at least two sizes too small for Quinn, which was exactly why Rachel shamelessly pushed Quinn to wear her clothes more often. There was also that problem where Rachel's fashion sense tended to cater to perverse male fantasies of underage girls in plaid skirts...well, maybe she was a pervert too because she really...really loved those miniskirts. Even the animal sweaters were growing on her. She still couldn't handle the argyle though. Something had to be done about that and soon.

The blonde smiled to herself as she pulled on a pair of pajama shorts that were actually loose on Rachel, but left nothing to the imagination on Quinn, as well as a too-small black sweater, the sleeves and torso of which were too short, showing a sliver of her stomach.

She almost laughed, knowing what the look on her girlfriend's face would be when she went downstairs. It was no secret why Rachel loved it when Quinn wore her clothes.

She made her way down the stairs slowly, her hair still wet from the shower, and suddenly froze before going into the kitchen where she could hear Rachel puttering about.

Crap!

What was she thinking putting on these clothes? It was an obvious tease! Before last night, it would have been a welcome flirtation, but now? How could she parade around like this when they had just gotten into a fight about the very thing Quinn was about to flaunt... Why hadn't she thought this through? She could be so stupid sometimes...

Quinn tugged the sweater down anxiously, as if it would help cover her more somehow, and shifted back and forth on her feet as she debated whether or not to just go back upstairs and put on her dress again.

They had put aside their conflict last night for the sake of Quinn's injury, but she knew Rachel would
want to talk about it this morning. When the nerves started again, so did her heart, and all that blood pumping through her just made her head throb to the point of dizziness again.

To hell with it.

The clothes wouldn't be that big of a deal. She really needed to calm down. They could talk about this. It didn't have to be this huge dark cloud looming over them.

So Rachel still didn't trust her. That was fair. Quinn was just going to have to live with it until one day…maybe…that would change. That is if…well, if Rachel still wanted this…if Rachel still wanted her when all was said and done. Clothes were clothes; it didn't mean she was insinuating or pushing anything. Rachel would know that – she wasn't a hormone-addled, dunce-headed teenage boy that couldn't see beyond how high a girl's skirt went and how low her shirt cut – she was Rachel and she would understand that Quinn wasn't trying anything.

She would understand, right?

Summoning her courage, Quinn threw her thoughts aside and walked into the kitchen with a frantically pounding heart. Rachel turned around, nearly dropping the plate in her hands when she saw what Quinn was wearing. The blonde giggled discreetly, covering it with a tiny cough.

It seems that was all she needed to ease her nerves. Those large brown eyes, round as saucers, unable to tear her eyes away from Quinn. Her gaze roamed greedily up and down the length of her body before finally, after a noticeably long time, settling on her face. It was just what Quinn had been hoping for – no worried or panicked expressions - just this, just love, just desire. She breathed that much easier for it. Maybe things last night hadn't been as serious as she made them out to be.

"You're up," Rachel said hoarsely, putting the plate down with shaking hands, and taking a deep breath.

"Couldn't go back to sleep."

"Because of your head?"

Quinn nodded and Rachel immediately sprung to action, as if she were desperate for something to do other than gawk, searching through the cabinets for something.

"It's okay that I borrowed your clothes, right?" she asked innocently. "I didn't bring anything else to wear…"

A few things fell out of the cabinet, clattering on the countertop and Quinn giggled again.

"O-of course!" Rachel squeaked. "You're welcome to whatever you – I mean, it's fine! Just fine! Perfect even." She quickly shoved the fallen items back in again before finally finding what she was looking for.

"Perfect?" Quinn raised an eyebrow.

The brunette's cheeks flushed scarlet, but she didn't reply. Instead she came over to where Quinn had seated herself at the counter and handed her a pill from a prescription bottle.

"Take that. It's a mild painkiller. My Dad keeps it on hand for when his knee is particularly bothering him. It's not going to make you loopy or anything, but it should help. I don't make it a habit to give out prescription medicine that hasn't been explicitly assigned by a licensed medical professional, but-"
"But you feel so guilty for hitting me that this will be the exception to the rule?" Quinn finished for her with a knowing smirk.

"Just take it."

"I trust you." She smiled and took the water Rachel offered her as well, gulping it down.

"Drink the whole glass, okay? And we need to get some food in your stomach fast."

"Yes, mother…" Rachel threw her a nasty look, but Quinn could only grin like an idiot for how giddy she felt. Sometimes that girl was too adorable for her own good.

"It's not broken, by the way," Rachel said.

"My head?"

"My hair dryer. It's working just fine. I tested it down here while you were asleep."

Quinn narrowed her eyes. "Well, I'm glad to see you have your priorities in order…my brain versus your precious weapon of mass destruction."

Rachel made a face. "Please. Let's not descend into histrionics here. Weapon of mass destruction?"


The brunette laughed and threw a napkin at her.

They ate breakfast together in a relatively comfortable silence, only a few words spoken here and there. Quinn was relieved that Rachel was at least giving her time to have coffee first before starting in on the talk she knew the diva was bursting at the seams to have.

But breakfast came and went. Rachel cleaned up while Quinn sat on pins and needles, just waiting for the moment she would spin around and start throwing out the questions or maybe begin with a ridiculously long speech she'd been planning since last night to admonish Quinn for her behavior, including the history of their relationship, all the mistakes Quinn had made, in excruciating detail until the blonde was begging for mercy…and then Rachel would start making her demands.

No more Sam-shield, everyone had to know about them if Quinn wanted to be with her, sex notwithstanding. Come out to the school. Come out to her…parents… Quinn was so grateful for that painkiller because if her head was still throbbing like it was before, she'd be throwing up right now.

The kitchen was clean. The dishes were dried and put away. Rachel was talking about picking something up at the mall and studying for their history test on Monday. There was no hint that last night was on the brunette's mind. Quinn was genuinely baffled.

Was she planning to ignore what had happened between them last night?

It was against everything Quinn knew about her! Rachel was always the first to want to talk about things. Rachel was always the first to attack every issue, no matter how sensitive or painful it might be. And she tended to do so in the bluntest of possible ways. Tact just wasn't in her repertoire.

Quinn just watched in stunned disbelief as Rachel walked out of the kitchen saying that she was going to get her purse, telling Quinn she should try to find something more appropriate to wear since they were going out.
She really *was* going to pretend like nothing ever happened?

No way. Not a chance. This had to be dealt with! How could Rachel possibly think they could just…

Quinn practically ran up the stairs to Rachel's bedroom again where the brunette was looking around for her bag.

"Are you serious?"

Rachel looked up at her with a frown. "Huh?"

"Are you serious?" she repeated plainly. "You're just going to ignore what happened yesterday? Act like we didn't almost…or that we didn't have that fight?"

"Quinn…" she said with a soft smile, not seeming to be bothered in the least, "I wasn't going to forget about it. I just thought… Well, I wanted to wait until you were feeling better before revisiting the issue."

"I FEEL FINE!"

Quinn knew she was getting a little too manic about this, but she couldn't help it. Her nerves were so frayed right now. She just needed this settled. She needed them to be okay. She wanted her footing again.

"Oh, good! The medicine is helping then?"

"Rachel!"

She laughed, still bafflingly unperturbed by Quinn's neurotic behavior, and walked over to her, taking her hands in hers. At her touch, soft and warm, fitting perfectly as always, Quinn couldn't help but feel as though she were being pulled from the ledge, back to safety and reality once more.

"Baby, please calm down," Rachel smiled and kissed her sweetly. "We can talk about it now if you need to."

"I…I…I need to," she stammered, more confused than ever.

What was going on here? Why was she the hysterical one? When did the roles reverse and Quinn became the high strung girlfriend who needed to talk about everything?

"Okay, I'll go first then," Rachel said with a nod and led a befuddled Quinn to sit down on the bed while she stood in front of her. "You were right last night."

"Rach, *no*, you-" Quinn immediately tried to protest, but the diva would have none of it.

"You said you wanted to talk, so we're going to talk!" she said sternly. "Be quiet and let me say this."

The blonde frowned, but said no more. Already she hated where this was going. It was not going to be like this! She wouldn't allow it! No matter what Rachel said, she was going to be very clear who was at fault here and it was *not* Rachel.

"You were right…" she repeated when she was sure Quinn wasn't going to interrupt again, "about me holding back. I want to make love with you Quinn. I'm ready for it. I have been for a while. But I had this fantasy in my head that when we finally took that step, Sam wouldn't be in the picture. Our
friends and family would know about us; they would know we're in love, that we're leaving Lima together... I think I started dreaming about it before you broke up with Sam the first time." She chuckled softly to herself. "Maybe even way before that. It was just silly daydreaming, you know? I never thought it could be real...or even close to real. Then we started to get to know each other better, we were dating, and still I had the same idea, only I held on to it a little tighter each day, thinking maybe...just maybe...it didn't have to be a fantasy after all. I'm not wrong to want that, Quinn."

"No, of course not." Quinn's heart broke a little as she said the words. "Rachel, you deserve so much more th-"

"I'm not finished."

The blonde closed her mouth.

"But I realized last night that I was holding on to something, not willing to give unless it was in exchange for something else. You have to believe me when I tell you that I honestly didn't know I was doing it."

"I know that." She nodded. "I know you didn't mean to."

"I want you so much...all the time... All day long, you are constantly in my thoughts, and at night, you're in my dreams as well. When you touch me...when you kiss me..."

Quinn sucked in a breath.

"I want it, Quinn. I want you so badly. I know all I have to do is say yes and I could have all of you, with you, but I stop myself."

Rachel sighed and crossed her arms sadly, looking away.

"Because somewhere in the back of my head, I always think, 'If I just wait a little longer...then she'll see...then she might want me enough to overcome her fears and let people know. We could be together for everyone to see. If only I wait a little longer...'" Rachel turned back to face her. "But I can't do that anymore."

"Y-you can't...?" Quinn stuttered fearfully, fear threatening to close her throat.

"It just doesn't make sense. Why am I denying myself something that we both want so much? We're so ready to share ourselves in that way with each other, the most intimate, precious bond we could have, and I continue to hold on to some childish fantasy ideal? I believe in you, Quinn. I know one day you'll be able to show your true self to the world, but if I'm the only one you can do that for right now, then how can I refuse? I want you, all of you, and I don't want to wait anymore."

Quinn had never been more grateful to be sitting down in her life. Her vision wavered as she tried to take it all in, but she had scarcely a moment. Rachel's delicious mouth was suddenly on hers, lips pressing insistently, demandingly, searchingly. Before she could process a single thought, Quinn was on her back and Rachel was straddling her waist, kissing her breathless.

For a moment she almost let herself get swept away by that mouth, those hands... But before Quinn lost herself to the abyss, she grasped on to the last bit of sanity she had and tore herself out from beneath the brunette. Stumbling, she almost fell off the bed in an effort to put some distance between them, and she threw herself against the wall on the opposite side – as far away from Rachel as the bedroom would allow.
"WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?" she shrieked.

Panic was all she could feel right now, that and utter bewilderment.

"Quinn…wha…" Rachel panted looking at her with wide-eyes, in the same position as if Quinn were still beneath her.

"NO!" she shouted angrily. "We're not doing this! I won't let you. Goddammit, Rachel! What were you thinking?"

The brunette just stared at her, looking more and more hurt by the second. Quinn's head was reeling, whether from the painkiller or Rachel's kisses, she didn't know.

Oh my God…

"Is that why you gave me that pill?"

Something in the back of her mind warned her she was going off the rails now, but she couldn't stop.

"You wanted me off guard so you could seduce me?"

"QUINN!" Rachel leapt off the bed like she'd been burned and openly gaped at her. "Have you lost all sanity? Do you hear yourself!"

"YOU SAID YOU WANTED TO WAIT!"

"I CHANGED MY MIND!"

"BECAUSE I PUSHED YOU INTO IT!"

"BUT YOU DIDN'T!"

Rachel stopped to take a deep, calming breath.

"God, Quinn! You didn't push me, not at all. This is something I want, something I've wanted for a while. Didn't you listen to a thing I said?"

The blonde shook her head furiously, still clinging to the wall as if it were her only saving grace.

"You were right last night! You were right. It's not fair to you and I shouldn't have reacted that way. How can you say… It shouldn't be a fantasy, Rachel! It's what you should have! It's what's normal! Because what's happening now isn't normal!"

Tears appeared in Rachel's eyes as she slumped down on the bed and Quinn slapped her hand to her forehead, crying out at the pain shooting through her skull as a result.

Stupid freaking hair dryer…

"Not us!" she cried, strained. "I didn't mean us, Rach, I meant the situation – what I've put you through, how things are right now. I have a boyfriend even though I'm completely, ridiculously, madly in love with another girl. And no one gets to know that! Not friends, not family, no one. It's wrong and you shouldn't have to put up with it, but you do. I'm not going to let what I did last night push you into making a decision you'll regret. I shouldn't have walked out. I'm sorry. This is my fault, Rachel. I won't let you do this. Not this way. When I can give you that, what you want and deserve, a public relationship…my hand to hold whenever you want it…then we can talk about this again."
"So this is yet another decision you're going to make for me?" Rachel's nostrils flared hotly as she clenched her fists at her side. "It's my choice, Quinn!"

"But you're only doing this because of how I reacted last night!" she shot back. "It wasn't about sex, Rachel. It was about us. It hurt to know...that you were holding back. Can you understand that?"

"You hold things back from me too, Quinn."

She nodded shakily. "But I've also given you more of me than I've ever...with anyone..."

Rachel sighed and rubbed her eyes wearily. Quinn still stayed plastered to the wall, but she was breathing easier now. It was as if the room was settling itself back down to its rightful place again, cool and quiet, after a firestorm just came tearing through.

"Do you really think I tried to drug you so I could convince you to have sex with me?" she asked quietly.

Quinn groaned softly.

What had she been thinking? How could she have entertained the mere thought, let alone let it come out of her mouth! It was just that her head still hurt and her brain was a little fuzzy from the medicine and then Rachel started saying all those things...

"Oh," she gulped. "Uh...no, s-sorry, I got a little crazy for a minute there."

Rachel nodded curtly. "We're really going to have to reconsider who's the melodramatic one in this relationship."

"You might be right."

"Because I swear I just wanted you to feel better. I wasn't even planning on doing this today. I wanted to wait for the right time to tell you, not when you're still suffering from an assault. I shouldn't have said anything, I should have waited. You're obviously under a great deal of stress..."

"Rach, don't," she begged. "I swear I was just being crazy. You...you caught me off guard. I don't handle surprises very well - even good ones."

"So I'm learning." She tucked her hands underneath her legs. "Definitely never planning any surprise birthday parties for you."

"I'm sorry."

Silence passed through the room, thick and disquieting. Quinn didn't know what to do, what to say. Rachel was only staring at the floor now. She wanted so badly to say something, something comforting, something reassuring, but her mouth only opened and closed uselessly.

After a while, Rachel's voice came, soft and timid, "Is this really happening? A-are you turning me down when I just opened myself up to you, told you that I love you...and that I-I want you to be my first? Are you rejecting me, Quinn?"

"T-t-that's not...!" Her eyes widened in horror. "Is that guilt? You're guilting me now? Oh my God! That is so freaking wrong - on so many levels - and completely unfair. You know that's not what this is about!"

"It's Jewish guilt. I can use it whenever I want," she retorted with a sniff and then rolled her eyes,
getting to her feet. "Stop being so silly, Quinn. I understand you're concerned that this is a result of your storm out last night, but get over it."

Indignant, she opened her mouth to protest, but Rachel took a few quick steps that closed the distance between them. Then she was so close Quinn could smell her all around again, those beautiful doe eyes staring right up into her, through her. All the words flew out of her head and her sweaty palms grasped desperately at the wall.

"We love each other. We want each other. We've known each other for years. We've been together for a significant period of time...I'm ready, I know you are too. The rest will come later. You may still be holding things back from me, Quinn, but I've made a decision to trust you - whether you like it or not. It's my choice. When you're ready...and I know you will be one day...we'll have all of those things we talked about, but for right now? Let us have this."

"But...you said..."

"A person can change her mind."

"It's only because of what I did."

"Yes. In a way, it is," she admitted. "If we hadn't talked about it, I wouldn't have had to force myself to truly consider my motivations. You're not pushing me into anything, Quinn. If anything, look at you," she gestured to the blonde's frozen stance against the wall, "you're pushing me away. This isn't about me giving you something you want...okay? It's about me letting myself have something I want. Do you see that?" She leaned in closer and Quinn could feel her breath on her skin. "And luckily enough, our desires just happen to coincide with each other perfectly."

Rachel's lips pressed against hers again, gently this time, a ghost of a kiss that was too much and not enough all at the same time.

Her resolve was weakening. Her palms left the cool wall for Rachel's cheeks, stroking the soft skin there with the pads of her thumbs.

"Tell me you don't want this."

Quinn almost cried tears of frustration. She had been so determined not to let this happen, not to let Rachel make this mistake, but how could she resist this anymore? Rachel was asking for everything Quinn wanted to give. How could she deny her? What was the right thing? Was she supposed to be chivalrous? Tell her no? Make the decision for them? Or was she going to trust that Rachel knew what she wanted, that she wouldn't regret it...that she really was going to trust her?

Biting her bottom lip hard, Quinn shook her head. "I can't tell you that," she whispered hoarsely.

"Then make love to me."

"A-are you sure?" she said pleadingly, begging with her eyes and her heart just one more time, giving her one more chance to change her mind.

Rachel said nothing, but Quinn heard everything.

The brunette led her over to the bed, gently encouraging Quinn to sit down once more. When she felt the mattress beneath her, everything started to slip away, but she desperately tried to hold on with every last bit of strength she had.

"Rach, please, we don't have to...I love you. I'll wait, just like you're waiting for me."
"No more waiting, not for this," she said with a loving smile and unbuttoned her shirt before pulling off Quinn's borrowed sweater.

They were falling back on the bed together, a tangled, glorious mess, but still Quinn couldn't bring herself to believe this was happening, that it was real, that it wouldn't go away, now or tomorrow, or forever...that it wouldn't be a mistake. Rachel's hands were running over Quinn's body slowly, exploring with leisure, giving Quinn comfort she didn't even know she needed.

"Tell me you love me again," Rachel said against her ear.

She could say it always, as many times, for as long as Rachel wanted to hear it, and mean it with every fiber of her being.

"I love you."

Her beautiful face hovered above her, dark hair cascading down like curtains so that there was only one thing for Quinn to see. She looked deep into the eyes that made her tremble under their intensity.

"Then love me."

And so the last of it fell away.

There was nothing left to hold on to but her.
Quick Learner

Quinn slid her hands into the thick, silky brunette hair and pulled Rachel back to her mouth fiercely. She didn't know how long they'd been going like this and she didn't care. Both girls were stripped down to nothing but panties once again, the same place they'd been last time before Leroy popped up to stop them, or stop Rachel really.

Quinn was straddling the diva's legs, letting the full weight of her body rest on the smaller girl. Rachel always made the best sound when she did that. As their tongues played again and again, she relished the feeling of an almost completely naked Rachel writhing beneath her, hot and soft, thrusting up against her as if her body had a mind of its own, demanding Quinn's in return. She had never known such pleasure before with anyone else. Not even close. She hadn't even known it was possible.

Rachel's tongue swept inside her mouth playfully and Quinn seized her chance to suck on it, but released it with a gasp because Rachel had dragged her nails hard down her back.

"I love it when you do that," the brunette mumbled and nipped Quinn's throat just a little harder than usual.

Shivering from the leftover burn on her skin, Quinn brushed the hair away from Rachel's shoulder and promptly returned the bite in kind. The brunette yelped and then giggled, wrapping her arms around Quinn's torso to hold her closer.

Out of nothing more than instinct, desire, and perhaps just pure curiosity, Quinn snaked her hand between them and groaned loudly into Rachel's mouth when she came into contact with the soaking wet cotton.

All for her…

Tentatively…testingly…Quinn used her fingers to rub against the wetness through the fabric. Mewling, Rachel clutched Quinn fiercely and rocked her hips against the touch.

"More."

She had never heard Rachel sound like that before. She was so vulnerable, so utterly wanting, so trusting, so open to anything and everything Quinn would do.

It was then that Quinn suddenly froze and broke out into a cold sweat. She knew just then what they were about to do and now there was a gut wrenching realization that she didn't know how to do what they were going to do!

She'd wanted Rachel sexually for...well for such a really freaking long time now that she let herself admit it, but even in pursuing this relationship, all the heated, intimate moments, she never quite thought it through. She knew what she wanted from Rachel and with Rachel, but it was in this sort of vague and abstract way. It was hard to explain, but she knew the end result desired, that there was supposed to be a release, but the technicalities of how to get there? She didn't know! She didn't know anything! How could she make love to Rachel without knowing what to do specifically to please her? Sex with Puck was entirely different (and oh-so brief). She just laid there while he did what he did and then it was over. If it weren't for the soreness the next day and the belly that followed those months, she would have hardly remembered anything about it all. It wouldn't have even existed.

This was all new. This was something she hadn't done before. Puck didn't count - how could
something that went on for hardly a minute count in that way? She'd suffered the price, of course, but none of the pleasure.

For all intents and purposes, she really was a virgin here with Rachel now and she was utterly, utterly at a loss. She almost sobbed when the fear washed over her and buried her face against Rachel's neck, hoping to hide there somehow. She didn't want to mess this up! How could she have allowed herself to get this far so blindly?

At that moment she found herself desperately wishing she had listened to more of Santana's crude tales and Brittany's innocent comments about 'sweet lady kisses' instead of blocking them out like the good little Christian girl she was. Her limited knowledge of dry humping came from unwanted experiences with Finn. He couldn't seem to help himself really and before Quinn could even get a chance to protest he would be shouting "Mailman!" and have to run out with a dark stain on his pants. It was absolutely revolting and that had been the extent of her sexual experiences up until now. Puck was one night and some minor kissing in the aftermath when she tried to make it work (stupidly so). Sam had always been kept at arm's length. That was it. Then there was her.

Rachel deserved her first time to be better than just some clumsy, inept fumbling that would inevitably leave them both red-faced with embarrassment. Fearful and ashamed, Quinn moved her hand away, finding a safe place to rest on Rachel's shoulder. She was already trying to plan ahead to figure out how she was going to do this. Was she going to have to watch porn? Oh, God help her, she didn't want to do that. Was there like an instruction manual online or something...?

So lost in her own terrified musings, she didn't notice how Rachel was gently urging her to turn over and laying Quinn down on her back so that she was on top until the sound of her voice softly calling brought her back.

"Quinn...talk to me."

She looked up at Rachel miserably.

*Why was she always so stupid? So selfish? So wrong? When was she ever going to do the right thing, for once in her life?*

"Is it too much?" Rachel asked nervously. "I-I thought we were on the same page, that you said you were ready, but it's okay if you're not..."

"But I am!" she wailed in frustration, tears close, but not quite there yet.

"Did I push? Oh! I did, didn't I? I wasn't thinking! Quinn, I'm sorry, I only thought you were refusing because of me, but I should have-"

"That's not it!"

Rachel looked at her warily and then her gaze dropped so she was no longer meeting Quinn's eyes. She covered her bare chest with her arms, seeming to want to curl into herself as much as possible. Right then, she could see that sad look of defeat, of shame, washing over the smaller girl. It was the same look she had when the Glee club would collectively try to crush her beneath their heel, the same look she had when Finn would make her feel ashamed of who she was. It was the look Quinn hated more than anything in the world and she had just caused it...again.

"W-well what is it then? Is it me? D-do you not want-"

"Finish that and I just might slap you."
Her eyes widened a bit. "Okayyyy," she said with a hint of exasperation, "then can I perhaps garner a clue here? While admittedly slightly psychic, I do not retain the full ability to read minds. I remind you, I'm very naked and thus extremely vulnerable at the moment so my thoughts will immediately jump to include the worst so please, please say something and save me from all the awful things going through my head now if they're not the truth."

"I'm scared," she whispered.

"I'm scared too."

"I'm afraid I won't be good. I-I-I don't know how...how to do this."

"We'll find out together."

Rachel carefully lay down on top of her, letting their naked bodies meet again, and Quinn swallowed hard. Her hands automatically went to Rachel's back, pulling her in closer, while Rachel smiled at her, stroking Quinn's hair soothingly before tucking it back behind her ear. She looked up into those dark eyes and she saw trust, she saw love, and she saw beauty…such…such beauty.

Could a person like this, like Rachel Berry, truly exist for her?

"But I haven't...I mean, I REALLY don't know how this works." She struggled to find a way to explain it. How was she going to actually say the words? "I don't know what to do!"

Rachel dropped her lips to the curve of Quinn's collarbone, the light brush of those perfect, plump lips against her skin made Quinn shiver. The brunette sighed and perched her chin on her hand as she looked down at her.

"It's not like I'm experienced in this either," she said tenderly. "Maybe j-just think about what you do when you please yourself and apply it here?"

"That's just it, I-I've never..." Quinn gulped, blushing furiously, unable to finish the sentence.

Realization visibly washed over Rachel's features and she lifted herself up on her arms. Quinn watched her brow go from furrowed sadness to smooth shock.

"Quinn! You mean to tell me that you've never masturbated before?"

"Oh God..." she groaned in humiliation, wanting nothing more than to smother herself with a pillow. Death was preferable over this.

Quinn had never let herself go there. All the things she had been told as a child in Sunday school, by her mother, by her pastor… It was a sin. It was wrong. You were dirty and evil if you did it. You were a pervert. Pleasure like that could only be experienced in the marital bed, but they'd never even mentioned pleasure — it was always responsibility or duty, a function she was supposed to perform as a wife and nothing more. For all that Quinn tried to let go of what had been so deeply instilled in her, this was still a roadblock. Every time she came close to caving, to letting her hands go there when she was alone in bed after a night, or, God, just a few minutes alone, with Rachel… she couldn't bring herself to do it. All the old adages piled on her again and refused to leave until she either took a cold shower or simply willed herself to sleep.

"I don't... I don't..." Rachel stammered in disbelief. "How have you been coping with all that we've been doing these last few months? I would have died not being able to find release after our extremely heated time together..."
"Y-you do that?" Quinn stammered in amazement. "After we...?"

"Of course! Our encounters always leave me so acutely aroused, it's as if I have no other choice."

She swallowed hard as that sent a lightning bolt to her already throbbing core. Her mind was filled with images of Rachel, her hair mussed and lips swollen from Quinn’s kisses, with her hand between her legs…moaning Quinn's name…

"I just assumed that... How have you been able to deal with it then? I would have lost my mind!"

"I dunno," she muttered almost incomprehensibly. "Just with Cheerios practice and cold showers..."

Actually, Quinn couldn't remember the last time she had taken a WARM shower. She'd just gotten so used to needing...

"Cheerios practice?" Rachel echoed with a deep frown. "Please tell me that-"

"The work out, Rach." Quinn smiled despite herself at the brunette's displeasure. "You know, exercise? I would even run suicides with the freshman when I didn't have to. Lots of energy to burn..."

"I see..."

"S-so we should hold off, I think, because I need to find out-"

The diva cut her off with a searing kiss that left Quinn breathless and writhing beneath her.

"We are NOT holding off on anything. But I do want you to promise me something."

"Anything."

She sincerely meant it. In this state, she'd do anything Rachel asked even if it meant stalking Barbra Streisand for weeks just to steal a lock of her hair...

"You need to be able to do that with yourself...please yourself I mean. I understand from my limited knowledge of your conservative upbringing that you've been taught it's a sin, but Quinn, remember how many other things you've been taught to be ashamed of but know now that you shouldn't be?"

"This is so embarrassing," she whined.

"It's only natural. And if it makes you feel better, you can think of it as practice."

"Practice?" Her eyebrow rose curiously.

"You need to know what pleases you, baby, and it'll also teach you how to please me better."

*That didn't sound so bad. If it was just practicing for Rachel...she could do that...*

"Do you k-know how this..."

Rachel's cheeks went red, but she gave no other sign of embarrassment as she admitted that she had indeed researched it. Quinn laughed heartily and wrapped her arms around the smaller girl, pulling her back down again. Despite the tension and humiliation she felt right now, hearing about Rachel doing something so perfectly *Rachel was* just a delightful distraction and lifted away the heaviness that threatened to crush her.
She was still laughing when lips met hers in a gentle caress, slowly easing away the giggling laughter. Rachel kissed her sweetly, lightly, as though they were starting all over again and hadn't been rolling around in this bed for...however long it'd been by now. It didn't take long for her body to ignite again and the kiss deepened. Rachel slanted her mouth over hers, drawing in Quinn's lips and tongue over and over again with such practiced ease that she found every spot to make Quinn heady with desire in a matter of seconds.

Their hands were traveling again, groping at each other for whatever flesh they could find and wanting even more of it. Rachel was fully on top of Quinn now, nestled between the blonde's legs and Quinn let her legs fall open further and hooked her ankle around Rachel's waist just to feel her more where she so desperately needed.

Rachel pulled back with a shaky breath, chewing on her bottom lip. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes dark as she looked to Quinn for permission.

"Is it okay?"

The blonde nodded. "W-will you show me...what you like?" she asked nervously. "H-how do you do it, I mean."

*Show me how you touch yourself. Show me what you like. I have to know. I'll make you feel good, Rachel. I swear it. I'll do anything. Just show me how.*

With a tremulous, but reassuring smile, Rachel slipped her hand between them, taking her time to trail between the valley of Quinn's breasts, sliding across her belly, before dipping down to cup the heat between her legs. They gasped simultaneously, Rachel at feeling the wetness there and Quinn at the shock of how such a simple action caused tremors to course through her entire body. She was bucking into Rachel's hand before she even knew what she was doing, desperate and whining for more of her touch, more pressure, more everything!

Rachel's mouth formed a 'o' shape as she looked down to see the undoubtedly large dark patch on Quinn's underwear. Her fingers were doing something magical, massaging her through the fabric and Quinn felt that pressure coiling low in her stomach.

Did Rachel like it as much as she had? Did it make Rachel feel the same as Quinn had when she got to touch her there? To see the effect she had on her?

Quinn could hardly think straight anymore. She needed something, anything, and she needed it now.

"Rach..."

Without a word or even a glance back up, the brunette shifted away from Quinn and pulled off her panties in one sweeping motion. She didn't have time to feel embarrassed at being so naked because Rachel had slipped her fingers into the wet heat to stroke her. Quinn's hips came off the mattress with a start.

"Oh, Quinn..." the brunette sighed.

She barely heard her. All she could think or feel were Rachel's fingers doing something incredible between her legs. No one had ever touched her like this. Puck had tried, but Quinn just batted him away and said to get on with it.

It...felt...so...good.

Rachel watched the blonde intently, determined to make this as thrillingly pleasurable as possible for
Quinn, especially after having just found out how truly sexually repressed her girlfriend was. It wasn't even just about them having this together, sharing this intimacy, but also just to give Quinn the attention and pleasure she deserved to experience, but she nearly lost all composure when Quinn arched her back, her breasts rising into the air, her incredible body stretched out and open before her. Quinn stared wide eyed at the ceiling with her mouth open as if she were in some state of shock, her cheeks a ruddy color that only served to make her that much more beautiful… Rachel had never seen anything so erotic, her hand between Quinn's spread legs, the blonde clutching everywhere she could and never finding the right place. When she left the sheets and brushed her hands over her own breasts with a breathy moan, tossing her head to the side, Rachel thought she might just come right then and there.

No. She had to be good. This had to be good for Quinn. She couldn't bear to let her down, but the throbbing between her legs was growing worse, her nipples were so tight they ached, and she wanted nothing more than to jump on Quinn and ride her for dear life. She wasn't exactly sure how that would work, but it sounded like a really good idea.

God, those should be her hands on her. She should be the one caressing those beautiful breasts, how soft and smooth, before she reached those straining peaks. She should be tasting every inch of her. Rachel's mouth watered at the thought of being able to find out what Quinn really tasted like, she could smell her everywhere…but that was too much too soon. She was getting ahead of herself.

*Just take it slow, like you always do with Quinn. You know how. Just take it slow.*

Instead Rachel found herself licking and biting at the blonde's trim stomach, tracing the curve of her hips with her mouth. What on earth had Quinn been talking about? What could her body have been like before? She was nothing short of utterly flawless. Was it those faint lines that marked where her belly had swollen once that had Quinn feeling so insecure? How could that possibly be it? Rachel was certain her girlfriend was off her rocker to think something as ludicrously insignificant, barely even NOTICEABLE, as that would make her any less desirable or perfect in her eyes. Instead, she chose to pay special attention to those lines, determined to show Quinn exactly what she thought. The blonde ineffectually tried to pull her away, but Rachel refused, and instead let her free hand make its way back up to palm those utterly perfect globes again, taking the hardened nipples between her fingers just to hear Quinn moan even more.

"Do you want me, Quinn?" she rasped, her voice sounding deeper than she'd ever heard it go.

That was something new. And apparently it had a profound effect on Quinn whose eyes nearly rolled in the back of her head as she whimpered out a "yes".

"Tell me."

"I w-want you."

"Just me?"

The brunette licked her lips eagerly, working her fingers a little more quickly now. This was good, talking helped her focus. She could think better, control things more.

"Just you. *Always* you."

"You feel so amazing, Quinn," she said huskily. "Do you like what I'm doing to you?"

The blonde just nodded fiercely, thrashing around on the bed a little. Rachel watched her in sheer wonderment, the wetness pooled between her thighs as she saw the effect she was having on this…
this gorgeous creature. It was Quinn Fabray, flushed and panting and moaning, all because of her. All because of Rachel.

She knew she would never want anything more than this. There was nothing more than this.

When her thumb brushed against that bundle of nerves again, the blonde suddenly launched upwards and yanked Rachel into her arms so she was straddling Quinn. Lips and tongue crashed together as Quinn kissed Rachel with all she had. Quinn wanted to feel every part of her; she wanted more, so much more. She never knew such wanton greediness such as this. Her hips rocked against the delicious friction Rachel caused as she teased her.

She pulled her roughly back down on the bed with her, Rachel's hand still firmly between her legs.

"Ah!" the brunette gasped and moved just out of reach when Quinn's hands, as if with a mind of their own, caressed her breasts and slipped between Rachel's thighs. "Quinn, stop that!" she said sternly. "I have to concentrate on what I'm doing!"

If she hadn't been so utterly desperate with need right then, Quinn would have had the sense enough to laugh.

"Then do it," she groaned, sliding her hands up and down the smooth, heated flesh of Rachel's back and buried her face in the crook of her neck, sucking hard before letting her tongue and lips take over to taste every inch of that spot.

Rachel moaned and used her free hand to seize Quinn's hair. It was the same spot Quinn had found all those months ago...their very first time together in this bed...and it was still every bit as sensitive as it was then. Rachel's grip was so tight it hurt, but Quinn didn't care, it only spurred her further.


It was all she could think of. Why was Rachel waiting? She needed more. She needed it now. Quinn had just opened her mouth to beg (yes she was going to beg like her freaking life depended on it) before Rachel pulled her head back and looked into her eyes. Quinn felt herself grounded there, yet falling through at exactly the same time. Their harsh breathing filled the room as there was not another sound to be heard save for the pounding of their hearts. She gave her permission without saying a thing at all, not even a nod of her head, and Rachel tentatively slipped a finger inside of her. She yelped at the feeling of such glorious relief and ground her hips down to match Rachel's gentle thrust.

"Are you-?"

"Don't stop please don't stop," she gasped breathlessly.

Her head was a fog of heated desire. She could comprehend nothing more or less than just Rachel, all of Rachel, everything Rachel, her Rachel.

Rachel kissed her neck, her throat, her chest, her breasts, Quinn could feel her everywhere. Her hot mouth was covering every inch of her body and she was inside of her. Finally, she was inside of her!

Rachel leaned her forehead against Quinn's as she pumped her finger slowly in and out of that slick, impossibly burning heat. She forced herself to keep her eyes open, just to watch what this was doing to Quinn. She had to know. She had to see everything. Quinn's hair splayed out across the pink sheets, the way she moaned, filling Rachel with a sensation she didn't fully understand...like this was it, this was everything, just to make her sound that way, just to make her feel like this. Quinn moved restlessly beneath her and Rachel just wanted to hold her even closer, wrap herself around her, and
never let go. She'd never been so close to someone like this and yet she wanted more. It would never be enough, but she would never stop trying.

With Rachel's hot breath against her throat, arm wrapped around her back, hand between her legs, Quinn felt herself getting closer to the edge. It just wasn't enough, she wanted to feel more. No sooner had she whimpered than Rachel added a second finger and Quinn groaned with pleasure. She ground her hips down, meeting each gentle thrust with her own.

"Rachel."

The pace increased and soon Quinn was matching every thrust for frenzied thrust. As Rachel went deeper and deeper with every stroke, Quinn felt the delicious pressure building within her, threatening to explode from between her legs to every corner of her body, to the very tips of her fingers. Her body screamed for release, flooding her with a fervent desperation through her veins, burning and tugging at her incessantly. It wanted to come out; it wanted to burst through, so close she could feel it. But it kept slipping away.

Rachel was whispering hotly against her ear.

"Breathe, baby, breathe - let it happen."

So close...

She didn't even know what she was close to! It was just something there, something she had to reach and fall over the edge. She twined her arms around Rachel's waist and with every thrust the blonde gave, Rachel used her hips to return it, driving her even deeper into Quinn. She buried her face in the crook of Rachel's neck, wanting to be closer, to breathe her in, to taste her. The tan skin beneath her lips was hot to the touch, feverish, as Quinn sucked hard before sinking her teeth down. Rachel whimpered and she swung her head around, desperately searching for Quinn's mouth, which she obligingly offered.

Their tongues played for a moment before Rachel got the better of her and swept deep inside. Quinn moaned at the taste of her.

So much of Rachel. So much. Never enough.

God, she didn't know what she was doing, what she was feeling; she only wanted more of it.

She could taste her, feel her, faster, Rach, ohgodplease, faster, harder, fuck me!

Had she said that out loud?

Quinn breathed her in deeply and when Rachel curled her fingers upward, hitting this place… everything shattered in a blinding white heat. She lost control as it ripped through her body, hitting every corner and crevice, every nerve ending, even places she didn't know could be touched. Then it was over and she was left wonderfully trembling, her body a mass of jelly. She didn't think it would ever be the same again.

So many thoughts raced through her head, she couldn't make out any but one that repeated itself the most.

So that's what it's supposed to be like.

A thousand miles away, she felt herself drifting in this state of utter bliss, where nothing existed but this feeling, this…this…this peace…yet for as far away from this earth as she was, she could still feel
her. Rachel's scent surrounded her, their legs entwined, her warm, naked body pressed against hers, her breasts against her stomach, her hand in her hair, softly stroking, while the other continued to explore her body in a light caress. Up and down again, circling her hip, tracing up her side, between the valley of her breasts, the line of her jaw…

"Quinn?" her voice beckoned to her softly, helping her float back down and anchor her once again.

She could barely manage a nonsensical sound of reply, just to let Rachel know she'd heard her. Speech wasn't coming back yet. Neither was much else.

"Are you okay?"

She struggled to make her eyes focus and when she did, there was the glowing, beautiful, and very worried face of Rachel Berry before her.

"What?" she managed to gasp out, still breathing hard. Her heart hadn't calmed down yet either. "W-what are you…what?"

It wasn't until the brunette reached out and wiped away the tears that had slipped out of the corner of her eyes that Quinn understood what she was saying. She had no idea she'd been crying.

"Are you all right? Did I hurt you?"

Quinn didn't bother to fight the giggles that bubbled up inside her. She just tilted her head back happily and carefree, letting it all come loose.

"That was…that was so..." she swallowed thickly and looked back at the brunette who still had a furrowed brow of concern, "I love you, Rachel Berry…more than I'll ever love anyone."

"So you're okay?" she pressed anxiously. "You feel okay? Your head doesn't hurt?"

Quinn wondered if she had even heard her at all.

Oh, but that was her Rachel. Silly Rachel. Perfectly Rachel.

Everything was just…stars. Gold stars, everywhere. Was that what she had needed for so long? 'Cause it felt like she'd found it - whatever 'it' was.

If someone offered her a million dollars to stop grinning right this second, she wouldn't have been able to do it.

"I'm…perfect."

Sighing with relief, Rachel dropped her head for a moment before looking back up with her signature mega-watt smile.

"Did Quinn Fabray just have her very first orgasm?"

"She did," Quinn purred delightedly. "And Rachel Berry gave it to her."

"Well, wasn't that nice of her?"

"I'd like to think she enjoyed it a little bit too."

"I think she might have."
As Rachel had watched Quinn orgasm, brought there by her and only her, she knew she had found a new passion that rivaled even her love of singing. What she wouldn't give to just be able to do this over and over again, to watch as she wound Quinn up and sent her into a freefall, to make her plummet over the edge again and again and again, each time better than the last. She found herself more determined than ever to be the perfect student and master this; what was valedictorian compared to this? What was History, Math, Science, English, compared to this? She'd give it all up just to study Quinn Fabray for the rest of her life and it would prove to be far more useful and worthwhile than any of those other things.

"Rachel?"

She broke away from her musings to see a wicked gleam in those hazel eyes that both frightened and excited her.

"Q-Quinn?"

"My turn."

The diva didn't have a chance to respond before Quinn had rapidly flipped them over, having regained her strength in the last few minutes, and it was as though she had even more energy than before. She gasped when her back slammed against the mattress so hard, they bounced slightly.

Then there was a hot mouth against her skin, a tongue laving over what felt like everywhere. Quinn sucked and licked at her breasts and she could do little else but hold on for dear life as this fierce blonde tigress took over. Rachel could have sworn she heard a growl.

It was the sexiest thing she'd ever heard.

Her core throbbed maddeningly as Quinn continued her merciless onslaught against Rachel's body, seemingly determined to find and mark every inch of it with her hands, lips, tongue, and even teeth.

Rachel had never been so utterly turned on her life. Her thighs were slick as she soaked through her underwear. Her hips had a mind of their own, grinding and thrusting against Quinn in any place she could find purchase.

Oh, God.

It was so hard and so fast, she couldn't think, couldn't breathe. Pleasure was building rapidly inside her, a storm about to unleash, and just as she felt herself beginning to crest, Quinn slowed, and the release that had just been encroaching, fell away.

Rachel had never so seriously and calculatingly considered murder before in her life. She was plotting her beautiful girlfriend's untimely death for being so cruel when she finally met those hazel, gold flecked eyes. There was no smirk, no raised eyebrow, nothing to indicate that she was teasing Rachel for the sake of tormenting her. It was just Quinn, looking at her, into her, through her. She knew then that it wasn't a tease, it wasn't Quinn messing around; it was Quinn…loving her. Sweet, soft lips melted against hers in a languid kiss where they licked and touched every place their mouths had to offer.

She'd never been kissed by anyone the way Quinn kissed her. Her first. Her always. Such love poured from within, Rachel curled her arms around the blonde and held her close just so that Quinn could feel it too, feel everything that was radiating out from her, so that Rachel could give it into her.

There would never be anyone she loved more than Quinn Fabray.
Oh. Had Quinn said the same before? She did. It hadn't registered at first because Rachel was so panicked by seeing those tears, but the utterly orgasmic look on Quinn's face had quelled her fears. Finally, she had gotten something right.

"I want to feel you," Quinn murmured huskily against her ear.

Rachel felt the words streak to her throbbing center.

With a surprisingly steady hand, she took Quinn's and slid it down between them until both of their hands rested against the wet apex at Rachel's thighs.

Be my first. Take me. Love me. I trust you.

Quinn swallowed thickly; the expression on her face was something torn between arousal, fear, and pure wonder. Rachel understood all too well. She felt it too.

She touched her tentatively at first, like she had before, just barely stroking the soaked material of her panties. Rachel whined and thrust her hips purposefully so Quinn would get the hint.

When Rachel pushed against her eagerly, Quinn bit her bottom lip so fiercely, she almost drew blood. That hesitation, the fear she felt earlier, had been cast aside as something else took over inside of her. Running on pure adrenaline, desire, need…she wanted Rachel and her brain went on autopilot. It didn't matter that she didn't know exactly what she was doing, only that she was going to do it. Everything was about instinct…instinct and what Rachel had shown her.

The fear hadn't vanished though. It was still there, but now there was a fiery, primal urge overriding it that Quinn had never experienced before. She had always been able to feign confidence and did so with startling ease. Maybe it was because of the way she was raised. Quinn wasn't confident, but she had to be. So she put on a damn good show. Even if she didn't feel that way, everyone would think it, and wasn't that just as good as confidence itself? But this…this lack of doubt…this lack of fear…she'd never known this. There was no thinking, no forced façade, no way to protect herself. There was just need.

She needed Rachel. To please Rachel, make Rachel come, make Rachel hers, take everything, give everything, please her, fuck her, love her.

When Quinn slipped her hand into the slick, heated folds, she couldn't help but moan. Feeling how impossibly wet Rachel was, touching her where no one else had ever touched her (or would ever touch her if she had anything to say about that), it struck up her own desire again and the bundle of nerves between her legs was throbbing again as though she hadn't just found release a few minutes ago.

How was that even possible? To be so turned on again so soon? To feel like she needed to…again…already?

Rachel whimpered and Quinn immediately crawled back up the bed to find her mouth and cover her with kisses anywhere she could. She laved over her breasts with the utmost care, roughing those pebbled points lightly with her teeth and Rachel made the sexiest sound. It wasn't exactly a moan, but something guttural and needy, something Quinn would do anything to hear again.

She always tasted so good, sweet in the same places, salty in the others, and Quinn would lap it all up every time. She wanted every inch of that body touched by her, marked by her, loved by her. Rachel would be loved in every way possible, inside AND out.

She'd never thought she could be so addicted to something before and here she was…freely
admitting that she, Quinn Fabray, was addicted to Rachel Berry, addicted the way Rachel felt beneath her, addicted to the way Rachel made her feel, addicted to this crazy, impossible, maddening, glorious girl that she never wanted to stop touching.

As her fingers stretched and stroked and explored that uncharted territory, Quinn paid close attention to the sounds the diva made, which action made her whimper, which place made her moan, which stroke had her hips bucking off the mattress...she wanted to know it all. She *had* to know it all.

"R-Rachel?"

"I'm ready," she nodded breathlessly, locking eyes with Quinn.

The blonde sucked in a harsh breath at the sight. Rachel was laid out before her, her lips swollen and perfect from Quinn's kisses, her hair mussed and glorious as it went every which way across the pillows, her light brown eyes nearly black with desire...desire for Quinn. She was so beautiful it made her want to cry. This dark haired beauty was *hers*.

As she kissed her, Quinn gently slid one of her fingers inside and groaned. Rachel was so hot and tight around her, it was like her body was clamping down on her, keeping her in. Without even thinking about it, Quinn straddled Rachel's leg and as she gently pumped in and out of her, her own hips rocked simultaneously against the brunette's thigh, matching each movement. As she looked down into those darkened eyes, Quinn never knew a more beautiful sight. She was making love to Rachel Berry, this stunning, magnificent girl...the girl she wanted to spend the rest of her life with...

Rachel heard Quinn moan as they moved together. She couldn't believe this was happening. Quinn was inside of her, sucking on her throat, her tongue was there and everywhere. A flush came over her as her body burned with what Quinn was doing to her. There it was again; she could feel the pressure coil, the ripples of pleasure, winding higher, but it was too far away. More. Always more.

Quinn wondered when had her life turned around enough to give her this. What had she done to deserve such happiness, to deserve such a rare gift? She didn't. But here it was. Would it go away? No. She wouldn't let it. If this was something given to her, she was damn well going to keep it.

When Rachel mewled pleadingly, it was like Quinn had heard her say the words. Another finger filled her and Rachel threw her head back with a hiss of "*oh God yes...*". Quinn was moving faster now and Rachel opened her legs shamelessly to allow her the deepest access possible. Her hands sought out every place she could reach on Quinn's body. Her breasts, her nipples, her stomach, her hips, and when she gripped her ass, helping Quinn move harder against her, the blonde gasped with an appreciative moan.

Rachel didn't know which way was up, down, sideways, anywhere, anything. She just knew that there was Quinn and Quinn inside of her and Quinn making love to her, and such...such pleasure she'd never felt before. She could feel herself reaching that breaking point, it was almost there; was Quinn there too? Their bodies moved together with such fervor, almost as if they were trying to climb inside each other. Rachel heard herself cry out or was that Quinn or was it both of them?

*Fall inside me...stay there...always...*

Rachel whimpered and moaned, writhing beneath Quinn madly, so she knew the girl had to be close. Her wrist hurt and her arm was aching, but she didn't care, Quinn thrust her fingers harder, trying to make them go as deep as possible, stretching her, feeling her. Every sound Rachel made, every movement, only spurred Quinn closer to her own release. She couldn't think, she could only feel, and feel she did.
Then all of a sudden, Rachel's hands left Quinn's hips and she groped around searchingly with an almost frustrated whine. Quinn looked to her wonderingly and at the wide eyed expression of unadulterated need, she just somehow understood. With her other hand, Quinn seized Rachel's, interlocking their fingers. Palm against palm, flesh against flesh, body against body, love against love, Rachel tumbled over the edge and with one last, trembling rock of her own hips, Quinn followed her down.

_I love you. Don't ever leave me. I love you. Don't ever leave me. I love you._

That's all they heard in the silence.

"I have never been so relaxed in my life..."

"Hmm..." Quinn agreed, "Me neither."

They were lying side by side, every inch of them touching as Quinn had hooked her hand behind Rachel's knee and pulled it securely over her hip so their legs could be tangled up with each other. Rachel used Quinn's arm as a pillow and wrapped around the blonde's waist, stroking the smooth skin of her back, ghosting up and down the length of her spine and between her shoulder blades. Quinn never stopped smiling at her, only breaking now and then to bite her lower lip shyly. She had her hands threaded in Rachel's hair, stroking over and over again as though she couldn't get enough of the feeling.

They couldn't take their eyes off each other. Not for sleep, not for anything.

"Did that really just happen?" she whispered. "I'm not going to wake up, am I?"

"If it was just a dream...it was the best dream I've ever had."

"I don't want it to be just a dream. It's too cruel."

Quinn brushed her lips against Rachel's forehead before staring back into her eyes purposefully. "It wasn't a dream."

"Good," she sighed blissfully and snuggled in closer so their noses were touching now. "Because it was _perfect._"

"Rachel..." Quinn started out nervously and then blushed, which made her all the more endearing to the brunette. "I think...I think I..."

But she couldn't bring herself to say it, so she just blushed even more, her cheeks a brilliant red by now. Yet, she didn't have to. Rachel knew what she was trying to say.

"You came with me?"

"Yeah," Quinn replied hoarsely with a quick nod, relieved that she didn't have to voice it. "Is that... is that normal? How many times can we..."

"As many times as we can hold out for," Rachel giggled. "It's called _multiple orgasms_, Quinn, one of the few perks we females enjoy and I think we're going to discover just what a glorious thing it can be."

"So if we do it... _again_... I could...?"

"You want to go again?"
If it were possible, Quinn turned even redder as she fidgeted. "I didn't mean that! I only wanted to know if-

Rachel giggled some more, gathering the embarrassed blonde in her arms and kissed her burning cheek. "I know what you meant. I'm teasing you, love."

"S-so in theory, we could just…never stop? We could keep going?"

"Well," she cocked her head to the side as she ruminated on it, "we might have to stop for food and rest at some point, but yes, in theory, we could keep going until one or both of us pass out from sheer sensory overload…or perhaps just exhaustion."

Quinn's tongue darted out to wet her lips and Rachel found herself mesmerized by that perfect pink tongue that worked such magic in her mouth. The blonde had this…**predatory** look on her face, like she was imagining just that very idea and it had Rachel breathing harder already, squirming with how much it turned her on.

"W-well if you plan on trying for such a strenuous goal," Rachel said, feeling strangely nervous, "you had better start building up that stamina, Fabray."

"Hey! I'm Captain of the Cheerios - or at least I was - I have PLENTY of stamina!"

At that, they both burst out laughing.

"I think everyone was right about us," Quinn said lazily as they calmed down once more and absently dragged her lips across Rachel's shoulder.

"Right about what?" she asked curiously.

"We did just need to get laid," she shrugged, wrinkling her nose as she said it. "Celibacy Club was killing us."

The diva was in the middle of a most indignant protesting rant about how insulting and sexist that was when Quinn suddenly disappeared from her sight and ducked down to settle her head between Rachel's thighs.

"W-what are you doing?" Her eyes widened.

Quick grinned up at her wolfishly. "I think I need to work a little harder to get you to relax."

Rachel yelped and fisted the sheets in awe. "Oh, God," she gasped. "Lindsay was right, you are a quick learner."

Quinn had to laugh at that.

What felt like hours later, Rachel collapsed on top of Quinn in a breathless, heaving, boneless mass. She was doing everything she could to fight sleep at this point. Her body had both reached and surpassed the point of exhaustion, but it was a wonderful feeling.

"Okay..." Rachel admitted, panting, as she lay against Quinn's shoulder, "maybe we did just need to…**get laid.**"

She said it so awkwardly, that Quinn giggled. Words like that just didn't fit in Rachel Berry's mouth - it was like her tongue was trying to make some foreign sounds it couldn't wrap itself around. Quinn
looped her arms around low on Rachel's back and held her there contentedly. She loved the feeling of Rachel's weight so full and settled on her like this. It was like it comforted something inside her she didn't even understand. Quinn trailed her finger lightly over the sensitive skin there, tracing a line just above the smooth curve of Rachel's buttocks.

God, she'd known her girlfriend had a great ass before, but now…she had a newfound appreciation for Rachel's ass. Also her breasts. She really, really loved Rachel's breasts. She was a total pervert honestly, wanting nothing more than to keep touching Rachel wherever and whenever she could. Turns out she was a lot of things now that she didn't think she was before.

"I feel like if Mr. Schuester tried to give away one of my solos right now, I wouldn't care."

"That won't last," Quinn scoffed, "but maybe you won't be as scary about it."

"I'll just plan a closet session with you later to work out the excess frustration."

"Sounds heavenly."

"Oh, Quinn!" Rachel sighed. "That was darling. Am I turning you into a romantic?"

"Whatever you want me to be, I will be," she said sincerely.

"I want you to be you."

"Then maybe I am turning into a bit of a romantic. After all…if you can do things like that to me…"

"I'm that good, huh?"

"Better."

"I knew I would be," she said confidently.

"You did not! You were just as much of a wreck as I was."

"Nu-uh!" she protested. "I may have been nervous, but I'm passionate, artistic, extremely in touch with my emotions, not to mention multi-talented, Quinn. Why wouldn't this be an area I excel in?"

"You are such a liar. You were terrified."

Rachel bit her lip fiercely before relenting at last. "Ohhhh…fine. I was! B-but you swear I was good?"

"I don't exactly have much to compare it to…" she teased.

"It's more than I do," she mumbled.

Quinn tightened her arms around her. "You're incredible. I…I can't imagine anything better," she said shyly.

"I don't think there is anything better," Rachel whispered back.

Quinn kissed her sweetly, the light touch acted almost as a healing balm on their abused, swollen lips. Then the two fell asleep, thoroughly exhausted, but with the largest smiles on their faces, wrapped up in each other.
Rachel woke to something buzzing incessantly. There was something soft tickling her nose and it took several blinks before she realized what it was – blonde hair. She had buried her face against the back of Quinn's neck, the silky fair locks fell across her face. Rachel breathed in deeply with an enormous smile. Quinn always smelled so good, she didn't wear perfume, so it was always this light, clean flowery scent that she was sure was a mixture of shampoo and something just Quinn. Rachel was spooning her, her arm wrapped around Quinn's stomach while her entire body was firmly curled against her. Quinn didn't seem to mind in the least, her hand was on Rachel's, trying to keep her there even in sleep. The diva lifted her head slightly and saw that it was still light out from what she could see streaming through the corners of the blinds.

There was that annoying buzzing sound again. Rachel carefully slipped her arm away from Quinn and she had almost gotten free when the blonde whined, shifting restlessly, and pulled Rachel back against her. Quinn had no intention of letting her go.

Rachel pressed a reassuring kiss below the hairline of her neck. "Just for a minute," she murmured. "I'll be right back."

She wasn't entirely sure if Quinn was awake or not, but after another restless shift, or a grunt of annoyance, Rachel couldn't tell which, Quinn released her. She rolled away from the warmth and instantly regretted it. How could she possibly leave that embrace, so warm and safe nestled against her lover?

She smiled giddily to herself.

Lover! She had a lover! And it wasn't just any lover, it was Quinn Fabray! The Quinn Fabray! Beautiful, strong, brilliant, amazing, Quinn Fabray – the girl she loved more than anything.

For a second, she forgot about the buzzing and was about to roll back and take Quinn into her arms again so neither of them could ever leave, but there it was again. With a growl, she leaned down off the side of the bed, groping around on the floor, her hand hit her bag, and she fumbled a bit before finally reaching the source of their rude interruption.

It surprised her how sore she was, in places other than just between her legs. Muscles she was certain she rarely used or didn't even know existed, were protesting loudly, making their presence obstinately known now. Her morning elliptical workouts had not prepared her for an active sex life. She wondered if there was some sort of exercise regimen she could plot out that would keep up her cardio as well as strengthen her…what to call it…sex muscles? That sounded absurd, even to her.

Perhaps the best way to build those muscles was to engage in the act itself…as often as possible. Yes, that sounded right. Just have sex with Quinn as often as possible and those muscles wouldn't be protesting as much after a while. Rachel had just set herself quite determinedly on this new plan when she saw what was on the screen of her cell and a loud gasp escaped her.

"Wha-what is it? What happened?" Quinn mumbled, trying to wake herself up as she flung herself across the bed to curl against Rachel's back this time, nuzzling into her shoulder, closing any distance between them with such determination it was as though those few moments apart had been a year.

"It's Dad," Rachel said forlornly and fell back onto the pillow with a sigh.

The blonde didn't really seem to register what she said. Actually, she thought Quinn had just fallen back asleep, but then she spoke again.

"What about your Dad?"
"He'll be home in an hour."

Rachel felt the other girl stiffen against her. They both knew what that meant.

Time to go.

"Oh," was all Quinn said.

"Yeah."

"I guess…I guess I should get dressed then…"

She was already sliding away from her when Rachel instinctively reached out and pulled her back into her arms.

"No, don't go," she breathed, resting against Quinn's forehead. "Please, don't go."

"I don't want to," her voice soft and helpless, "but I'm…I'm not allowed…"

"Then just not yet; we still have time."

Rachel knew how needy she sounded and she would have felt ashamed for it had Quinn not seemed to feel the same. The way the blonde had her arms wrapped securely around her, her eyes shut, how she melted into Rachel's embrace… Quinn didn't want this moment to end either.

"I'm not going anywhere."

Rachel knew she wasn't just talking about right now.

"You promise?"

Quinn reached behind her to pry away one of Rachel's hands that had such a tight hold on her and brought it up to her chest. She placed Rachel's palm right over the bare, warm skin above her breast and covered it with her own.

"I can't go anywhere."

She had put Rachel's hand right over her heart.

The brunette could feel it fluttering wildly beneath her fingers. Her brain had to catch up with her body because she had rolled on top of Quinn's naked body, heated flesh meeting heated flesh once again in the most exciting, nerve awakening feeling, kissing her deeply, before knowing she had moved at all.

"Make love to me."

Rachel steeled herself for a response of something like "it's too risky," "we don't have time," or "I really should go," but instead Quinn gave a strained moan and the brunette found herself flat on her back in a matter of seconds, lips, hands, and tongue running over her in a flurry of pleasure.

They were still kissing each other, still touching each other as though it was their last chance, by the time Leroy gave Rachel their traditional ten minute call. That is, a ten minute warning call, which usually meant that Rachel got the chance to straighten up the house or put the finishing touches on whatever meal she had planned for her father's homecoming. Never had it been so aptly used before. Even as Rachel was trying to get off the phone with Leroy, Quinn was still attached to her from
behind, kissing her neck as though she hadn't already been for hours, as though she would never stop.

Rachel pressed her girlfriend up against the front door instead of letting her out and Quinn didn't mind one bit.

"You have to go," she whined and yet still kept kissing her.

"I do. I have to go." Quinn nodded, kissing her back just as passionately.

"Tomorrow is too far away. I won't survive it."

"I'll die first."

"No! You can't! You have to be the strong one. I die first."

"Let's just grow old and die together – at exactly the same time."

Rachel frowned. "Like a joint suicide?"

Quinn huffed exasperatedly. "I was thinking more along the lines of fate…"

"Oh!" She lit up happily. "I like that much better. Fate."

"We were fated."

"So…tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow."

"Don't die first."

"I promise if you promise."

"I think having sex has caused us to lose some brain function. We're being ridiculous."

"Can too many orgasms make you stupid?"

"Just look at Puck."

Quinn threaded her fingers into Rachel's hair for what must have been the hundredth time that day and just held her there. She didn't seem to have heard what Rachel said about Puck, she was looking at her too intently. Rachel could feel her knees going weak under those blazing hazel eyes that penetrated places she didn't think could be touched. She leaned on Quinn for support, which the blonde was, steady and unyielding as she held on to her, keeping her standing.

"I don't want to go, Rachel," Quinn whispered.

"Then stay," she urged, not caring how needy she sounded. She was needy! "Stay right here."

"I love you so much."

Quinn kissed her fiercely and all too quickly because then she was gone. Rachel felt the cool air against her face as the door closed. Already she felt cold and empty without that girl in her arms. Could she really survive till tomorrow? Would she wake and discover this was all just a dream? Would anything change?
Please…please don't let this go away.

It didn't.

Tomorrow came all too slowly, but the second Quinn was back in her arms, she let out the breath she didn't know she'd been holding since the blonde walked out the door. It didn't vanish. Quinn didn't run away. Quinn was there. Solid and warm and wonderful and kissing her.

Then Rachel changed her mind. Separation wouldn't kill her, but happiness just might.
A few weeks had gone by, Nationals was approaching, and so was Prom. Rachel had forgotten all about it until Mercedes mentioned something to Quinn about starting her campaign for Prom Queen. To Rachel's utter disbelief, Quinn just shook her head hastily, glancing sideways at Sam who looked a little disappointed, and simply shrugged, saying that she wasn't going to run.

That declaration had caused a collective gasp from nearly the entire Glee club. Everyone knew it was Quinn's dream to be Prom Queen and this was her first year at getting that chance. She was almost a sure thing with all those crazy rumors that while hurtful at times, kept her in the spotlight and forefront of everyone's mind. Plus, she had Sam on her arm as they took their place as McKinley's top power couple. Quinn didn't even have to campaign really, just put her name on the ballot, and she'd be a shoo-in.

Even Rachel was surprised to hear her girlfriend dismiss the matter. She knew, just like everyone else, how important the title was to Quinn. After Glee, she immediately jumped on her for it.

"Why aren't you running? Why would you do that? You've been talking about being Prom Queen since junior high! Here's your chance…what's wrong?"

Quinn stared at her like she'd just had her head spin around on her shoulders Exorcist-style.

"Why?" she echoed in disbelief. "Rachel! You know why!"

She thought about it for a few moments, but couldn't come up with a sufficient answer.

"No, I really don't. Explain it to me. You've wanted this for so long…why are you letting it go without even-"

"Do you understand what campaigning for Prom Queen entails? Even the slightest bit? I'd be with Sam ALL the time! We'd be flaunting our status quo as a couple for weeks." She spat the word out like it tasted bitter. "Not just passively being together, but together like we're the new celebrities, showing off, presenting a united front, asking for votes, giving out cookies, and buttons and… whatever else! There would be posters with our pictures on them plastered everywhere, Prom King and Queen…the perfect relationship, the new face of McKinley. I'm not doing that!"

"So you're not going to go after this, something I know you've dreamed about for so long, b-because of me? Because you think it'll hurt me to see that?"

"Won't it?"

Rachel blinked at her, staring silently for a long moment, and then suddenly grabbed Quinn's hand, pulling her into an empty classroom. Quinn was taken completely off guard when she was pushed up against the wall and Rachel's mouth was on hers.

"Wh-what was that for?" she panted when Rachel finally pulled away.

"Because I love you."

"And?" she pressed.

"And you were willing to give up a dream of yours just for me."
"It doesn't matter to me anymore. I don't need it."

"I don't think you fully believe that."

Rachel was right. Quinn didn't fully believe it. She didn't want it as badly as she had before, but there was still something in the back of her mind that said…what if? It didn't matter though.

"I don't want to lie like that," she sighed. "It's hard enough already. I don't want to go to Prom and dance with Sam and take my pictures with Sam and be crowned with Sam. I want…"

"…to be with me?" Rachel offered shyly

"Every minute."

That seemed to solidify something in Rachel's head and Quinn watched a wave of determination wash over her girlfriend.

"I want you to do this, Quinn," Rachel said sternly. "I want you to run for Prom Queen."

"WHAT?"

"Do it. I'll help you however I can. I'll have you know I was considered quite the ingénue in performing arts camp not only when it came to my vocal and dance abilities, but in the crafts area as well. I'm a genius with a glue gun."

"Rach, I'm not."

"You are. You're going to do this. Besides, I think Sam really wants it too, though he won't admit it. He loves the idea of being Prom King."

"I don't want to!" she replied stubbornly. "Can't we just skip Prom altogether?"

Rachel gasped in horror. "And miss a valuable life milestone in our high school career? Never! Quinn, what has gotten into you?"

"It doesn't matter because I can't go with you!" she shot back angrily. "So why bother?"

"We can work it out. I'll go with Kurt or someone else as a friend, while you go with Sam."

"Someone else?" she replied with a disgusted look on her face. "No. No! Why are you pushing this so hard? I never thought Prom would mean so much to you."

"It doesn't. At least, not really. I mean, I would love to have that romantic, timeless moment where you pick me up in a limo, give me a corsage that matches my dress, our parents gush while taking far too many pictures, and then we dance the night away…but I don't need it. We can have romance without that – we do have it! But Prom means something to you, being Prom Queen, and Quinn…I can't let you give up a dream like that for me, especially when you don't know for sure that you don't want it. You might resent me for it and that's not fair."

Rachel rubbed her hands up and down Quinn's arms reassuringly, moving them closer together. Quinn was looking everywhere but her.

"So you're going to run, you're going to win, and when you dance with Sam after being crowned, I'll be on stage singing for you. If it turns out you really didn't need it, that it really didn't matter, then that's great, but if it does…I'm not letting you give that up. I may not understand this desire of yours, Quinn, but I won't ever let you give up on something you want."
"I don't think this is a good idea…" she muttered uncomfortably.

"You told me you never wanted to hold me back, that you would do anything to help me achieve my dreams right?"

She nodded, looking at her out of the corner of her eye. "I never want to hold you down."

"So can't you understand why I want to do this with you?"

"But…the campaign…"

"Vote Fabrevans!" she chirped loudly.

Quinn's eyes widened. "Excuse me?"

"Oh, that's your portmanteau," Rachel said flippantly. "I came up with it in Glee while planning your campaign platform. I thought of 'Quam' at first, but it didn't sound very pretty, more like the sound of something being squashed…"

The blonde snorted.

"But then I thought of 'Fabrevans'! Fabray and Evans! It's perfect. So you see? I can be very useful in this area. Politics and show choir are practically the same thing."

Quinn arched one of her perfectly sculpted eyebrows. "That…is news to me."

"It's true."

Sighing, she shook her head in amusement, knowing she wasn't going to get around this. Her girlfriend had a one track mind that while in some cases proved to be absolutely incredible, other times it just made her want to pull her own hair out.

"So what's our couple name?" she relented with a huff.

Rachel pouted. "I haven't figured that one out yet. Nothing sounds right."

"Let me know when you do come up with one," she teased. "I'm sure it'll be perfect."

It was a few days later, and they'd already been hard at work at Sam's house making the Prom King and Queen posters and other various campaign items that Rachel deemed necessary. Sam loved the whole thing and threw himself into it headfirst, though Quinn was forced to separate him from the glue gun when he burned himself for the seventh time. There were graphs, flow charts, weekly schedules with events planned, and various crafts happening, which the younger two Evanses were eager to join. It really was an enjoyable time for all of them, until Rachel would let herself look at the faces on the posters and felt her heart drop. She just shook it off and continued on with her carefully laid plans which Quinn eventually started to join in on once Rachel had made it clear she wasn't going to let this go.

When the blonde realized that she really was going to have to do this, run for Prom Queen, she went into full Head Cheerleader mode as she started delegating tasks and took over completely. Sam looked afraid for his life at one point when Rachel and Quinn were arguing over the best pastry to hand out – two alpha females battling it out in his living room – but Rachel won in the end. Quinn would never cop to the reason why, but it had something to do with how distracted she got by the way Rachel looked when she was angry… Her cheeks were all flushed and she kept huffing angrily,
her arms across her chest, pushing up her breasts in that low cut blouse she was wearing… Quinn had gotten so distracted, she slipped up, and Rachel almost did a victory lap around the house. Sam snickered knowingly over in the corner as the brunette ran off to dance with the younger kids, singing happily about how she’d gotten her way. Quinn glared at him so fiercely, he cowered and went back to what he was doing, pretending like he hadn’t seen a thing at all.

Rachel opened her locker hastily, grabbing some books before shoving others back in as she rushed to make it to her next class on time. Moments before, she had narrowly avoided a slushie that she thought was aimed at her, but was in fact aimed at a freshman boy behind her. Just for a second, she had that familiar rush of fear coursing through her again as she screwed her eyes shut and braced herself for the icy slap that never came. There was laughter all around, but she hadn't been hit. Confused, Rachel opened her eyes to see the boy behind her dripping with blue, humiliated, and running off towards the bathroom. Azimio and Karofsky high fived each other before strutting off to class like the stupid lugs they were. Rachel had stood there in shock.

That boy was her once…until Quinn stopped it.

What would happen when she didn't have Quinn anymore?

Don't do that. Don't go there You promised yourself. No thoughts of the future. You have Quinn now and that's all that matters.

It felt like she was dragging her feet through mud as she trudged down the rapidly emptying hallway to her locker. She really was going to be late for her next class!

Cursing her slovenly behavior, she decided to pull it together and raced against the bell. She would win! She'd done it before!

But then the race was lost before it even really started - an unfamiliar looking piece of paper, the kind used for personal letters, fluttered out beneath her things and onto the floor. Curious, Rachel precariously balanced her books as she bent down to pick it up. To her surprise, it was more than one piece of paper; there were several folded neatly in half. Her name was scrawled across the side and she knew the handwriting at once.

All thoughts of class and tardiness flew from her head as Rachel absently dropped her books back into her locker, leaving her free to read without hindrance.

Her heart raced as she unfolded the pages to see that same handwriting filling the paper from top to bottom. Stunned and dying of curiosity, Rachel started to read. She didn't realize that she was sinking to the floor, sliding down the lockers.

There was no heading other than her name on the folded over blank side.

This is a love letter. I just thought you should know now that's what I was trying to do in case I mess it up. I thought you'd appreciate a handwritten one as opposed to a love-email or even a love-text (though those are nice - especially the sexts). It's not always so easy for me to say certain things so I wanted to try this way. Maybe the words will come easier. Maybe not.

I started to write this in Glee and already you're annoyed with me. Right now you're giving me dirty looks and trying to tell me to pay attention. I don't need to listen to yet another one of Mr. Schue's lectures on how special we all are (he really does too many of those). I know how special you are and that's the only thing that matters. Rachel, I know how much it hurts you not to be recognized and appreciated for all that you are, but at least you know that's what you deserve. Most people
I can't say they treat you the way they do because they're jealous, Rach, because there are people here that are too stupid to know they should be. And I can't say that they don't understand, because there are also people smart enough to understand; they just don't want to admit it. What I can say, is that I know. Your fathers know. And someday the rest of the world will know too. I can't wait for that day so I can watch and laugh as you yell at everyone "I TOLD YOU SO!" It will be well-deserved and a long time coming.

No one is completely faultless. It's true that at times you can be obnoxious, overbearing, egocentric, and...this isn't sounding so much like a love letter anymore. Sorry! It's my first attempt, you'll have to make some allowances. What I mean is that even though you have your moments (we'll just call it that, sweetie) it's not why they act that way. The real reason why you get treated the way you do is because you're going to win and they know they're going to lose. That's the sad truth. You're extraordinary, Rachel, and don't ever let anyone tell you otherwise. Especially me and anyone like me. Until that day, I'll just be sure to remind you.

I never knew it could be like this. Love. Real love. Actual, all-consuming, soul bending love. I thought I knew - what it was for other people - but for sure it could never happen to me. Not for someone so profoundly and irreversibly screwed up as I am. But every time we make love, I feel as though I'm giving you another tiny piece of me that I can never get back and don't ever want back. It changes everything I thought I knew.

When you moan my name as I touch you, God, you have no idea how many times I've nearly come from just hearing the sound alone. It makes me think for a moment just what I would do to make sure this never goes away, that I never lose you. Maybe I'd kill for it.

The best part of making love with you is that moment right before you're about to come; you reach for my hand and hold on to me so fiercely like you just can't let go unless you know I'm there to catch you. I will always catch you, Rachel. I'll keep you safe. I'll make sure you're loved. There is nothing in the world that compares to the feeling of being between your thighs, my tongue pressed deep inside you, tasting you, pleasing you, the way you fist your hands in my hair and beg me not to stop. As if I would ever stop. Unless I feel like teasing you, of course, you know much I love to do that. I love driving you wild, baby.

Shoot, I think I must have giggled or something because people in class are looking at me strangely. Don't worry, I glared at them and they started minding their own business again. I may not be Captain of the Cheerios any more, but it looks like I haven't completely lost my touch. If yesterday was any indication, I think you would agree. What with all that begging... You're shameless, baby, and I love every second of it. It turns me on more than you can-

Oh my God, again with the looks! Is everyone else in this place a complete moron? There. That one should have scared them off for good. I really shouldn't be writing this kind of thing in school, but I can't help it. I think about you all the time.

You told me you never hated me, and it hurts to have to say this, but I hated you...for so long. You were the worst reminder of what I couldn't stand about myself. Everything I should be, but wasn't. You're so strong, brave, talented, and confident to be exactly who you are. I loved you for it just as much as I hated you for it.

I don't know when it is I fell in love with you, Rachel Berry. Was it that day in third grade on the playground? Was it when I kissed you in the parking lot? Was it the first night we shared the same bed? Or was it simply the first time I ever met you?
I remember it, you know. First grade, you were one of the early kids already at their desks. You had braids and a bright pink pencil with feathers on top. Puckerman kept trying to poke me so I sat down next to you, far, far away from him. You smiled and said, "Hello, my name is Rachel Berry, what's yours?" I told you and you replied, "It's a pleasure to meet you, Quinn. You have a very pretty name!" Then you pointed to your backpack. "It's gold and shaped like a star. Do you like it? My Daddys bought it for me because they say I'm a star. It's a metaphor. Metaphors are important." To be honest, I didn't know what the word metaphor meant at the time, but the way you said it had me convinced it was the best thing in the world. Is it weird that I remember that? I don't know. Maybe I started loving you that very moment.

It doesn't really matter when it happened though, because it's true now, and will always be true. I meant it when I said you were never a choice, Rachel. You were just you: an inevitability. I don't think I'll ever be able to stop thanking God for bringing you into my life. I know now that He did, even if the rest of the world can't understand it yet. I don't know what I would be if He hadn't given me you and I don't ever want to think about it. Without my savior? It would be a different world...an unbearable one.

You're my first of firsts, Rachel Berry, and I pray that you'll be my last of lasts.

(If you need this signed to know who it's from then we have some serious issues.)

P.S. Leave the door unlocked for me tonight?

It was when the bell rang and students poured into the halls in a mad rush, that Rachel scrambled to her feet in shock, realizing that she'd read Quinn's letter over and over for an entire period, skipping her class altogether. Gathering her things, she ran off to her next class, but didn't learn a thing for the rest of the day. Her thoughts were soaring in the clouds with a certain blonde and weren't likely to come back anytime soon.

After Rachel's fathers had gone to bed, Quinn slipped through the backdoor left open for her. It had become a routine since taking that last step and spending nights apart was just not an option anymore. It was a huge risk, not just that Rachel's Dads would discover their secret, but the simple fact that Quinn wasn't allowed to be there at all. However, both of them agreed it was a risk well worth taking.

So every chance Quinn could find to escape her mother for the night, she'd drive over to the Berrys', park a few houses away, sneak in through the backyard and use the sliding door, which made less sound when opened, before acting like a ninja to finally make it into Rachel's room unseen. She knew she was going to have to start dying her hair soon to hide the gray streaks or maybe it would just be a heart attack at the very, very young age of seventeen that would end her. It didn't matter though. She would keep doing it.

They just...couldn't stand to sleep alone anymore. Nights apart usually meant restlessness and bleary eyes the next day. Quinn knew she was getting far too attached to Rachel for her own good. She'd never been so close to anyone before, never needed anyone like this before. It was terrifying, but the more she gave in to it, the easier it became. Sometimes it didn't even feel strange, just right.

Quinn barely had one foot into the house before Rachel pounced on her. She ended up carrying the brunette, who had wrapped her legs around her waist, just far enough to reach the couch in the den. Any further and Quinn wouldn't have had any clothes left on for the walk up the stairs. Thank God for Hiram wearing ear plugs and Leroy being able to sleep through a battering ram...

She woke that morning alone in Rachel's bed with a letter where the brunette's head should have
been. She actually did have to climb out the window that time to avoid the Berry men after sleeping too late, but it was easier than it looked. Thankfully, Rachel never found out about it. She waited only long enough to reach her car before eagerly unfolding the pages to see what her girlfriend had in store.

After that, it became a ritual for the two of them that would last for much longer than either would imagine. Once a week, Quinn and Rachel would each write each other a letter. Sometimes they were sweet, filled with bubbly praise and love declarations. Sometimes they were silly and pointless, filled with ramblings about the most recent gossip or maybe if one of them was having a bad day, it would be ranting about the injustices of the world. Sometimes it was just pure filthy, smutty, deliciously explicit pages of details about what they wanted to do to each other given the next opportunity. Sometimes it was all of those things combined. Rachel almost always finished her weekly letter first, but she liked to wait until Quinn gave her hers in case there was an addendum she wished to make to her own. Occasionally there would be times when she just couldn't wait and shoved it into Quinn's hands before running off again. No matter how many letters were exchanged, neither one could get over the sheer thrill of opening the new one for the week. Each was pored over with the same eagerness and delight as if it were the very first time all over again.

There was never a need to sign them. The signature was imprinted with every sentence, every word, every distinct curve to a letter. Their names were plastered across every inch of those papers – seen or unseen.

"Sam!" she hissed, looking around the empty hall warily. "Stop that! You'll get us in trouble!"

"Aw, come on, Rach! Just one mustache?"

She looked at the sharpie then back at the poster before relenting. "Fine! But make it fast and leave Lauren's picture alone."

"Yes!" He pumped his fist eagerly and got to work on defacing Puck's picture on his Prom King and Queen poster with Lauren Zizes.

That one had taken them all by surprise. Zizes was a total loser, badass, scary chick on the wrestling team. One day, Puckerman had brought her into the Glee club on his arm and she announced that she was going to join. Mr. Schuester weakly asked her to audition, but she only stared at him for a long moment, chewing on a candy bar, before taking her seat on the risers next to Puck. That was that. Santana was kind of annoyed, but that lasted for as long as a blink of an eye. Then Lauren was just one of them, oddly enough. It took longer for everyone to accept that Puck and Lauren were dating though. That was just...weird.

Rachel kept watch, anxiously looking up and down the hallway for any sign of someone to catch them.

"We're supposed to be putting up your posters, not childishly scribbling on our opponents'. It's dirty politics."

"It's high school," Sam replied dryly and she gave him a scathing look which he only smirked at.

"What is taking you so long?"

"I'm adding a tail."

"You said it was just a mustache!"
"Not enough."

"You're leaving Lauren alone though, right? She doesn't deserve it, however frightening she may be. I once had a nightmare she crushed me into a ball with her giant hands and rolled me down a bowling lane into the pins."

He snorted with laughter. "Was it a strike?"

"It's not funny!" She stomped her foot. "It was a terrifying ordeal and I don't appreciate you making light of it."

"Relax. I'm leaving her alone. She doesn't deserve it, but the guy who slept with your girlfriend and got her pregnant so totally does."

Rachel froze beside him and Sam mentally slapped himself. He dropped his hand from the poster and turned to her apologetically.

"Shoot, Rachel," he shook his head, "I'm... I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that. That was-"

He didn't get to finish because, all of a sudden, Rachel jumped up, angrily ripped the poster off the wall, and tore it to pieces until the whole thing was scattered across on the floor of the hallway.

She stood there silently, glowering down at the paper.

"Feel better?" he asked.

"A little."

"Wanna go draw on another one?"

"Sure."

They ran off to find another poster, still keeping an eye out for anyone who might catch them.

"Don't forget the missing teeth this time!" Rachel hissed.

Quinn found them the next period, putting up one of Sam and Quinn's campaign posters near Principal Figgins's office.

"Keep it straight!"

"It is straight!"

"Move it a quarter inch to the right."

"But it's straight!"

"Move it."

"Fine! Just put the tape on already! My arms are starting to hurt."

"Don't you bench press like 100 pounds every day?"

"250!" he snapped indignantly. "And we've been doing this for hours!"

"If you could actually manage to hold the posters straight, this would have gone a whole lot faster."
"I'm gonna start bench pressing you…” he muttered under his breath.

"I'm not 250 pounds," she replied airily.

"Could have fooled me."

"Why you rotten-!"

"Hey! Guys!" Quinn chirped cautiously, picking that moment to interrupt before things got out of hand. "How's it going?"

"Fine," they grumbled simultaneously.

Soon Rachel had taped the last corner and Sam dropped his arms with a sigh. Quinn examined the poster with that same dreadful feeling gnawing at the pit of her stomach. It was a picture of her and Sam, with his arms respectfully around her waist while she touched his chest and they smiled broadly into the camera and now out into the hall for all the students and faculty alike to see.

She hated it.

"This is so…wrong," Quinn muttered, looking at the two of them out of the corner of her eye. "You guys just spent all day putting these things up and it doesn't bother you?"

Sam and Rachel exchanged a furtive look that confused her, but they never explained it. Instead, Rachel merely shrugged.

"As I recall, you are the one who got us into this in the first place. It's a little late to be noticing how 'wrong' it is now, Quinn…"

"I told you I didn't want to run for Prom Queen!"

"No," Rachel said pointedly. "That discussion ended with you not being sure about whether or not you wanted to run. Therefore, we decided to go ahead with it, just in case, or do you not remember? Besides, that wasn't exactly what I was referring to."

Quinn groaned and turned away from the happy, smiling faces on the poster.

"Can we just go to Glee already?"

Rachel sighed and walked alongside her girlfriend while Sam tucked the extra posters under his arm and followed behind them both.

"Thank you for helping," she said quietly to the brunette.

"After all the hard work I put into helping make these, I deserved the right to see them displayed properly."

Quinn smiled at that. Just then, they passed one of Puck and Lauren's posters. Puck's picture had a black sharpie's work scribbled all over it.

"They better not do that to our picture." Quinn frowned.

Sam and Rachel exchanged another mysterious look, shifting anxiously.

"I don't think you'll have to worry about that," Rachel said finally.
The blonde furrowed her brow in confusion. Sometimes she wondered just what those two were really up to these days.

Quinn held Rachel's hand the whole drive to school, mostly just because she wanted to, and a little because she knew she wouldn't get to touch her again for much too long. She had secretly slept over at the Berry house last night, having snuck in as usual, and then waited for Rachel's Dads to leave for work so they could go to school together. Quinn parked four houses down just to be safe and hope that Hiram and Leroy wouldn't pick it out as her car though she was sure Hiram had her license plate number on hand for whenever he had the chance to call the cops in on her. Sam was Rachel's excuse. "He's going to give me a ride to school today, Dad. We have to discuss our strategy for Nationals!" Brittany was Quinn's. The girl was always a safe excuse because even if her mother for some God knows what reason, called the Pierce household, they were always so confused about anything that was going on, her mother would think nothing of them not knowing about Quinn being there.

She had to let go of Rachel when they got there, but they still walked in together, only parting ways to go to their lockers. Quinn winked at her as Rachel walked off. The brunette blushed and Quinn just watched as she skipped away happily.

She was just closing her locker after third period when Sam came up and slid his arm around her shoulders. It didn't make her cringe anymore like it used to. She liked it now. It was something comforting and familiar. He kissed her on the cheek before walking her to her first class as was the usual routine they had agreed upon.

There was something off today though. From the minute he walked up, the boy had this leering smile on his face that just wasn't going away.

"Why are you grinning like such an idiot?"

He shrugged, chuckling. "No reason."

Quinn rolled her eyes. "That ridiculous smirk tells me otherwise. Out with it!"

"You're talkin' to me all wrong. That's the wrong tone. Do it again and I'll stab you in the face with a soldering iron."

She groaned weakly. "Christopher Walken."

"Hey! I'm getting better! You got that one!"

"Only 'cause you tried to do him last week too."

Even that wasn't enough to wipe the shit-eating grin off his face. He was like the Cheshire cat, acting like he knew something she didn't. It infuriated her.

"Seriously, what are you so stupid-faced about?"

"You don't wear perfume, Quinn."

She gave him one of her patented 'are you really this dumb – I have no time for bullshit' looks, which made him laugh.

"You don't wear perfume, yet it's all over you," he explained further. 
"Excuse me?"

He leaned in conspiratorially. "You think you're so smooth and subtle, but hate to break it to you, babe, you're not. You need to be more careful."

"Sam, I swear if you don't start making sense in the next five seconds I'm gonna-"

"You smell like Rachel."

"What?"

"You smell like Rachel's perfume. You kind of always do, but it's gotten a lot worse lately. Most people wouldn't notice, but in Glee... they're gonna pick up on it soon. Santana's like a bloodhound when it comes to this stuff and Puck prides himself on being able to identify every chick in school by either the shape of their ass or the way they smell – which is creepy, I know. Then there's also the diva-ettes who are bound to pick up on it."

Quinn covered her face with her hands. "It's that strong?"

He shrugged with that same silly looking grin plastered on his face. "Safe to say you're enjoying yourself with our tiny diva?"

"Shut up, Sam."

Still red in the face, Quinn finally was able to get away from Sam's whispering in her ear, teasing her about Rachel, when they reached her fourth period class. Shoving him away with a roll of her eyes, he snickered and pulled her back to kiss her on the cheek again with resounding smack.

Relieved to be free of Sam's good natured taunting, she happily took her seat next to Rachel at the desk they shared and sighed. She hoped her cheeks weren't still flaming.

"Something funny?" Rachel leaned in and asked with poorly contained jealousy.

It made her blood boil to see the two blondes giggling and whispering as they walked in. Rachel had gotten better at controlling her jealousy about Sam, even reaching a point of precarious acceptance, but all that vanished in the blink of an eye after she and Quinn had taken that ultimate step towards their intimacy. Now Rachel knew for certain she wasn't going to share Quinn ever and she shouldn't have to. It seemed to have the opposite effect on Quinn though, because the blonde seemed strangely more comfortable with letting Sam be around her, even when Rachel was there. It was one of the most frustrating and yes, at times extremely hurtful, things Rachel had ever experienced. It was all so confusing!

So it didn't help that Quinn's cheeks turned a rosy color as she shook her head shyly. "Not that funny."

She wasn't even going to give her any details?

Dejected, feeling left out, and struggling to tamp down the angry flames of jealousy, Rachel realized she was white knuckling the desk. Quinn didn't seem to notice, her head down and her hand on her neck as she scribbled in her notebook.

Desperate to find a way to calm herself from the feelings that threatened to overwhelm her, Rachel just started to hum. It seemed to work a little because the further into the song she got, the more she could feel her grip start to loosen. Her rapidly pounding heart slowed to normalcy once again.
Quinn's ears perked up when she heard Rachel softly humming 'Come What May' to herself.

What made her sing that now?

Was she trying to tell her something? Was she trying to torture her in the middle of class when she couldn't do anything about it? Quinn so wished she could be closer to her right now, to be able to touch her. It was their song… Instead, she had to settle and take a risk all at the same time. It had always been hard not to touch Rachel when they were in public, but ever since they made love, it became damn near impossible! Quinn would find herself halfway there, to brush Rachel's hand, hug her, kiss her cheek, jeez, she'd even been an inch away from nuzzling her once, before she realized what she was doing and narrowly escaped catastrophe each time. It was so instinctive now, so natural, and now they had to fight to override it. Quinn knew Rachel struggled with it too, seeing her hand move towards her, only to drop itself quickly or pretend like she was reaching for something else. This was going to drive them both mad.

*Just another year; it's not that long. You can do this.*

Leaning on her chin casually, Quinn ever so slowly inched her leg over to Rachel's until she was close enough to hook her foot around the brunette's ankle. Rachel sat up with a start and stared straight ahead, but there was a brilliant smile on her face.

Class had already started so they couldn't talk, but a few minutes later, Quinn slid a piece of paper towards Rachel.

*You're going to have to stop wearing perfume.*

Rachel gave her a bewildered look and wrote back.

*Why? I thought you said you liked this one.*

Quinn shook her head discreetly.

*I love it, but Sam just told me before I came in that I smell like you. I can't go through school smelling like my girlfriend no matter how much I'd like to. Someone will figure it out. I think I might have to shower before Glee just to escape Santana.*

Rachel's eyes widened as she read and it took her a few minutes to write back.

*He could actually smell me on you?*

Quinn threw her a flirtatious look and furtively moved her smooth, naked calf up and down over Rachel's.

*All over me, baby.*

The brunette gnawed on her lower lip anxiously and shifted in her seat. Quinn just smiled and kept her eyes forward with their ankles still hooked around each other. It was a really…really long time before that bell rang.

It was the last class of the day and Rachel was literally bouncing with excitement. It had nothing to do with the fact that it was the end of the school day or even that Glee club was soon, but that in her hands was this week's letter from Quinn. She had her head down as she tried to read and walk at the same time, too eager to wait, and ended up colliding with Santana as they both tried to walk into the classroom at the same time.
"Out of my way, dwarf!" Santana barked. "God!"

Rachel just rolled her eyes and let the Latina pass before going in after her and raced to her seat to keep reading her letter. She should have known better. She should have exercised more caution. She should have waited until she was somewhere private to read because she should have known!

But she didn't.

As Rachel read through the letter, she turned a deep shade of red at the words on the page, smiling from ear to ear. Her enamored glow was like a red alert going off in the room for Santana who sat just across from her. She knew there was something seriously up with the diva and she had to know EXACTLY what.

When class began, she watched Rachel carefully slip the letter into her folder and sit up straight to pay attention to the lesson. She also noticed, most pointedly, how the brunette squeezed her thighs together tightly for the better part of class. After the bell rang and all the other kids were climbing over each other to make it out the door, Rachel simply bounded up to Mr. Guerin for her usual barrage of questions about the day's lesson and homework. As she kept chattering away at the weary looking man who wanted nothing more than to be done with his day too, Rachel never saw Santana's wicked grin when she left the room.

It was quiet and warm in the auditorium as Quinn sat there alone as she waited. She ran her fingers over the keys, playing a few scales lightly as she tried to recover those foggy memories of childhood piano lessons. Ever since joining Glee, she'd thought of taking up lessons again. She'd always liked the piano. It wasn't until cheerleading became her primary focus - a more useful one with how it looked on her transcripts, not to mention the social benefits - that she gave up her lessons altogether and didn't look back.

She found herself looking back a lot now, especially these last few months ever since things really started with Rachel. She let herself remember the past and she saw it all with new eyes. Was it just that hindsight is 20/20 or was it that being with Rachel…allowing herself to love Rachel…had that changed her so much that even her past didn't look the same anymore?

"QUINN!" that familiar, annoyed voice rang out, bringing an instant smile to her face. Tiny but fierce footsteps scrambled up the steps to the stage. "Why did you ask me to meet you here? We're going to be late for Glee club!"

Quinn didn't bother to move until Rachel's hand touched her shoulder and she spun around suddenly on the bench, yanking the brunette down onto her lap to straddle her, and attacked her mouth.

Rachel yelped in surprise, but didn't hesitate to return the kiss in kind, wrapping her arms around Quinn's shoulders. She sighed with relief to feel Rachel near her again like this, to feel her frame against her, how she fit in her arms. They'd just spent last night together, and this morning, but for what it felt like…it was too long. Quinn grabbed her ass and pulled her in closer, their hips rocked together with tantalizing friction. Rachel moaned and the simple sound sent tiny shivers of electricity running through her body. Their tongues slid together again and again, delving deeper each time before pulling back playfully. Quinn may have started it, but Rachel was in control now with a hand fisted in Quinn's hair as she played with her lips and her tongue, taking whatever she wanted and giving Quinn exactly what she needed at the same time. The brunette's dress was already shoved up to her waist so Quinn's hand slipped beneath the underwear-clad curve of her ass to grasp bare skin while the other went up to cup Rachel's cheek.

"W-what if someone sees?" Rachel panted as she broke away long enough to get it out before diving
back in.

It was some time before the blonde was released again for another breath.

"No one will see. Kiss me."

She did. Quinn dropped her hand from Rachel's face to trace her fingers lightly across her jaw then drifted down her neck, before palming her breasts. She loved being able to touch Rachel like this, so freely, without hesitation on either side. They both knew they wanted this and there was such freedom in that knowledge that it made Quinn feel bolder than ever, bold enough to do what she was about to do on the stage, curtains wide, for anyone to witness should they walk in.

Was it reckless? Of course. Did she care? Not at the moment.

Quinn just needed her.

She sucked in a breath of much needed oxygen as she tore away from those very...very addictive lips and dove into Rachel's throat. Quinn breathed her in deeply, pressing kisses to every exposed inch of sweet skin she could find, nipping her ear and jaw when she could.

"Quinn..." Rachel moaned, but she could hear the concern in her voice.

"I've been thinking about you all day," she mumbled, popping open the, thank God, conveniently placed buttons on the front of Rachel's dress before snaking her hand in to touch her more fully. Everything Rachel wore should be easily removed, in five seconds or less. She wondered if she could somehow steal half of Rachel's wardrobe. That would force her to wear fewer layers...

"M-me too."

The brunette gasped and rolled her hips against her instinctively; grasping Quinn anywhere she could touch her, pulling her closer as she tried to find the best way possible to hold on to her. Her fingers dug into her skin and Quinn moaned wanting nothing more than to touch her in return.

She left Rachel's throat to bury her face against her breasts, licking and biting at the fragile flesh of her cleavage and impatiently pulled the bra aside so she could reach what she really wanted. When her mouth closed around a nipple, Rachel whimpered, holding the back of Quinn's head to keep her there. Quinn was more than happy to oblige.

Wetness pooled between her own thighs as Rachel keened and moved against her while Quinn sucked and licked at those breasts she had come to know so intimately. She loved the shape and size, the weight of them in her hands, the way they felt against her tongue. They were made for her, just like Rachel was made for her. Once during their lovemaking, she'd slipped and said it out loud. Instead of Rachel laughing at her for being so absurd, she just kissed her with all her might, telling her that she felt the same.

As Quinn nursed on those perfect breasts, and they were perfect to her, switching back and forth so neither felt neglected, Rachel thrust her hips against her, making the blonde moan at the way her body reacted to each movement. If Quinn were honest, she could do this for hours...but they didn't have that luxury. Yet.

She so longed for the day they would, when they wouldn't be forced to rush or keep each other quiet, or worry about who might find them. The day when they could just throw away the rest of the world and spend the day in bed with each other, exploring and laughing and kissing until they couldn't bear it anymore and gave in to exhaustion - only to wake up and do it all over again. Quinn wanted that life so badly sometimes, she could hardly breathe.
For now though…for now she could do this.

As her mouth continued to move over Rachel's breasts, her whole body ached with need. She slid her fingers along Rachel's side, digging slightly into the soft flesh, while her lips latched once more onto a pert nipple and flicked it harshly with the tip of her tongue. She reached down, pushing Rachel's panties to the side, and dipped her fingers into the already drenched folds.

"God, Rachel!" she groaned at feeling the other girl's arousal. She hadn't expected her to be this far along so quickly. Quinn traced the soft wetness of her folds, before moving upwards and circling just along the outside of that throbbing flashpoint.

Oh, there was definitely no stopping her now.

"A-are we really going to do this…here?" Rachel whimpered, sounding unsure, and she lifted her head to scan the room.

There was no one there.

"You say that like you're not dripping all over me," Quinn purred seductively with nerve she didn't know she possessed.

She continued to explore her, dancing her fingers through the folds and around her dripping wet entrance. Quinn couldn't imagine not touching her, couldn't imagine stopping; she would never stop.

"But Quinn—"

Not willing to let Rachel over think this, she circled her thumb around the protruding bundle of nerves and thrust two fingers inside of her without warning. Quinn bit her lower lip fiercely, her whole body tensed at the feeling of being inside the brunette. It was almost absurd how much it affected her too, how it made her feel to have Rachel so tight and wet around her - all the while knowing that she'd caused it.

"Oh, God!" Rachel cried. Her lips crashed into Quinn's desperately, her tongue plunged into her mouth, setting the blonde's senses alight with a most delicious taste of Rachel Berry. She could live on just that taste alone, she was sure of it.

They'd done this more times than she could count by now, but it was always that same jolt, that spark, that same genuine surprise. Somehow, she didn't think she'd ever get used to this. She pumped her fingers sporadically in and out of the soaking heat, not even thinking about what she was doing because Rachel was sucking on her tongue and she was cross-eyed.

When the diva pulled away to breathe, Quinn used that as her chance to seize control again. She ripped open Rachel's dress all the way and wrapped one arm around her bare waist for leverage. She gazed up into Rachel's lust darkened eyes and said, "Ride me."

The brunette shuddered against her, but never looked away.

"Pull your skirt up," she demanded breathlessly.

Quinn didn't hesitate, she knew Rachel wasn't going to do a thing unless she got what she wanted too, so she gathered up her long skirt hastily and pushed it back until Rachel could reach under. Her eyebrows lifted into her hairline and Quinn chuckled.

"You've been going around all day like this?"
"Felt like the day for it."

"If I had known…"

"…we would have been doing this hours ago."

"Not fair, Quinn," she whined. "You can't do that to me."

"Can," she shot back tauntingly, "and did."

She promptly yanked off Quinn's shirt. "From now on you are absolutely required to tell me when you are not wearing any underwear. It's a rule."

"A relationship rule?"

"Our relationship rule!"

With that, Rachel slammed herself down on Quinn's fingers still inside of her, causing them both to forget anything more about words and silly things like that. There was only one thing needed and they needed it now. When Rachel found a rhythm with her hips as she gyrated and thrust against Quinn, so did her hand between Quinn's legs. The blonde was going into sensory overload. Together they moaned and rocked together, Quinn nuzzled Rachel's breasts, nipping and sucking with pure delight as she held her tightly, holding her hips in place while Rachel arched her back as she undulated against Quinn.

There was nothing said between them as the stage echoed with various gasps and moans of pleasure. For every thrust Rachel gave, Quinn returned it. Both her hand and her hips were moving with Rachel. The brunette circled and stroked, driving Quinn closer and closer to that breaking point. Each sound Rachel made, every touch, made her throb with desire, until she could feel herself trembling as they worked towards that glorious end. Rachel tore away Quinn's bra and palmed her breasts eagerly with her free hand, running her thumb across the hardened peaks. There was nothing Quinn craved more than to have Rachel touch her like this. She loved those soft, small, and extraordinarily talented hands running across every inch of her body. Rachel always knew how to touch her. Quinn only prayed she was able to bring Rachel half as much pleasure as the brunette gave her.

Having Rachel pressed against her, her fingers moving in and out of the sopping heat was almost more than Quinn could handle. Moaning, she tucked her head into Rachel's neck, attacking the hollow of her throat with lips, teeth, and tongue. The pace grew faster and more frantic with each passing second. Quinn could feel it building up inside of her, she was so close, so ready to break. Was Rachel?

As if to answer her question, Rachel threw herself forward, knocking Quinn off guard, and her back hit the piano keys causing a cacophony of discordant notes that echoed through the auditorium - neither cared.

Now that Rachel was almost completely on top of her, Quinn ignored the pain digging into her back, and freed her arm from Rachel's waist, to dip down and circle over that swollen bundle, flicking over it. She had to bite back a whimper at how good it felt, Rachel was all over her, so wet, so perfect, so hers.

The brunette cried out helplessly and Quinn used that moment to look up at her. Dark hair cascaded over her, those perfectly swollen, bee-stung lips were parted as she panted. Her cheeks were flushed and she was covered with a slight sheen of sweat. The way her hips moved against her, the desperate
look in her eyes…it was almost more than Quinn could bear. Rachel was lost and wild, she threw her head back in abandon before meeting her gaze again. There was no hiding here. There were no secrets, no shame, no fear. Just love. Quinn could see it in her eyes - Rachel was so close to the same end, to finding that with her. She was so vulnerable, so beautiful…

The blonde whimpered involuntarily when she felt Rachel shuddering around her fingers as she continued to shift down on them, working more frantically with each passing second.

As if her body had a mind of its own, Quinn reached up and pulled Rachel down to her mouth before bucking against her hand and everything exploded into white.

As they panted and trembled against each other, she sighed into Rachel's mouth contentedly. Quinn kissed her sweetly again and again, nibbling on her bottom lip playfully before finally releasing her. The brunette slumped against her while Quinn tried to regain her strength enough to sit back up, the edge of the piano digging painfully into her back. Rachel didn't bother trying to move from her lap as Quinn shifted forward again and for that she was grateful – she wasn't ready to let go yet. With shy smiles and giggles here and there, they gently petted each other, trying to right askew clothing and straighten mussed hair. Quinn buttoned Rachel's dress back up with a lazy grin and Rachel lifted herself up just enough to smooth out Quinn's skirt so it draped across her legs once more.

"What was that all about?" she asked a bit breathlessly, but with an adoring smile all the same.

"Just felt the need for a little afternoon delight…" Quinn teased.

"You want dessert?" She scrunched her nose in befuddlement. "I thought you didn't have much of a sweet tooth. You're not very big on chocolate or-"

Quinn giggled delightedly and shook her head. Sometimes Rachel could be so naïve about sex, it astounded her, especially considering how abashedly unashamed and well versed she was in the actual act of it. The diva was baffled and a little miffed at missing out on the joke, so Quinn explained.

"Oh," she squeaked, brown eyes widening, and nodded. "Well…uh…that song makes a lot more sense now."

Quinn laughed harder, but at Rachel's glare, she sobered and tried to put on a show of sympathy for her girlfriend.

"It's okay, sweetie, it's an easy mistake. Don't worry about it, but now that you know…"

"…I'm sure that I'll be taking full advantage of it." She beamed. "I loved your letter today. Though I'm sure you could tell…" If her cheeks hadn't already been flushed with exertion, Quinn knew she would be blushing.

The very realization made her quiver. Rachel had been so wet; Quinn knew most of it had been from something earlier, but she didn't put together that Rachel would have reacted that strongly to something she wrote. Even if it was about…

"That was from me?"

"You made me so wet, Quinn!" Rachel admitted with her eyes wide. "D-did you really do that? Touch yourself while picturing…” she trailed off blushing.

The blonde nodded shyly. They both knew what a big step that had been for her, let alone actually
telling Rachel about it.
"I thought I was going to have to run out of the class and find you right then."

"Why didn't you?"
She rolled her eyes. "I do make it a point to exercise a modicum of self control…"

"Self control sucks."
Rachel chuckled. "Says the girl who tried to repress her true feelings for a decade!"

"I learned my lesson!"
"I think we should try phone sex sometime soon."

"Rach!"
"What?" she replied innocently. "Too soon? That's okay. Perhaps after a few more attempts with you exploring… you'd feel comfortable enough."

"You'd really want to do that… over the phone?" she asked unsurely.
"For lack of a better alternative on those nights when we can't be together…"
Quinn took a deep breath. "I'll… think about it."
Rachel giggled and touched her nose to hers. "You do that."

Okay. Here it was. Now or never.
Quinn took a deep breath and summoned all the courage she could find for this.
"I also, um, wanted to see you because… well, because I have something for you."

"For me?" the diva's eyes lit up like a child on Christmas day. "A present?"
She leaned down and picked up a small, neatly wrapped box from underneath the piano bench and handed it to Rachel while nodding shyly. "A present for you."

"Oh, but, Quinn!" she cried, looking down at the box in dismay. "There's no occasion! It's not my birthday, o-or any holiday, and you said you didn't like celebrating anniversaries… I don't have anything for you!"

The blonde just laughed. "This is a 'no occasion' gift. Just something I wanted you to have. Besides, I was thinking about that 'no anniversary' thing. While celebrating it every month is just not gonna happen - we're beyond that, Rach. We don't need each month to be a milestone like every other high school relationship…"

"But?" she tried hopefully.

"We could do semi-annual anniversaries?" Quinn sighed. "I know how much you love this kind of thing and it's not right for me to take that away from you so I would be willing to compromise…"

"Ah!" Rachel squealed and clapped her hands excitedly. "Like half birthdays? Do you really mean it? OH! Could we do half birthdays too?"
"You just like any reason to celebrate and get presents and be the center of attention."

"And there's something wrong with that?"

Quinn rolled her eyes good naturedly. "I guess not."

"So we get two anniversaries every year?"

"That's what I said."

"And half birthdays?"

"Don't push it."

"You are aware that our 6-month anniversary is in a few weeks?"

"I am," Quinn nodded with a straight face. "Already bought you your anniversary present."

Rachel looked like she was going to pass out from sheer excitement and possibly the pressure of knowing that she now had only a few weeks to find something for Quinn. She knew her girlfriend and the diva was going to obsess over the anniversary gift endlessly, starting now probably. Then Rachel's brow suddenly furrowed in confusion.

"But this isn't the anniversary present?"

"Nope. Are you ever going to open it? We're seriously late for Glee club…"

At that, Rachel promptly ripped into it, tearing off the wrapping paper with vigor and tossed aside the bow before she opened the velvet covered box and froze.

"Don't freak out; just let me explain-"

"It's not…that's not…” she stammered, "it's not real is it?"

"It is." She smiled and took the diamond tennis bracelet out of the box, clasping it around Rachel's wrist before she had a chance to refuse. It looked just like she imagined it would and something inside her chest squeezed, but not unpleasantly. It was…right.

"Oh, Quinn," she breathed, her pupils as wide as saucers as she stared at the beautiful bracelet now adorning her wrist. It was easily the most expensive thing she'd ever worn. "No, you can't! It's too much! I can't accept this. How could you even afford…"

"I said not to freak out," she said laughingly.

"But it's just so-"

"Rach, I didn't buy it for you."

The diva pursed her lips, looking very put-off. "Are you re-gifting, Quinn Fabray?"

"Kind of," she admitted and then rolled her eyes at Rachel's outraged visage. "Stop it! Just listen and then when I'm done you can throw it back in my face if you still want to."

Rachel was looking more and more displeased by the second, but she was quiet so Quinn knew that was her chance.
"It was my bracelet. I...I got it for Christmas one year when I was fourteen. Sort of. You see...my parents had been fighting all week long. It was awful. That was the first time my Mom ever found out about him cheating. She eventually forgave him for it though, as you know, but this was the first. It was, um...an absolute nightmare. Every year my parents would throw a huge Christmas Eve party. Everyone from Church came, the important people anyway. It was considered one of the biggest social events of the year, Christmas Eve at the Fabrays." She said it with a mocking lilt in her voice, smiling like someone had screwed it on. Then it fell away again.

"Every year, for as long as I can remember, I would wear my nicest party dress, always white of course, spend all day brushing my hair so it would be perfect, and make myself into the shining example of the darling, dutiful angel of a daughter. Then after church, I would sit through an insufferably long party with a bunch of boring adults and bratty kids that I hated even the sight of. Of course, my parents managed to pull it together enough for their annual Christmas Eve spectacular. They are Fabrays after all, and I was naïve enough to think that meant they would come together enough to keep Christmas intact."

She shrugged diffidently and Rachel chose that moment to comb her fingers through Quinn's hair. It felt good. It felt grounding. It was like she was telling her without telling her that she was safe to keep going. So she did.

"That wasn't the case. Mom practically drank herself into a coma that night; it was..." Quinn tried to find the word for it, "humiliating. She eventually passed out in her bed, fully clothed, after the guests left, and Dad...I don't even know where he was. I don't want to know. When I woke up the next morning, Mom was still knocked out, the house was a disaster, Dad wasn't home, and my older sister had wisely chosen to stay at school for the holidays."

Quinn swallowed thickly.

"I made myself breakfast and opened all my presents by myself; the ones I had gotten for my parents were left untouched under the tree. I spent that Christmas day alone, watching specials on TV in my pajamas. I don't even get along with my sister, but I would have...I would have even taken her over being alone, and I couldn't go to anyone else's house because then they would know... Well, I just dealt with it."

Rachel brushed her fingers across Quinn's cheek, her brown eyes filled with...it wasn't pity, no, Rachel wouldn't pity her, but rather it was something like pain. Rachel hurt, but not because of her, for her. The touch was so distracting Quinn had to deliberately force herself to stay on track.

"Anyway, Mom was on a bender for like a month until she eventually came out of it enough to somehow forgive my Dad and they made up. Things were kind of back to normal...or whatever is normal for us, I guess. Then she came in one day and handed me this." Quinn tapped the bracelet with a sigh. "She said it was her way of saying sorry for how badly they behaved and how my Christmas had been ruined. It was also a giant 'eff you to my Dad because of how ridiculously extravagant it was. He couldn't say anything, no matter how much money she spent on it, 'cause it was for me and they were guilty. Mom made me wear it for the rest of the day, just to rub it in my Dad's face, but after that I never put it on again."

"Why?" she asked softly.

"It was never going to make up for what happened. It couldn't make me forgive her. In fact, it was only just a reminder of how lonely I was."

"So..." Rachel looked down at the glittering jewelry on her wrist.
"So…” Quinn took her hand in hers and traced her index finger over the diamonds. "I think Mom just finally made up for that Christmas."

"I don't understand."

"It never felt like it was mine, Rachel. I never wanted it. I wanted a family that could actually…” She couldn't finish that. "I didn't want more make-up or new clothes or a stupid tennis bracelet, but now I'm glad she gave this to me. I'm so glad because it means I get to give you something beautiful and…” she laughed softly to herself, "just seeing it on you now is making that memory hurt less. I feel like you do that all the time."

"I make your memories hurt less?"

The blonde nodded, at a loss for anything else.

"It's…” Rachel trailed off wonderingly as she stared at the diamonds on her wrist that Quinn's finger was still tracing, "it's exquisite."

"So you can accept it, okay? I didn't buy it for you. I'm just…giving you another piece of me. That's fair game, it's not really re-gifting," she echoed Rachel's horrified tone teasingly.

"But what if you change your mind?"

"I won't."

"But what if you have the perfect outfit for it someday and then you realize you gave the bracelet away and it's ruined-"

"Then I'll borrow it from you!" Quinn burst out exasperatedly and chuckled. "But it's not mine anymore, see?" She held up Rachel's wrist and kissed her pulse point. "It's yours. It even looks like it was made for you."

Rachel kissed her with tears in her eyes. "This is the most beautiful thing anyone's ever given me…” her voice trembled, "a-and I don't mean because of how expensive it is, but because-"

"I know."

She really did know.

The brunette sniffled. "I'm sorry you had to go through something like that, Quinn. You deserve more than parents that selfish…so much more."

"I have you now."

"Yes…you most definitely do."

"So, do you like it?" she asked, resting her chin on Rachel's shoulder.

"Like it?" she giggled madly and held up the bracelet in the air to sparkle in the stage lights. "I love it! I'll never take it off. Or wait…maybe I shouldn't wear it except for special occasions. It's so valuable! I'd scratch it or something."

"Wear it whenever you want."

"Do you like seeing it on me?"
"I love it."

"Then I'll wear it every day…and just take extra care of it."

Quinn took her hand and helped Rachel stand. They tried to fix each other up as best they could, to make it somewhat less obvious what they'd just been doing. Rachel was giggling as she ran her fingers through Quinn's hair to smooth it down.

"What?"

The diva shrugged, still smiling. "It just seems like you're determined to fulfill all my fantasies."

"Fantasies?" she echoed curiously.

"You have no idea how many times I've imagined having sex with you on this stage."

"Really…" Quinn purred, leaning in with a roguish look on her face. "So, um, you wouldn't happen to have any other fantasies I should know about, would you?"

"More than you know what to do with."

The blonde bit her lower lip fiercely, narrowing her eyes. "That sounds like a challenge, Berry."

"I believe it was, Fabray."

"Tell me another one."

"Nu-uh," she squealed and danced out of Quinn's reach as she lunged for her. "You already know about two of my fantasies, both involving a stage. Now it's your turn."

"You want to know one of my fantasies?"

"It's only fair."

Quinn looked her over for a moment and then gathered her things without a word, sauntering off, leaving a pouting Rachel to scramble to catch up behind her.

"Are you really not going to tell me?" she asked sadly.

The blonde didn't even look at her, but as they walked up the stairs to the exit, Quinn looped her arm in Rachel's and pulled her close to whisper hotly against her ear.

"Well…there was that time you went through the Britney Spears phase…"

They were indeed late for Glee club and desperately tried not to look like the guilty parties they so obviously were. Sam rolled his eyes, while the others didn't really think much of it, too wrapped up in their own conversations to care. Quinn took her seat next to Sam while Rachel remained standing, looking around in annoyance.

"What's going on? Why isn't Mr. Schuester here yet? The lesson should have already started!"

"Chill, girl." Mercedes reluctantly broke away from her conversation with Kurt who was talking about a cute boy he met at the Lima Bean from Dalton Academy. "He wrote that he was gonna be a little late today because of a staff meeting."
She pointed to the wall behind the brunette and Rachel spun around to see Mr. Schue's handwriting scrawled across the dry erase board.

"Oh," she said, feeling a little silly, "I suppose that's alright then. We can just start without him."

"You're one to talk, Miss High and Mighty," Kurt said, crossing his legs, "you and Quinn were significantly late as well, without an excuse I might add."

Rachel turned pink and averted her gaze. "W-we…we were talking about homework. It doesn't matter! We're all here now, so why don't we discuss-"

"Remind me again how you two are friends?" Tina interjected. "I feel like we're living in a parallel universe."

"Because we just are," Quinn replied briskly.

"Oh, that explains it, thank you."

"I think it's a good thing," Mike said with a shrug at his girlfriend. "There's no more of that 'grr' scary girl stuff happening with you guys."

"Thank you, Mike," the diva said with a nod and quickly went on to change the subject. "As we all know, Nationals is just around the corner and we have yet to work on our original songs-"

"Santana's not here yet," Brittany interrupted. "We can't start without her."

"Well, where is she?" Rachel huffed exasperatedly, throwing her hands in the air.

"Look, just because you're co-Captain-" Mercedes started in and Quinn leaned forward like she was going to intervene, but Sam put his arm across her, physically warning her not to go too far. None of them got to finish because at that moment Santana strode in with the smuggest look on her face which everyone knew meant something bad was coming.

"You're late!" Rachel snapped.

Santana glided right by her as if she didn't hear a word and set her bag down on the chair.

"So were you!" Lauren piped up from the back.

Rachel growled in frustration. Her authority was being usurped just because of one instance of tardiness? After all the times she'd been the first to arrive? This wasn't fair! They came in late ALL the time and just because she took one opportunity to… OH! They were such hypocrites!

"So sorry everyone!" Santana chirped pleasantly and smiled around the room. It nearly gave them frostbite.

"I just had to make a pit-stop, but I have something here that I really believe should be brought to your attention. Now, collectively, we have the right to know about certain members' doings because secrets only hurt the team. And, well!" she said brightly, lifting her肩膀, "With Nationals right around the corner, we need to be at our very best, don't we?"

"Bitch, what are you on about?" Mercedes asked tiredly.

Tina nodded in agreement. "Yeah, you're kind of weirding us out."
"Scaring the bejesus out of us, more like it," Artie muttered.

Santana's sickly sweet smile vanished for a split second as she glared at him with pure venom, causing Artie to lean back as if she were about to strike, before regaining control over herself and moving on smoothly.

"I'm SO glad you asked! Because…” she pulled out a few pieces of folded paper from her backpack and held them up pinched between her fingers victoriously, "this will explain everything."

There was a loud gasp behind her, but Santana didn't bother to turn around. Her smile only grew wider.

Rachel recognized it from the minute Santana held it up.

Quinn's letter!

Her mind worked furiously to fit the pieces together. How on earth could Santana have gotten her claws on it? When did she have it last? Dammit! When did she have it last! THINK! In class. Oh! She had been reading it class - the class she shared with Santana!

Rachel cursed so loudly in her head, she was sure everyone else heard it too.

How could she have been so utterly BRAINLESS? It must have happened when she was engaged with Mr. Guerin. Santana must have snuck up to her desk while her back was turned and stolen the letter out from her folder!

Rachel wanted to dig herself a hole and lie down in it. It would save Quinn the trouble of a messy clean up after she murdered her. Santana saw something that was meant to be shared between them and only them, something precious and sacred. And because of Rachel's carelessness, it was now not only profaned, but it would destroy them! Even though the letter wasn't signed, Santana knew Quinn well enough to recognize her handwriting. That meant she knew. If she knew, they were seconds away from the entire club knowing too. Then it would be the school; then it was over. Quinn would never come near her again.

Without even thinking, Rachel lunged forward and tried to snatch the paper out of Santana's hands, but the other girl was too fast. She just laughed as she held the letter out of Rachel's reach.

"Oh, I don't think so, Berry, but nice try. You're not squirming your way out of it this time, though it seems someone else does just love when you squirm..." She eyed the letter knowingly. "I told you it would happen sooner or later. I told you I would find it out. Didn't listen, did you?"

Quinn hadn't moved a muscle since Santana pulled out her letter, but Rachel didn't dare let herself look at the blonde directly. She wanted to cry thinking about what Quinn might be thinking right now, hating her probably, thinking about running, maybe getting up and denying the whole thing as an act of some unrequited crush on Rachel's part, to make it seem like Quinn wrote her a love letter.

Her mind was going a mile a minute and she knew she was moments away from hitting the wall.

Sam looked between Quinn and Rachel's mirrored expressions of terror and it didn't take him but a second to jump into action. He didn't know what this was about, what Santana had in her hands, but it didn't matter. If it was making his girls look like this…he knew it was bad. While Santana was distracted with taunting Rachel, he leapt off the risers and snatched it out of her hands easily. The Latina whirled around on him in annoyance, folding her arms across her chest.

"You shouldn't take things that aren't yours," he said sternly. "What's with the game?"
Finn, who hadn't really been paying attention until this point, suddenly snapped awake when Sam got involved. "Yeah, Santana! Why don't you just lay off Rachel?"

Ignoring Finn, Santana's eyes widened and she leaned into Sam, looking him over from head to toe. "So you're in on it!" she said with a wicked grin. "Damn, boy! Just when I was about to feel sorry for you…"

"I don't know what you're talking about," he snapped. "Just back off, okay?"

"Keep it if you want." She shrugged uncaringly. "It's a pretty steamy beat off for your poor boys there… Don't worry, I gots plenty of copies."

Horrified, Rachel looked to Sam for help, but he didn't know what to do either. They were out of ideas as they watched helplessly while the Latina went over to her bag, pulling out what looked like an identical copy of the papers Sam held crushed in his fist.

"Now, as I was saying, before they so rudely interrupted…"

Rachel wanted to dive after her again, but what good would it do? Sam was shifting back and forth on his feet restlessly, looking to do the same, yet they were powerless to stop her. With the amount of time Santana had, she could have made a hundred copies, and likely did. Everything was seconds away from crashing down around them when suddenly Quinn jumped out of her seat.

"OUT!"

It was the HBIC Captain of the Cheerios now, official title notwithstanding, that stared vicious daggers into Santana while pointing to the door.

For some reason, that seemed to be the reaction the Latina was looking for all along because she simply folded the paper over with a satisfied smirk and followed the stewing blonde out the door. Rachel watched them go with a sickly feeling in her stomach.

"I don't get it," Finn said. "What's going on?"
Quinn knew from the second she saw Rachel's face what Santana had. She knew it long before she ever glimpsed her own handwriting on those pages as the Latina waved them around. It felt like her heart stopped in her chest - just stopped. She didn't even know how she continued to breathe, but she must have, because she was still alive. You don't not breathe and stay alive.

Santana read one of their letters. Santana knew. Santana knew everything.

They'd grown up together. For better or for worse, this girl was one of her oldest friends. Maybe 'frenemies' was a better way of putting it, though they hadn't always been like that. Now she knew Quinn's secret. After all those years of tormenting Rachel Berry with Santana by her side, participating with such vigor, now the Latina knew the truth.

And from the look in her eyes, Quinn knew Santana wanted to hurt her with it. She just didn't understand why. Of all people…

Did she think she was stupid? Of course Quinn knew! All those years of being friends with her and Brittany, did Santana think she was so naïve, so Christian, so *virginal*, that she couldn't see what was right before her eyes? Yet, here she was, standing in the hallway with a girl who used to be one of her closest friends, or at least as close a friend as she had before Rachel and Sam, and that same girl was threatening to ruin her.

For a moment, Quinn wondered if that pain, of betrayal, of loss, outweighed the fear she felt right now… How had things between them gone so wrong that it came to this? She hated high school, she hated McKinley. She hated everything about it. High school was where it went wrong, when everyone became so incredibly screwed up - junior high was only a preview. Here was where the madness began and here was where she hoped it ended too.

Santana was her friend once. She knew the kind of person that lay deep down inside her. She remembered those sleepovers where they would talk all night about their families, about their fears, about the idiots in school… She remembered the way Santana would look at Brittany. The way she still looked at her.

Did Santana remember that too? Or was she too lost to care? Quinn couldn't risk it. There had to be some way to stop her. She didn't know how yet, but she was sure as hell going to figure it out. There was no way she was going down without a fight. Maybe Santana didn't even have one of the more explicit letters. Maybe she'd just come across a silly one and decided that was enough evidence.

Quinn made sure to close the door to the choir room behind them and stepped closer to the lockers, looking around them to ensure they wouldn't be overheard. Once she was sure they were in the clear, Quinn turned on her, moving in close with a growl.

"What do you want?"

"The truth," she replied simply.

Quinn raised her eyebrow and shrugged. "About?"

"Don't waste my time playing dumb, Blondie," Santana scoffed, "otherwise I'mma head back in there and read it out loud for all to hear and if you think you can stop me, just wait till tomorrow morning when this," she waved the papers in front of her nose, "is plastered over every inch of this
building. No hiding anymore, Q, I won. Now talk."

"What do you even have?" she huffed and snatched the papers out of Santana's hand.

Skimming it, her face burned, with anger or embarrassment, she wasn't sure - probably both. Sure enough, it was the letter she had given to Rachel today...not one of the more innocent ones as she had hoped. Crumpling the paper in her fist, she dropped her hand to her side and fixated on the Latina once more.

"You can't prove it's from me," she said tersely.

Santana chuckled. "Oh come on, Q! Let's just put aside the fact that I know your handwriting like I know my own...all those handwritten Cheerios orders? Plus I've copied off of you for practically every test we've had since first grade...but you know what?" She snapped her fingers as if suddenly realizing something. "You're right! I didn't have solid evidence..." the corners of her mouth turned up in a sneer, "that is until you stood up."

Quinn's eyes widened as the mistake came barreling into her head setting off every alarm.

"Thanks for that by the way," Santana chuckled. "It would have been a little harder to convince people if you hadn't gone out of your way to make my job even easier! If anyone in the club reads this now, they'll know who's responsible. A girl's handwriting, bearing a remarkable resemblance to yours, you dragging me out here..."

She gestured widely to the empty hallway.

"Face it, Q, you dug this grave and then you buried yourself in it. I didn't even have to hand you a shovel."

She folded her arms across her chest smugly. Quinn could hear the blood roaring in her ears as she tried to tamp down on her rage. She wanted nothing more than to slap that grin off her face...and pull her hair until she yanked that damn weave out!

Santana had played her! If she had just stayed seated, there would have been no way to prove the letter came from her, handwriting notwithstanding. Quinn could have talked her way out of it easily. Forgery was more believable than the actual truth for the Glee Club at this point. Santana knew that. She'd manipulated Quinn into thinking she had no choice, made her too angry to think clearly...

Her cheeks were blazing now and it had nothing to do with embarrassment. Santana's smirk grew, if that was even possible. She seemed to savor every minute of watching Quinn realize her mistake. Winning against the once-upon-a-time Captain of the Cheerios? It was glorious! Now it was her turn to hold the cards. Quinn was going to pay for how she'd treated her!

"Why are you doing this?" Quinn said through gritted teeth. Her knuckles had gone white around the paper, hand just itching to collide with that face, but she had to stay in control. Brawling with Santana was never a good idea.

"Why wouldn't I?" she retorted. "It's the perfect chance to ruin you once and for all and not just your measly chance for Prom Queen, but everything. You know what they say about payback? I'm the bitch. You got me dropped to the bottom of the pyramid. Now I'm gonna drop you to bottom feeding scum of this school. The infamous Quinn Fabray swimming full on in the lezzie pool with none other than social pariah Rachel Berry? It's like Christmas, Easter, and my birthday all rolled into one."

Quinn was so horrified that it took her a few moments to even gather the words to respond. "What is wrong with you?" She gaped. "How can you be so..."
"You got exactly 30 seconds to start talking, Q," Santana snapped, "or this goes viral. Bye bye Prom Queen. Bye bye rep. Bye bye Mommy and Daddy. Oh! You don't think you'll get your little flat white ass dropkicked to the street again?"

She almost hit her. She really did. She even flinched to make the move, but it never came.

"I'm in love with her, Santana."

"Someone needs to go all ninja, yo, and sneak out there to find out what they're talking about!" Artie slapped his hands down on the arms of his wheelchair excitedly.

"Who's the littlest?" Mercedes suggested. "They'll stand out less."

"The skinny ass pale kid here is probably your best bet." Lauren kicked the back of Kurt's chair.

"Excuse me!," he sniped, affronted. "My complexion is fair and flawless due to my zealous avoidance of skin damaging ultraviolet rays... And don't do that again."

"Or you'll do what? Exactly?"

"Lauren," he turned around to face her calmly, "while I both understand and appreciate you finding a way to use hostility as a personality defining factor in order for you to navigate the jungle-like, animal infested halls of McKinley, it is really quite unnecessary for you to employ it in this forum."

There was an awkward silence.

"Just don't kick my chair again," he finished with a little less vigor, gulping.

Lauren stared at him for a long, hard moment and then just shrugged, settling back comfortably. "Fair enough," she agreed.

Kurt let out a sigh of relief and Mercedes gave him a sympathetic nod.

"Okay, so Puck should go!" Artie jumped in again, determined to get to the bottom of this. "I'd do it myself but I haven't greased my wheels this week. Squeaking as I roll up the hallway isn't exactly super ninja..."

"Like hell I'm going out there!" Puck cried, waving his arm at the door. "Those chicks are looking to rip something off and I ain't going anywhere near them."

"Afraid for your manhood?" Lauren taunted.

"My livelihood," he corrected her. "The Puckasaurus can't live without them."

"Can we please not talk about your balls?" Tina muttered. "Or anything else in that area, 'cause I seriously think I might vomit."

"Whatever! All the same, I ain't going out there."

"Well somebody should," Mike said. "What if they start throwing down?"

Puck shot up straight in his seat, clearly interested now. "Okay, maybe I could go scope it out."

"I don't see why we have to eavesdrop," Brittany said casually. "It's about Rachel, isn't it? And Rachel's right here. Let's just ask her."
Kurt's eyes lit up, along with Artie's and Mercedes'. "Brittany…you astound me sometimes."

"I like being astounded. It tickles."

But Kurt wasn't listening to her anymore, having focused in on a now wincing girl who had all eyes on her in the front of the choir room. She held her hands up nervously, trying to back away from them all.

"Rachel, as the Blonde one said, this is about you and-" His gaze dropped down a bit and his mouth fell open. "For the love of Patti, Barbra, and Liza! What on earth is that gorgeous thing blinding me on your wrist?"

"Kurt!" she cried reprovingly. "Don't swear!"

"Girl, that is some serious bling!" Mercedes remarked, catching on as Kurt did to Rachel's bracelet.

The two of them leapt out of their seats in a flash and before Rachel could move, they had her snared by the wrist and were scrutinizing the jewelry with an almost professional air.

"THOSE ARE REAL DIAMONDS!" Mercedes gasped.

"Rachel Barbra Berry, how did you get your tiny, solo grasping hands on something like this! This is like wearing the average Lima-loser's yearly salary on your wrist!"

"You stole it didn't you?" Mercedes said accusingly.

"I did not! I-it was a gift," she stammered. "From…from my grandmother! She's getting old and has little use for it so she passed it down to me. It's part of my inheritance as her only grandchild."

The way Kurt and Mercedes were salivating over Quinn’s present made Rachel rethink the decision to wear it every day. The diva-ettes looked like they were seconds away from ripping it off her body and making a run for it.

"Alright!" Artie interrupted. "Can we please get back to the actually important thing here? Quinn and Satan are out there battling it out over something we know nothing about, but SHE does."

Rachel yanked her hand away and held it behind her back for safety as Kurt and Mercedes refocused their attention on the 'mystery'.

"So what is it Rachel? What's Santana got on you? Send another Vocal Adrenaline member to a crackhouse? Worse? Stuff their dead body in the dumpster? I bet that's it. Quinn's trying to cover up the gruesome…"

"Shut up, Wheels!" Lauren groaned. "This isn't turning into Murder on the Orient, okay?"

"I don't think Rachel would kill anyone," Brittany said. "At least, not unless she really, really wanted a solo."

"You're all acting insane!" Sam rolled his eyes. "No one murdered anyone! Can we just stop now?"

"Quinn and Santana are outside duking it out and you really don't care why?" Finn glared at him accusingly.

"It's nothing, guys!" Rachel cried weakly. "Really…it's nothing."

No one believed her.
"WITH THAT CRAZY-ASS SUPersonic Midget in a miniskirt!" Santana shrieked. "Has the bleach finally sunk too deep into your brain!"

Quinn winced at how loud it was. She looked around worriedly and hissed through her teeth, "Keep it down!"

Santana didn't yell anymore, but that didn't mean she calmed down any either. "Did shooting Puckerman's spawn out between your legs permanently screw up your head?"

Every muscle in Quinn's body tensed with anger. Her hands clenched into painful fists as blood pounded through her veins. The Latina knew she'd crossed a line, it was written all over her face.

"You wanna say that to me again?" Quinn said in a low, dangerous voice, like a tether close to snapping. She stepped in so she was hardly an inch from Santana's nose. "Go ahead...say it again."

Santana locked eyes with her for a long moment before she finally relented and looked away shamefully.

"That's what I thought."

The violent urge in her receded somewhat, but the tension was still coiled through her body. It wouldn't take much for Santana to make her snap now. Quinn was already so unraveled by this turn of events, to have another know their secret, to be so precariously close to losing everything before she could even gain it... Santana bringing up the child she had to force herself not to think about everyday from the moment she opened her eyes...it was enough to make her break.

She hadn't always been this way, she used to be better at keeping herself in control.

The Ice Queen. The Prude. The Captain of the Cheerios. The HBIC of McKinley.

In giving herself to Rachel, letting her in, it turned out the barriers weren't only down just for her. Once they came down for Rachel, to love Rachel, they were down everywhere and with everyone. The very notion scared Quinn to death – she was losing everything she'd worked so hard to build. Taking a deep breath, she tried to reel herself back in. If ever there was a time for her to be in control of her emotions, it was now.

Recovering from that dark moment as well, the Latina gathered herself as if she hadn't just been forced to back down like a dog and started again. Squaring her shoulders, she looked Quinn head on.

"Look, it's one thing to go all dykey on me, Fabray, but this? Rachel fucking Berry? Okay, I get it, Puckerman knocking you up has you a bit gun shy. You're not too keen about riding that horse again just yet, so you took a detour. Completely understandable; you still gotta get your rocks off somehow, right? Who knows that better than me? But what on God's green earth possessed you to go after Berry! And to say that you..." She shuddered, making a disgusted noise. "I even understood the twisted fucking on some level, Q. I was ready to take your princess ass down with it, but now you're telling me..." She shook her head in disbelief. "What happened to you? You HATE her! All those years we used to..."

Her jaw dropped, recognition lit up her face, and it was like Quinn could see the memories flashing through her mind, each one with a new interpretation. She knew that look.

She had been that look.

"All that time. Damn..." Santana muttered, slapping her palm to her cheek. "Qué coño! You are so
much more fucked up than I ever took you for."

Quinn winced, gnawing on her bottom lip. "Can't really argue with you..."

"I knew those drawings in the bathroom were too good!" Santana said accusingly, jabbing her index finger at her. "Britts even said how hot they made her, but I wasn't really paying attention because she was..." She threw Quinn a nervous glance. "I-I just wasn't listening. Are you sure you're not just suffering from some kind of Berry disease? Maybe she talked so much you had a mini aneurysm and it's causing you to hallucinate before your head eventually implodes?"

"San, she makes me happy," the blonde shrugged helplessly. "You really think I'd risk it for just...sex?"

She gave her a hard look. "You're dead if they ever find out, Q."

"Forget about me; it doesn't matter," Quinn said firmly. "But you know...you know you can't tell. This is not about the Prom campaign. I'll even withdraw if it means so much to you."

"I'll tell you what YOU can't do..." she shot back menacingly. "You can't tell me what to do anymore! I could post these all over town and by tomorrow morning, you'd be the most talked about thing in Lima...even more than front page news. Oh! I could probably get you on there too..."

"You won't though," Quinn said confidently.

"And why is that?"

"Because we were friends once and I think we still are."

She scoffed. "You're delusional."

"And you won't because...you know how it feels."

"Yup, definitely off your teen mom rocker."

"I love Rachel, Santana, and even though you may not agree with that, you can sure as hell understand it. She - makes - me - happy. We're going to move to New York together, we're getting out of here. I just have to make sure..."

"...No one finds out until then?" Santana finished for her with a hint of amusement. "Well, kind of screwed up that one!"

"If you care even the slightest bit about me or if you ever did..." Quinn swallowed thickly, "you won't do this to me. You won't hurt her."

"Are you believing in happy endings now? Has the cynicism all been washed away? I feel like I'm talking to a pod person!"

"Just a changed one."

Santana gave a stifled cry of frustration, throwing her hands in the air. "How can you love her, Q? She's so...Berry!"

"How do you love Brittany?"

Santana bristled, flinching at the very mention of her name. Quinn could see the pain written over every inch of her body.
"Don't."

"She loves you too, I can see it."

"Just shut your face."

"You don't have to keep hiding your feelings from her, Santana. If you just told her..."

"She's with Wheels!" she cried all of a sudden. "She's with that freak and I can't..."

"Tell her that you want her all to yourself?"

"Look, I'm not...gay...alright?" She swallowed painfully. "It's not like that. You don't get to put labels on me. I'm not you!"

"No," Quinn raised an eyebrow knowingly, "you're just in love with a girl, that's all."

"What is this?" Santana wailed. "Are you suddenly all...out and proud now? Gonna join the golf team, waving the rainbow flag, and just walking around being a lez...that's OKAY with you?"

She shifted uncomfortably. "I'm...working on it. Someday I will be. It's not easy."

Santana stared at her for a long moment and it was one of those rare times that Quinn couldn't read her at all. They'd known each other for so long, there was little Santana could ever hide from her. She tried, to be sure, but Quinn always knew. They were so different in so many ways that it made their friendship wear at the seams, but then again, they were so much alike, that didn't make things easier either. The only reason Quinn had for their on-again/off-again friendship, why they always came back to each other, was because she had always seen something in the other girl. And she was pretty sure it was the same for Santana too. Why else did this invisible tie keep snapping them back together no matter how hard they tried to run?

Santana wouldn't meet her eyes, but there was something bursting to get through. "She's different, Quinn," the Latina said softly.

The walls had fallen, for however short a time. The real girl was coming through, not the nasty, vicious front she put on for everyone else. It was the Santana that Brittany knew better than anyone else in the world.

"You know she's...I won't be enough."

Quinn sighed, her heart aching for what Santana was going through. After all, it wasn't very far from her own pain. "Don't kid yourself. You are all she's ever wanted. Since we were kids, you've never been able to break Brittana apart. As if Brittany would let you leave her side...not that you ever tried or even wanted to."

"It's Santittany," she grumbled.

Quinn rolled her eyes. "You just like that because it has 'tit' in it."

"Which means you should love it too, right?" she shot back.

"Make it Rachel's tits and..." Quinn blushed, not able to finish that.

Santana couldn't quite believe her ears either.

"Who are you and what have you done to Q?"
"She got happy."

"She got laid."

"Many...many...many times..." Quinn trailed off dreamily.

"Oh, sick! Shut up! You're making my gag reflex act up."

"You actually have a gag reflex? I thought with all the dic-"

"Finish that and I will end you, right here, right now, bitch."

Quinn smirked. "So we understand each other then?"

"More than we should. I'll...burn them, okay?"

"All of them?"

"Keeping one copy just in case I need blackmail material in the future."

"You'll burn them all or Brittany's going to hear some very interesting things from me... Especially how you tricked her into thinking sleeping with you didn't mean cheating on Artie."

Santana's eyes went wide. "Fuck you!" she spat viciously. "That's NONE of your business, Fabray!"

"You got into mine so now I'm forced to get into yours," Quinn replied calmly. "It's your own damn fault. Now are we clear?"

She glowered, knowing she'd been painted into a corner. "Guess that Q isn't completely gone after all, hm?" She crossed her arms sullenly. "I should knock your teeth down your throat."

"You could try. But I guess it doesn't take much to forget... I was the one who taught you in the first place, S. You've got a long way to go before you can beat me."

"I'll work on it."

"Until next time then."

Santana sighed unhappily. "So your dirty little secret lives to hide another day."

"It's not dirty."

"And mine?"

"...Isn't dirty either. Tell her, Santana. That girl loves you more than anything. She'll want you too."

"I meant are you gonna keep mine while I keep yours?" she said impatiently.

Quinn shrugged. She knew what Santana meant, she just wanted the chance to drive her point home. "Until you don't want me to anymore."

"I could say the same for you."

"It's different and you KNOW it."

"Rachel fucking Berry..." she muttered under her breath.
Quinn whipped around violently. "One wrong word to her and I swear to God, Coach Sylvester will look like a ray of sunshine on puppies by the time I'm through with you."

"Captain, my Captain!" She mock saluted.

She narrowed her eyes in annoyance. "Figures English is the only class you pay attention in. She's the hottest teacher at McKinley."

Santana ignored her. "I cannot believe you're a Berry whore now."

"Says the girl who's had more than half the school...including two of my exes."

"Yeah, but none of them were Rachel Berry, so I still win."

Rachel backed away from the crowd of people that had hawk-like eyes on her every move. Questions were firing from every which direction and she had no idea what to do. More than anything, she wished Quinn would walk back in right now. She'd be able to shut them all up with just a look. That was what Rachel needed right now. She needed Quinn. If it was up to her...she would answer every question with unmatched pride and happiness. Quinn was hers and they were in love. How badly she wanted to share that with her friends...

They were her friends, right?

Yes, yes, they were, but instead of getting to show off how unbelievably elated and wonderful she felt like her life was right now, she had to keep her mouth shut, feign ignorance...lie.

_For Quinn...you're doing it for Quinn... This isn't for forever. You can do it for Quinn._

Sam saw Rachel struggling and shouted for everyone to cut it out before pulling Rachel into a side hug reassuringly. She was grateful for his protectiveness, more than he would know. Before Quinn, she hadn't ever really known what it was like to have someone stand up for her. Not that she needed it, but just to have someone wanting, willing...to care enough? It wasn't necessarily the action itself, but what it meant. She even smiled a little when his arm curled around her tightly. Quinn was right, he did smell good. She was going to have to ask him what he used...

But her tiny moment of reprieve was lost when Finn was on his feet. The moment the boy touched Rachel, something in Finn snapped, and it didn't look like there was any way he was going to be able to pull himself back.

"What is going on here!" he cried. "I'm sick of this. I want answers, Rachel. Once and for all, what's going on with you two!"

She looked up at Sam with a raised eyebrow. "We're...friends?"

"That's bull! I've been seeing it for weeks now! Tell me the truth. I have the right to know."

Rachel groaned and a stabbing pain formed between her eyes. She was so tired of this, of Finn's boorishness, tired of this arguing, tired of him acting like she belonged to him, as if she ever had.

The right to know? What right? He lost any right when he had sex with Santana and lied to her about it. He lost any right when he broke up with her. He lost any right every time he made her feel ashamed, unworthy, and unloved. He had NO rights.

"How many times do I have to say it? Sam is my friend, nothing more. Just stop this!"
Finn ignored her completely. He was fixated on Sam now like a dog foaming at the mouth for a bone that had been taken away. "Why'd you try to get that stuff away from Santana if it didn't have something about you? You're hooking up with Rachel and she has evidence!"

"Dude, are you seriously this stupid?"

"You're the one that's stupid for thinking you could get away with it!"

"What is wrong with you!" Rachel snapped. "You are being completely irrational!"

"Then what does Santana have on you?" Finn finally turned on her. "Why'd you freak so bad? Why is he protecting you?"

"Because that's what people do when they care about someone! A lesson you sorely need to learn, Finn, and I suggest you start learning it sooner rather than later."

"You're lying! I've known about it all along." He whirled around on Sam again angrily. "I can't believe you could do something like that to Quinn! You said you loved her!"

"Oh, like you loved her? And Rachel? You cheated on them both!"

"I never-!"

"Shut up! Both of you!" Rachel jumped between them as the boys looked seconds away from lunging for each other. "Stop this right now! Finn, it is NONE of your business. Sam, just sit down, please?"

"But it is something about you," Tina said. "You practically turned white when you saw what Santana had."

"Yes, it's about me," she admitted reluctantly, "it's something...private that Santana stole. She had no right and it's not something bad; it's just p-personal and she's trying to use it to hurt me."

"What is it!" Finn demanded.

"She just told you it was personal!" Sam growled.

"You better shut the-"

"Finn, seriously man, cut the bull," Puck said from the top of the risers. "Rachel said it wasn't our business and it's not Satan's right to air out her dirty laundry. Us Jews got a right to privacy too."

"It's not dirty!" She cried helplessly, but acknowledged Puck's help anyway with a weary nod of her head.

"Why would Santana go out of her way to hurt you like that?" Artie asked accusingly. "Must be pretty juicy."

"It's Santana," Mercedes replied with a roll of her eyes. "It's what she does."

"True dat." He shrugged.

Brittany was looking more and more unhappy by the second. She pulled away from Artie with a sigh, but he didn't notice.

"Look, enough!" Sam cried. "We're done talking about this."
"They're not," Brittany said, pointing to the door where the girls had exited earlier.

There had been a loud, unintelligible screech from Santana before, but nothing since. If they didn't come back soon, the Gleeks were going to have to send out a rescue party while someone else called 911.

"Why did Quinn take her outside?" Tina asked curiously.

"Oh, didn't you hear, Quinn is Rachel's new bestest friend in the world!" Finn mocked.

"Hey, I think you need to cool off a little now, Finn," Kurt said carefully. "You're taking this too far."

"Just stay out of it!" He snapped at the boy and then turned to the rest of the group. "None of you know Quinn like I do. She'll do anything to keep her reputation intact! Anything! She doesn't care about people's feelings, just as long as things look good on the outside. Like the perfect, screwed up image she's got in her head. She probably even knows they're hooking up," he gestured to Rachel and Sam wildly, "but she's out there threatening Santana to stay quiet just so she doesn't get humiliated!"

"YOU DON'T KNOW THE FIRST THING ABOUT HER, FINN HUDSON!"

Sam stepped in close to Rachel who looked angrier than any of them had ever seen before. She looked ready to rip him to pieces with her bare hands. Sam was there just in case he had to hold her back. He remembered what Rachel had been like in their brawl with the football team. She went for the jugular with Karofsky and it'd taken most of his strength to hold that crazy girl back as she screamed and kicked violently at boys three times her size.

But that…that was nothing compared to right now. Rachel looked ready to murder, and frankly, it stunned the others in the club into silence.

Rachel Berry this angry at Finn Hudson? Almost as if…she…hated him?

A similar thought went through all their heads as they wondered in various ways if Tina hadn't been so far from the truth. Maybe this was a parallel universe.

Rachel never looked like that at Finn, not even at his worst, not even when he insulted her, used her, shamed her, slept with Santana… Where was that Rachel? Who was this new Rachel standing in front of them, fury rolling off her in waves, glaring at Finn as though he were the vilest thing she'd ever laid eyes on?

"You're one to talk!" Finn shot back. "You've been obsessed with her for as long as I can remember. Are you just doing all this to hurt her cause she used to be my girlfriend? 'Cause this is seriously messed up, Rachel, even for you."

Sam tensed beside her, waiting for her to pounce. Rachel was sure that's what it looked like on the outside, probably because that's what it felt like, but Finn wasn't worth it. Her rage began to dissipate as a world of disillusionment settled in. It was as though the last two years were finally shattered, after surviving with cracks riddled through it until now.

She felt ill.

This boy…this boy acting so horribly, saying such awful things, behaving with such utter stupidity and immaturity…she thought she had loved this boy?
"I don't know what I ever saw in you," she said coldly.

Finn glared at her. "Yeah, well, right now? I'm thinking about the same."

Mr. Schuester walked in just then and saw the two of them facing off. He warily set his bag on the piano and came up to them, acting like even the slightest wrong movement would set off the bomb that was the tension suffocating the room.

"Hey...guys...what's going on here?"

Rachel looked at Finn hard for a long moment then turned to Mr. Schue. The decision came surprisingly easily. She knew what had to be done, and this wasn't even about her and Quinn anymore. Finn had turned it into something else; it was no one's fault but his own.

"I request that Finn be removed as Glee Club's co-captain," she said calmly, "effective immediately."

Finn chuckled incredulously, shaking his head. "You can't do that."

"Whoa, whoa! What is this? Rachel, just because you two are-"

"This isn't just a simple argument, Mr. Schue. Finn has failed time and again to be an effective leader for the club and I feel it's in our best interests to go to Nationals with someone we support and believe in. Finn is no longer the best candidate for the job."

"And you're gonna say that he is!" Finn pointed to Sam who looked just as surprised.

"I haven't seen anything to show that Finn isn't the leader he should be," Mr. Schuester said firmly. "He's made mistakes, but he's also come through for you," he looked around at the rest of the club pointedly, "all of you."

Rachel didn't seem to care. "I wish to put it to a vote."

"Are you serious!" Finn cried. "I can't believe you!"

"We're not voting-"

"Mr. Schue," Mercedes interrupted, "while I usually try to tune out whatever Rachel says, 'cause it mostly just gives me a headache, I think...ugh...I think she's got a point."

Finn's mouth fell open in disbelief as he looked at the girl, who only shrugged apologetically.

"I'm with Mercedes," Brittany joined in. "It wasn't nice what you said about Quinn and a real team captain doesn't act like that."

"Quinn?" Mr. Schuester echoed in befuddlement. "You said something about Quinn?"

"I vote too," Puck said with a shrug at Finn. "Sorry, bro. You know we're friends and all but you haven't been doing so hot lately. Sam deserves a shot."

"You want THIS DUDE to be captain?"

"Co-captain," Rachel said evenly.

"What the hell! This is...this is that pirate moronity thing!"

"Uh, that would be mutiny," Lauren corrected him.
"YEAH, THAT!"

"But Finn's talking," Brittany said in confusion. "Doesn't that mean he's not mute?"

"Mutiny, not mute, babe," Artie replied with a pat on her arm.

"Still," she shook her head, "it's majorly uncool to make people walk the plank into water with a giant crocodile for not being able to talk."

Everyone looked at her.

"I watched Peter Pan with Santana last weekend," she explained. "That's what pirates do."

They moved on.

"Well, Sam is the one singing all the major duets now," Artie pointed out. "And you've been a pretty big jerk lately."

"Wait, just stop for a second-" Mr. Schuester tried, but Finn cut him off.

"NO!" He threw his hands up. "You guys don't want me to be your Captain? Fine. I quit."

After he looked past the group on the risers, his eyes finally landed on Rachel with a fierce glare. She remained impassive as she stared back at him.

"Good luck trying to win Nationals without me," he said, sounding like it was for the whole Glee Club, but with his gaze on Rachel like that, it was as if he said it just for her.

She knew exactly what he was doing. It was a last ditch attempt to appeal to her sense of competition and undying need to reach the top. By leaving, Finn would be throwing a wrench into the works of New Directions, but his plan failed. She knew that it would only be a minor bump, even without Finn at Nationals. They had enough people to meet the requirements and Sam was more than prepared to take his place as the lead male soloist after all their hard work together. Finn thought he was more important than he really was. Maybe when he understood that someday, he'd be better for it. The world didn't revolve around Finn Hudson, nor did McKinley High, or even the Glee Club, no matter how much he wanted it to.

When Rachel didn't say a word, or even blink at all at his final desperate act to get her to change her mind, Finn reared back, angrier than ever, and stormed out, leaving behind a rather unimpressed group.

Sam rolled his eyes and went back to his seat while Rachel quietly perched herself on a chair at the far end of the risers, looking more weary than anything else.

"I wanted him to kick a chair again." Brittany sighed disappointedly. "Giants always knock things over."

"Hate to say it, but Finn kind of proved the point there," Tina said. "That wasn't very leader-ly of him."

Mike shook his head disapprovingly.

"No, just a colossal, stomping baby," Lauren snorted and Puck nodded in agreement with her.

Quinn and Santana chose that moment to re-enter the room, both girls looking a little worse for the wear, but neither of them said a word or made eye contact with anyone. Sam was leaning forward
anxiously, hands on his knees, while Rachel looked like she was going to pass out. Quinn took her seat next to Sam and Santana unceremoniously shoved her bag off the chair before sitting down in the front row.

"So, just what exactly was that all about with you two anyway?" Artie broke the silence before Mr. Schuester could get the chance.

"Who the fuck talked to you, Stubbles McCripplepants?" Santana barked at him.

"Santana!" Brittany exclaimed reprovingly.

The Latina ignored them all.

Sam leaned over to Quinn as inconspicuously as he could. "Everything okay?" he whispered.

"I took care of it," she answered tersely, her eyes glued on Mr. Schuester, acting as if nothing out of the ordinary occurred.

Sam sighed and looked over to Rachel who had returned to her petrified state the moment Quinn returned. Finn had been a temporary distraction from the real disaster at hand. He nodded to let her know everything was okay. She practically melted in the seat with relief and turned back to Mr. Schuester, though she could hardly listen to a word he said.

"Someone better explain to me right now what the heck is going on here!" the teacher demanded.

"Well, if I'm not mistaken," Kurt answered, "Finn just quit and the rest of us voted Sam in as our new co-captain."

"Good to hear," Quinn sighed, not knowing what happened or even caring at the moment.

"Makes no difference to me," Santana shrugged, "they're both morons."

"It makes no difference?" Mr. Schuester cried. "Guys! I can't believe what I'm hearing! One of our strongest team members just walked out! We need to fix this NOW. How do we get him back?"

"But no one really wants him back right now," Brittany said.

"Maybe he'll cool off and change his mind later," Mike suggested.

"Sam, this is no reflection on whether or not I think you'd be a good co-captain," Mr. Schuester said. "As a matter of fact, I think you'd be great, but we already have two captains and that's the way it's going to be."

"Sam is the best chance we have for someone else to help lead this team to victory," Rachel insisted. "We need him, not someone that's consumed by petty jealousy and bitterness. Finn's allowed that to grow to such a point that it's become detrimental to our team morale." She looked around for confirmation and got several reluctant nods.

"I'm not saying I should be captain, I didn't know anything about this, but Rachel's right," Sam said. "Finn's got no business leading anyone right now. No offense, Mr. Schue, but if the guys are saying they want someone else, don't you think you oughta listen to that?"

"Enough!" The teacher cried, running his fingers through his hair. "Just...enough. You can all leave. We're done for today, but I strongly suggest you do something to work this out. We're supposed to be a team and what just happened here was wrong! Tomorrow I want you back here with ideas on
how to make this right. Now go!"

They all started collecting their things, murmuring quietly to each other as they exited the room. Rachel met Quinn's eyes for just a moment before Mr. Schuester called out to her.

"Rachel? I'm very disappointed in you."

"Perhaps you should learn all the facts before you say that, Mr. Schue."

"Then tell me the facts."

Rachel only shook her head and left the room with Quinn and Sam following behind.

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_Fabrevans are your Prom King and Queen of 2011!_

Sam was gleefully tossing the inscribed pens with their names on it down to the end of the hall to the football guys.

"So lame, Evans!"

"Says the dude who can't catch!"

"It was a bad throw!"

"It was right at you!"

The Prom campaign was in full swing that week. Today, while Sam was working his angle with the football team, Quinn and Rachel were going around with giant baskets of homemade muffins that had Sam and Quinn's names decorating the parchment on the bottom. They stood on opposite ends of the hallway to reach more people as they handed them out. Rachel had to remind herself not to stare at Quinn too much, a thought she often had to keep in her head these days. Looking at Quinn just led to thoughts she couldn't afford to have on school grounds if they meant to keep their relationship hidden still.

Quinn was busying herself with the hockey team. She had them, literally, eating out of her hand as she sported that perfected angelic, charming smile of hers. Those mullet wearing, teeth missing, Canadian wannabes were practically swooning from the attention.

Rachel thought it was pathetic how they were drooling all over her, but deep down she knew she was just jealous. In their place, she would be doing the same thing. In fact, she had been in their place. At least she'd been a little more subtle and graceful about it though! Boys.

"Vote Fabrevans!" she chirped at a couple of passerby and held her own basket of muffins, identical to Quinn's, and the two girls stopped to take some. "Your support is greatly appreciated!"

Quinn glanced at her out of the corner of her eye from the other end of the hall and gave her a small smile, the special kind, the kind Rachel knew was meant just for her, before turning her attention back to the hockey players. Beaming from the inside out, she went back to handing out the baked goods with even more vigor.

"It's a good thing you're so short, Berry, seeing as how much you enjoy getting kicked like a dog."

Sighing wearily, Rachel turned to face her.

"What now, Santana?"
She was not in the mood to deal with the Latina today. Quinn had filled her in on what happened with Santana out in the hall that day, but it didn't make Rachel breathe any easier. The blonde was on edge now that Santana knew and it made her worry for what Quinn might do to ensure that Santana kept their secret. The bare bones of the story were given to Sam, but Rachel knew all the details, including Santana's feelings for a certain other blonde. She was hardly surprised by it - everyone knew they slept together on occasion - but what did surprise her was the depth of Santana's feelings for Brittany.

From the way Quinn conveyed it, Santana was deeply in love and absolutely terrified. For a moment it made her think how amazingly similar those two girls were. She'd always wondered why Quinn and Santana had a connection, beyond being attractive, popular, and on the Cheerios, what on earth were they doing being friends? The more she understood the real Quinn, the less she understood her connection to Santana. Now?

Now she was starting to see something different.

But whatever happened between Quinn and Santana in the hall didn't seem to change the Latina's opinion or treatment of Rachel one bit. She didn't know what to make of it. Surely Santana had to realize that they were on the same side now, not meant to be enemies? Yet…that wasn't the case. Rachel didn't understand it at all and that made her even more nervous.

Santana started circling her like a hawk; arms crossed tightly as she looked her up and down, making Rachel feel more uncomfortable than she let on.

"You...are a tiny, loud, yapping, and ever so loyal poodle. Q's got it made. For some reason, that's against the laws of nature, she's got a hard on for you, and Little Miss Perfect gets everything she wants. Not only does she get up your skirt, but she also gets to keep guppy face for her status."

At the mention of Quinn, they simultaneously looked over to where she was. Quinn and Sam were now handing out muffins and pens to the girl's volleyball team, a charming duo as ever. Sam's charm was in his endearing awkwardness whereas Quinn was like a work of art, so beautiful and elegant you could hardly take your eyes off her. They were simply perfect together. Rachel's heart squeezed painfully.

"Look at them over there with the adoring masses," Santana said against her ear.

Rachel shuddered to have her so close, too close. It was stifling.

"...while you're over here handing out muffins for her and her boyfriend on behalf of this disgusting sham of a campaign."

"As it just so happens," she squared her shoulders to make herself look more confident and put some distance between them, which made her breathe easier, "I was the one who encouraged Quinn to go through with the campaign."

Santana scoffed. "Then you're even more pathetic than I thought you were. She's got you so wrapped around her finger, you can't see how freaking EASY she's manipulating you. Q's wanted Prom Queen almost her whole life and now she's suckered you into thinking it was YOUR idea. I thought you were supposed to have more brains than Sammy-boy. Guess you proved me wrong."

Rachel bristled. "Whatever you may think about the nature of my relationship with Quinn, Santana, your opinion actually couldn't mean less to me. This isn't any of your business and I would appreciate you staying out of it."
"Fine," she shrugged, holding her hands up in forfeit. "Let me put it this way for you then: Quinn gets everything; she reaps all the rewards. What do you get?"

"Quinn," Rachel answered simply.

"Hah!" Santana uncrossed her arms and pointed at her as if Rachel just made her argument for her. "You get to fuck her, Berry...in the closet, probably literally most of the time. That's your reward? Never thought that would be enough for a girl like you who claims to be destined for big things, including worldwide fame."

"It's enough for now," Rachel hissed, looking around to make sure no one was listening before she turned back on the Latina angrily. "You're not even one to talk, Santana. At least I get to be with the one I want and have her love me too, even if we are hiding it."

Santana rolled her eyes and waved her off as she started to walk away, apparently finished with the conversation.

Rachel wasn't.

Her blood was boiling now, she could feel it rushing to her face.

"If memory serves me right," she called after her in a harsh whisper, "Quinn has no desire to be with Sam romantically, but Brittany genuinely has feelings for Artie, does she not?"

Rachel knew she had stepped over the line the minute the words left her mouth. A sick feeling swept through her that she knew oh so very well to be guilt. She wished she could take it back, but it was too late.

A black rage surged through the Latina has her body went taut with fury. She whirled around and started back for Rachel, looking to tear her limb from limb. Genuinely afraid, Rachel was just about to run when someone stepped between them and Santana was physically thrown back.

"Touch her and I'll kill you," Quinn growled.

Instead of acknowledging the blonde's seething body blockade, she simply leaned around her former Captain to see Rachel.

She hissed lowly, "If you so much as look at me..."

Santana didn't have to say the rest, Rachel knew. With that, she stalked past Quinn, knocking her shoulder hard, leaving Quinn utterly baffled and Rachel with a horribly unsettled feeling in the pit of her stomach.

"What the hell just happened?" Quinn turned to her in shock. "I've seen that look on her before, Rachel! Santana was seconds away from doing serious damage."

"It's nothing, don't worry about it," she replied absently, looking sadly in the direction the other girl left in. "I have to go. Here are the rest of the muffins."

Quinn looked down at the basket shoved into her arms and back up at Rachel in bewilderment.

"W-what?" she spluttered. "But I thought we were going to hand them out together. Rach, what did she-"

"It's nothing. I just forgot, I...I have an appointment with Mr. Schue to discuss our strategy for
Nationals. You'll be fine without me. Sam's right there. I'll see you later."

"Oh, okay..." Quinn said unsurely, "but are we still on for tonight?"

Rachel never answered; she'd already walked away. Sam glanced over at Quinn questioningly, but she only shook her head. Looking between the direction her friend had left in and then the opposite way Rachel had gone, Quinn knew something was very, very wrong was happening. She wanted answers and she wanted them now.

She nearly tore the school apart looking for Santana, blowing up her cell too, but the Latina was nowhere to be found.

That didn't bother Quinn nearly as much as the fact that Rachel wasn't picking up her phone either.
She was a wreck, an absolute wreck. Rachel wasn't answering her phone, Santana had disappeared - not even Brittany knew where she was - and then a couple hours before Quinn would do her usual sneaking out routine over to Rachel's, she got a text from the diva filled with excuses about being tired and needing rest so it would be best if they spent the night apart.

It was such a lie...a lie like Quinn didn't even know Rachel had the capacity to tell.

They always slept better together than apart.

It's not like they always fooled around. There were many nights where the most they exchanged would be some innocent kisses before falling asleep in each other's arms.

This distance from Rachel, the lying, the look on her face when Santana walked away... Quinn was hitting Defcon 1! She had one foot out the door and her jacket half on when Sam called just in time to stop her from ambushing Rachel.

He wanted to talk about the three of them going to a Trinity party that weekend so Quinn and Rachel could meet his new friends...and exes. Anna was only the first in what was becoming a stream of millisecond girls that Sam left in his wake.

His new serial dating method had Quinn worried about him at first, not to mention confused. It wasn't at all like him to be so...cavalier about dating. He wasn't Puck. But her worries were put to rest when she talked to some of her friends on the Trixies and they had nothing but wonderful things to say about Sam Evans. They all adored him, even the girls he hooked up with just once or twice. It seemed his honesty and caring nature hadn't vanished with the newfound appreciation for casual dating. Quinn was actually baffled sitting in the coffee shop that day as she listened to them wax poetic about Sam, when to her it seemed like he was just being a whore.

So, yes, he was hooking up a lot, but it didn't wasn't as serious as to involve sex, and he never made a promise he couldn't keep. He was the unattainable, a mystery, and thus the ultimate catch. Quinn called Rachel as soon as she left the group of girls to tell her all about it. Rachel was surprisingly understanding about all of it. It made more sense to her than it did to Quinn.

In the end, she decided not to make an issue of it with Sam, so they never talked about it much. She just hoped he wouldn't get himself in trouble. He told her a little bit more as time went on, tidbits here and there, then actual stories, then even names. Now, he was trying to get them to meet another girl he thought he might like, but he wanted their take on it. Rachel was excited to meet his new crowd, especially since a few were Quinn's friends as well.

Quinn was apathetic about the whole thing. Why waste time at another lame high school party (they were all the same) with people she didn't know (or barely knew) and scope out Sam's next fling, when she could be happily ensconced in bed with her very naked girlfriend? But Rachel said she wanted to go...so Quinn was going to go.

Even though Sam called initially to discuss details for the weekend, he ended up spending an hour on the phone with Quinn, trying to talk her down from the Rachel Berry ledge of insanity and realize the right thing to do. The blonde sat on her porch and stared intently at her car while listening to
Sam's voice on the phone. One part of her brain was screaming at her to get in the car, drive to the Berrys, and make Rachel talk to her face to face. The other was trying to get a word in edgewise, telling her to listen to Sam. If Rachel wanted space, then she deserved that. It was Rachel. It was hardly a matter of if she would talk to Quinn, rather only when she would. If her girlfriend needed time for whatever it is she was dealing with, whatever that BITCH of a human being, Santana Lopez, said to her, then Quinn was just going to have to let her have it.

She crawled into bed cold, lonely, and hating that she couldn't smell Rachel on her pillows.

**I miss you.**

After Quinn sent the text, she fell into a fitful sleep with dreams about dark hair, flying razorblades, a freezing winter, and Rachel Berry's empty arms.

The next day came and a tired Quinn dragged herself to school, making a beeline for Rachel's locker before even thinking of her own. She waited until the bell for first period rang, but Rachel never showed. Quinn couldn't have cared less that she got written up for being late. She just needed to know where Rachel was.

It wasn't until their first shared class together that Quinn finally laid eyes on her. She slid into her seat so fast, she nearly knocked the stool over.

"H-hey!" she said nervously. "How are you?"

"Just fine," Rachel smiled, though it never reached her eyes. Quinn could see she was exhausted too. "Did you finish the assignment yet? I know it's due tomorrow, but I-"

"I don't care about the homework."

Quinn looked at her fiercely, willing her to understand what this was doing to her, but the brunette just gave her a weary shrug before turning away and tucked her hair behind her ear.

"Rachel…"

"I'm speaking now, Miss Fabray," their teacher broke in, forcing Quinn to turn forward, "which means it's your turn to be silent."

Quinn nodded and nearly growled with frustration, giving the teacher a fearsome glare when the woman turned her back. She was forced to remain quiet for the rest of the period, sneaking glances at Rachel whenever she could, but the diva just kept her head down and focused on the class work.

She was avoiding her and Quinn knew it. It only made her all the more determined to find Santana.

When she found out that the Latina had called in sick that day, people were throwing themselves up against the locker just to avoid bumping into a very, very angry looking Quinn Fabray.

It seems like luck was on Rachel's side or a dark cloud of misfortune was hanging over Quinn's head. Either way, things were not going well.

Every time Quinn had the slightest chance to corner the brunette, someone else came along just in time to interrupt them before they could discuss anything of significance. First it was their teacher, then Sam, then an untimely run in with Sue who was still bitter about Quinn leaving the Cheerios in the dust. So that rampage of verbal abuse took a while. Before Quinn knew it, the day was over and
only Glee was left before Rachel would go home and she would be left to another agonizing night alone, wondering how to fix this, and what there even was to fix.

She needed to talk to Rachel before Glee and even waited right outside the door for her. There was no way she could get in without passing Quinn, but her girlfriend was craftier than she gave her credit for. The one second Quinn turned her head, Rachel managed to slip inside the opposite door without her seeing a thing. It wasn't until Mr. Schuester called her in to start the meeting that she saw Rachel somehow magically perched on the risers.

Cursing under her breath, Quinn dug her nails into her palms, and stalked into the choir room. She plopped down next to Sam, folding her arms tightly across her chest, and he knew better than to say anything. In fact, he started to inch away a little bit to put space between them. Quinn didn't care. She just wanted Rachel to talk to her already! This game of *Hide and Seek* wasn't the least bit amusing and Quinn had just about reached her limit.

Glee carried on as usual and Mr. Schuester talked about their new assignment for the week, an effort to get them to practice for Nationals and songwriting by getting in touch with their feelings. They were supposed to choose a song that best expressed something about themselves that they weren't able to say out loud. Through song, perhaps they could find a way to communicate.

Quinn had already heard this lesson before. She rolled her eyes and Sam smirked at her.

"He just needs another excuse to serenade Miss Pillsbury," he whispered.

"Pathetic and a waste of time," Quinn scoffed. "We have more things to worry about than his hopeless love life."

"You mean like yours?"

"I will kick you."

He frowned and scooted even further away from her for good measure.

Her hushed conversation with Sam had momentarily distracted Quinn, so when Rachel appeared in front of the class, she bolted up in her seat like a shot and listened carefully.

"...so as I already have a perfect example prepared in my repertoire of what I believe you're looking for in this assignment, Mr. Schue, may I be the first to go?"

"You mean now?"

"Yes," she answered breezily, flipping her hair over her shoulder, "I keep a copy of this particular song's sheet music in the choir room at all times so Brad and the band can be prepared."

"Uh, then by all means..."

He waved her to the front of the room awkwardly and took a seat himself.

Quinn was on the edge of her chair when the music started playing. She watched Rachel's every move, every nervous glance, every time she swallowed, the way her lower lip trembled for just a moment before she seemed to compose herself.

Kurt gasped excitedly when the music began to play, instantly recognizing the song, and then he settled down rather quickly. Quinn couldn't take the chance of letting her eyes leave Rachel, just in case the girl decided to look at her. But she knew from Kurt's sudden change in demeanor that it
meant something wasn't right.

*Hands touch, eyes meet*
*Sudden silence, sudden heat*
*Hearts leap in a giddy whirl*
*He could be that boy*
*But I'm not that girl*

Why wasn't Rachel looking at her? She was looking out at everyone, hands clasped in front of her, but never at Quinn.

*Don't dream too far*
*Don't lose sight of who you are*
*Don't remember that rush of joy*
*He could be that boy*
*I'm not that girl*

There was a painful lump in Quinn's throat as Rachel's beautiful voice crashed over her.

*Ev'ry so often we long to steal*
*To the land of what-might-have-been*
*But that doesn't soften the ache we feel*
*When reality sets back in*

Quinn wanted to run up to the front of that room and shake the living daylights out of that girl. How could she sing this? How could she think it? Didn't she know? Didn't Quinn show her enough?

No…of course it wasn't enough.

Would Quinn ever be enough for her…enough for someone like Rachel Berry?

*Blithe smile, lithe limb*
*She who's winsome, she wins him*
*Gold hair with a gentle curl*
*That's the girl he chose*
*And Heaven knows*
*I'm not that girl*

Sam shifted uncomfortably in his seat. Gazes were straying up to them now. Quinn ignored them all. The brunette's eyes were red and shining with unshed tears causing Quinn's chest to ache so badly she could hardly breathe. She hated seeing Rachel like this. All she wanted was to make it better, but she didn't know how.

*Don't wish, don't start*
*Wishing only wounds the heart*
*I wasn't born for the rose and the pearl*
*There's a girl I know*
*He loves her so*
*I'm not that girl*

As the music faded, the entire Glee club turned their eyes up to Sam who was sitting shell shocked in his chair while Quinn was simply…speechless.

Speechless and heartbroken.
Rachel sighed at the end of the song and looked to their teacher. "Would you agree that's something in line with what you were expecting from the assignment, Mr. Schue?"

"Y-yeah…Rachel…" he stammered, dumbfounded like the rest of them, "I guess that is an example of what I meant."

The meeting went on for a little while longer, but no one was paying attention to Mr. Schuester. They were all still abuzz with the scandal of Rachel's performance. If they weren't whispering about it, they were throwing furtive glances at the two blondes who tried to pretend like it never happened. Rachel wasn't making eye contact with anyone at all.

Quinn almost screamed with relief when Mr. Schuester let them go for the day. It seemed like he would never stop his incessant babbling. She needed to talk to Rachel and after that song, they needed to now.

The brunette was sitting up front so she had a head start on Quinn and bolted out of the choir room as quickly as she could. Not wasting a second, Quinn leaped down and ran after her. She didn't bother calling after Rachel, because Rachel knew she was coming. Calling wasn't going to make a difference. Instead, Quinn had to let her longer legs get the best of Rachel again. She overtook her just as they turned the corner.

"Enough!" Quinn planted herself firmly in front of her, just daring Rachel to try and get past her this time.

Rachel just crossed her arms and shrugged. "What is it, Quinn?"

"Are you really going to try and play stupid with me right now?"

Still the girl wouldn't look at her.

"Just talk to me! You can't do this. You can't just ignore me a-and lie to me and expect me to just leave you alone! What the hell was that song all about?"

Rachel's head snapped up and Quinn didn't like the look in her eyes. It scared her.

"I thought it was rather obvious," she said icily. "It's a song about not being chosen, not being the one, surely you can see how I identify with it."

"That's not-"

"Something else always wins out over me, Quinn. Whether it's your reputation, your fear, your need to stay hidden – that's what you choose, each and every time. I don't get to be the one. You never pick me."

Dumbfounded, Quinn couldn't find the words in time to reply before Sam burst in on them angrily.

"Jeez, Rachel!" he cried. "What were you thinking? We're supposed to be convincing people that I'm not cheating on Quinn and then you go sing something like that? You might as well have sung that from a mountaintop and let the rest of the universe in on it! There is no way that anyone is going to believe that it wasn't about me!"

"Not now, Sam!" Quinn snapped. She didn't have the time or the patience for him, this had to be
fixed with Rachel. He was wasting precious time. Quinn couldn't let Rachel go on thinking like this for even just a second more! There had to be a way to show the girl how wrong she had it - so, so very wrong.

"It has nothing to do with you! We'll fix it later, just leave us alone!"

"But-"

"Sam!" She turned on him fiercely. "Just. Go."

Rachel made a move to leave, but Quinn snagged her arm and pulled her back with a look that said 'Don't you even try.'

The rest of the Glee club was filtering out now. They could hear the chatter coming towards them, not to mention there were other students milling around in the halls still. Quinn glanced around warily.

Rachel looked up at her with a rueful smile.

"Guess we can't exactly have that talk right now. Wouldn't want it to look like we're having a lover's quarrel. After all, people will ask questions." She shook her head in disgust. "Goodbye, Quinn."

The blonde watched her go, too stunned to feel anything else but numb. She looked to Sam who only leaned against the lockers in disbelief.

Despair began to settle in.

Had Santana done something Quinn couldn't fix?

What if it wasn't Santana at all?

She thanked God that it was starting to get warmer out because if this had been the middle of winter, she would have already fallen to an icy demise. Going up was so much harder than going down.

By the time she reached Rachel's window, she was completely out of breath and her fingers felt like they were going to give way at any moment. Fortunately, her girlfriend loved the warmer weather and had already started leaving her window open to enjoy the fresh air of spring.

Clawing the windowsill, Quinn launched herself over the side and at long last, had safely arrived at her destination. She grinned proudly to herself for having achieved her sneaky break in, but not in the creepy stalker way. It was her girlfriend. Did it count as a break in if it was your girlfriend?

Yeah…it kind of did.

Hopefully Rachel wouldn't see it that way.

Quinn listened for any movement in the bathroom, but there was none. Rachel's room was Rachel's room, neat and tidy as ever, but with something rather important missing.

Rachel.

Sighing, she plopped down onto the bed and lay on her back to stare at the ceiling she knew quite well by now. Her hands still hurt from the climb, but at least her heart rate was returning to normal. Then she started to go over in her head what she planned to say and it sped right up again wildly, more frantic than before.
Apparently talking to Rachel right now was more terrifying than scaling a drainpipe and using nothing but her upper arm strength to get her across the edge of the roof, feet dangling, to reach a window on the second story.

What Rachel had said to her today, the way she sang that song, the dull look in her usually bright and shining eyes filled with dreams and passion and...love. Today Quinn saw defeat and she couldn't bear it. How much longer could they go on like this? How much longer could she keep the wolves at bay until they were safely away from here and there would be nothing to prevent her from making sure Rachel was treated and loved in every way she deserved? Time was running out and Quinn knew it.

They just had to hold on for a little longer. Get out of here and everything would be alright.

But she was lying to herself.

The door opened and Quinn panicked. It suddenly occurred to her that she hadn't taken into account the possibility of one of Rachel's fathers walking in instead of the girl herself. Before she saw who it was, she considered making a dive off the side of the bed to hide. But it was too late.

Rachel stood still in the doorway, staring at Quinn for a long moment. She didn't seem surprised to see her sitting there. She didn't look altogether happy about it either.

Seeming to debate something with herself, Rachel paused with the door wide open as their gazes locked. Then she finally stepped into the room and closed the door behind her.

"What do you want?" she asked coldly, folding her arms across her chest.

"We need to talk."

"We've done plenty of that. To be honest, it's getting really old. I keep hearing the same things, Quinn, the same promises. I don't need to hear them again."

"What do you want me to do? What do you need me to do to fix this?"

"You already know the answer to that."

"But."

"No!" she interrupted her with a burst of anger, surprising Quinn. "I said I didn't want to hear it and I meant it! You need to leave. Now. I want you to leave!"

"I'm not going any-"

"YES, YOU ARE! This is my house, Quinn! My room! You have no right to barge in here, demanding things from me. I've let you do it time and again, but enough is enough. I want you out and you do not get to say no. Not this time!"

Fury surged through Quinn's veins. Maybe she had no right to be angry too, but damn it she was! They were better than this! They were past this! Rachel said she had forgiven her for the way things started and now she was going to throw it back in her face no matter how hard Quinn had tried to make up for it? No. No! This wasn't going to happen.

"So that's it? Those are your terms? I come out of the closet or we're through?"

Rachel faltered slightly at that, but drummed up her courage again.
"I thought I could do this, Quinn, but...maybe I was wrong. I thought that you loved me and that would be enough, but maybe...maybe it's not. I hate having to go through each day knowing that I can't be myself and that I can't be with you. It's not fair and you should never have asked this of me."

"I know I shouldn't have."

"You keep saying that!" she said furiously. "That you know how wrong it is and yet you continue to do it anyway? With no thought for how it might affect me! How it affects others! Only yourself! You just don't want to deal with the everyday consequences of-"

And Quinn exploded.

"I'M NOT THINKING ABOUT THAT!" she shouted, slamming her hands on the bed, and leapt to her feet. "I'M NOT THINKING ABOUT TODAY OR EVEN TOMORROW!"

Rachel's eyes widened.

Taking deep breaths, Quinn tried to calm herself enough to say the speech she had been planning ever since Rachel left her in the hallway that afternoon. Maybe she'd been planning it longer than that.

"I'm thinking about the rest of our lives!" she cried despairingly. "Don't you get that? I want an actual life with you, Rachel Berry! God help me, but I do! What's one year compared to a lifetime? Maybe that scares you, it might be too much, I know how young we are, but Rachel...it's all I think about. I love you so much I can't imagine... I just want us, okay? For as long as you want me too."

Rachel leaned back against her desk as if she needed something to support her. Quinn wanted to be that support, she wanted to be the one to hold her up and make her feel safe, but she wasn't finished yet.

"So, fine, you want me to come out, tell everyone I'm gay and we're together? Okay. Let me tell you how that'll go. I'll be dropped on the popularity charts faster and harder than that damn pyramid Sue ever did me in for. I'll be a bottom feeder at this school, thrown to the wolves. I won't have any standing and I won't be able to protect you. I'll be treated like dirt, slushed on a daily basis. It'll suck, I'll hate it, but if that were the only issue, I'd steal Coach Sylvester's megaphone right now and scream it through the halls."

The brunette looked utterly bewildered.

"Here's where it goes wrong, Rachel. We get to hold hands, walk each other to class, kiss at our lockers, be as affectionate as we want to be. It'll be amazing despite what everyone else says or does because we're together. Meanwhile, while we're all 'out and proud,' I'll be homeless. Mom will drop kick me out that door faster than my Daddy ever did. He gave me 30 minutes at least. She won't. Then it'll be...I mean, they'll..."

No. It won't be much longer. She doesn't have to know that part. If she doesn't know by now, then she'll never have to. Only another year.

"Forget it." She shook her head. "So I'll just find someone to stay with for a few months until we graduate, get a full time job as a waitress in some dive, save up enough to get a crappy apartment. Then I'll break up with you and you'll leave for New York to live the life you've always known you wanted, to gain the respect and notoriety you know you deserve and you'll follow your dreams to completion. I'll end up a Lima Loser, alone with no family, and without you. It's true, I want to preserve my future for myself, but even more than that, I want it so I can have it with you. So that I
can go with you to New York, go to school, figure out what I want to do, and be with you. Rachel, I want to see you accomplish everything you dreamed and more, to be by your side while you do it."

Quinn reminded herself that she needed to breathe if she wanted to get all of this out. She took a moment to let it settle in before she started again, voice trembling.

"Now it's your turn. Tell me, is that one year of high school bliss and freedom so worth it to you that you'd want to sacrifice potential years of our happiness and independence together? We get to come out and tell everyone now. Then it ends come graduation. Or we hold on and get something that is going to be the best thing that will ever happen to..." she checked herself, "well, it would be the best thing to ever happen to me. You."

Quinn wiped away a few stray tears furiously.

"There's the story, Rachel. Its got two endings. Now tell me, what do you want? Because if all you want is that year, if you don't want me like I want you, then I'll give it to you."

Her voice was cracking painfully now, but she didn't care.

"I'll give it to you no matter what it costs, because in the end it'll have meant I got that time with you. It'll have been worth it. But if you can tell me that you want more too...more like I do...then..."

Rachel flung herself into Quinn's arms and stayed there like she was never going to let go. Quinn held onto her tightly, willing back the tears that threatened to spill over once more. She didn't want to cry again. Instead, she just buried her face in Rachel's dark hair and inhaled deeply. The familiar scent and touch was more soothing than anything else she could have asked for at that moment. She shut her eyes tightly and let it wash over her. Relief. Love. Rachel was in her arms again.

It was going to be okay. Everything would be okay.

Was she still lying to herself?

"Why haven't you talked like this with me before?" Rachel said finally after a long silence, her voice echoed in Quinn's ears. It had been far too long since she last heard such a sound.

"I don't like talking about it," she mumbled.

"Because you're ashamed?"

"Because I'm terrified. Saying all that just now...it means you can crush my heart worse than ever. I don't tell people things like this. I don't tell them anything. It's safer that way. I'm...trusting you."

Rachel moved her head just enough so that they were facing each other, but her arms around Quinn never slackened.

"I love you, Quinn," she whispered, willing the blonde to do more than just hear the words. Rachel needed her to feel them. "I never...I wasn't thinking about it like that. I had no idea."

"Now you do," she replied curtly.

"I'll wait forever for you," she murmured.

Quinn shook her head. "It's not forever."

"So I'll wait a year then."
"Yeah?"

"Of course. Quinn, I want that life with you too, so much. I-I-I fantasize about it constantly... I just never thought you really meant it."

"Then what did you think I was trying so hard for us for?" she cried exasperatedly. "Fun?"

"I didn't know. I guess I was afraid to know if the truth turned out to be..."

"That I was lying?"

"Something like that. Or you just didn't really understand what you were promising. Or maybe you feel this way now, but when presented with the opportunity to leave Lima...your feelings would change."

"And now what do you think?"

"I don't think - I know. I want you, Quinn. Not just for a year. Not even for just two. I want everything. I just never... I could never imagine being lucky enough to actually get it."

She tapped the side of her head lightly with her index finger. "I know here the reasons why you're doing all this, you explained it and I understand, I do. But I'm not...sometimes I'm not..."

She shrugged, tucking her hair behind her ear self consciously.

"I may want everything, I probably want it too much, but that doesn't mean I really believed I would get it. I'm confident about many things, Quinn, but this isn't one of them. You are not one of them. I have my dreams, of my career, to perform, to be known and loved by adoring fans, which of course are not dreams and rather the inevitable, but when it comes to my own love life? I resigned myself to it a long time ago, I didn't believe it was possible that anyone could o-or would love me like..."

She shook her head.

"So I just worked harder, practiced more, devoted all of myself to what I thought would be my first and only love - Broadway. Even Finn...wasn't able to shake that. Actually, he managed to do precisely the opposite. He made me believe in the impossibility of any love overcoming Broadway all the more. Now I have two loves," she smiled softly, "and I will be honest by telling you that you're partaking in a fearsome competition for first."  

"Oh, yeah?" Quinn's mouth quirked upwards in amusement. "How am I faring?"

"You are definitely holding your own," Rachel replied in all seriousness. "I do want us out in school, Quinn, but I think a big part of my desperation for it was because I thought once we graduated...it'd be over. I wanted as much of you as I could get before you left me. I suppose that's just my insecurities still practicing their meddlesome ways."

She cracked a smile to distract from her vulnerability in that moment, but Quinn wasn't having it.

"You'll get everything I have to give."

"In a year?"

"Well, you pretty much have most of it now." Quinn started checking off a list in her head. "Friendship? There. Physical desire? So there. Trust? We're working on it. Love? You definitely know the answer to that. Sex? Well, I think you can pretty much gold star that one."
The brunette laughed brightly and Quinn smiled back, letting her hands run down Rachel's back before taking both of her hands and laced their fingers.

"I'll come second to your first love, Rachel," she murmured. "That's okay. I wouldn't have it any other way."

"I'm afraid you don't get a say in it, Quinn," she replied confidently. "My heart will decide and if you don't win outright then it looks like Broadway will have to be content with a tie for first."

Chuckling, the blonde leaned in and rested her forehead against Rachel's, never taking her eyes off her for a second.

"I love you."

"I know. I have it recorded, remember?"

It wasn't until the next day that Quinn finally got the chance to ask about what happened with Santana. With everything going on, she knew that Santana hadn't been the crux of the reason for Rachel pulling away from her, but she had been a catalyst, and there was no way that Quinn was going to let that go.

So she stole away with Rachel, just after classes were over for the day, ushering her into an empty classroom, and asked.

She received a guilty look for an answer.

Rachel started to relay the beginning of the conversation with great hesitancy, and Quinn stared at her hard for a long moment. Then, without a word, the blonde spun around and stalked out of the room before Rachel had a chance to finish, leaving her shorter girlfriend having to run to catch her.

"Where do you think you're going?"

"Oh, just to make Santana die a slow, painful death," she said nonchalantly as Rachel tried to keep up with her pace. "I'm considering bringing her to a taxidermist afterwards, have her stuffed and placed in the courtyard to serve as a warning for the rest of those morons if they even so much as think about trying to mess with you." Quinn stopped short, causing Rachel to stumble into her. "I think Coach Sylvester would be impressed." With a satisfied nod, she started moving again.

"Quinn! Wait! You don't understand, you don't know the whole story, I said some-"

"It doesn't matter!" she cut her off angrily. "I warned her! I warned that water balloon chest to stay away from you and she's going to pay!"

"But Quinn! Just hear the rest-"

Santana was just up ahead and went around the corner. Quinn snapped up like a panther ready to pounce and broke into a run. Frantic, Rachel saw Sam coming down towards them and cried out, "Sam! Stop her!"

Seeing Quinn in a rage and Rachel's desperation, he reacted on instinct and ducked in front of Quinn. She ran straight into him and he tossed her easily over his shoulder. Shouting and flailing, Quinn clawed at him furiously to get free, but Sam remained calm as he held the fighting girl on his way back to a relieved looking Rachel.
"WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING?" she shouted. "SAM EVANS, YOU LET ME GO RIGHT NOW!"

"Sorry, Quinn," he said, unfazed. "Our girl said to stop you, so I listened. You know what happens when we don't listen."

"She's my girl!" Quinn growled, but he paid no attention.

Sam looked like he was on a leisurely stroll, about to break into a jaunty whistling tune as he made his way past odd looks and towards Rachel who was anxiously waiting for them.

Knowing she was stuck, Quinn relented, and instead smacked his back hard in frustration. "You idiot! I was going after Santana because she tried to make Rachel believe that I was manipulating her into loving me just so I could sleep with her."

Sam froze at that and eyed Rachel warily. He was wondering if he'd done the right thing by stopping Quinn.

"She doesn't know the whole story!" Rachel insisted.

"I don't need to know the whole story!" She shot back, still flung over Sam's shoulder.

The boy was utterly confused as to what he should do. Half of him wanted to unleash Quinn on Santana, even join in, but the other part of him had a practiced habit of listening to Rachel now.

"Yes, Quinn, you do."

The blonde sighed impatiently and tried to push herself up somewhat in her awkward position, bracing her hands against Sam's back to be more upright as she listened.

"If you still feel the same way after I've explained everything that occurred between us then I won't try to stop you from confronting her."

"That sounds reasonable." Sam nodded.

"PUT ME DOWN!" Quinn shouted, at her wit's end.

He set her back on her feet with a sheepish grin, as if he had forgotten she was slung over there at all. Quinn shoved him hard.

"Don't you ever do that again!"

"Don't push him, Quinn," Rachel admonished. "There's no need for violence."

"I decide that!"

"Come on, Quinn," Sam taunted good-naturedly. "Why do you have to be so aggressive all the time? Let love in!"

"Don't make me hurt you."

Sam turned to Rachel. "I don't know what you see in her."

She only shook her head. "I see the same thing you do."

He grinned and Rachel smiled back, but Quinn just let out a disgusted noise at both of them.
"Not that this love fest isn't great and all, but I was on a mission here. You better talk fast and then I'm going after her."

Rachel began to wring her hands nervously and made a few stuttering starts before she finally blurted it out.

"I said something to her about Brittany! Okay?" She sighed. "Santana made me... she made me so mad that I just... lost it. And what I said was something not altogether nice... L-look, I regret it! I truly, truly regret it! I swear!"

Sam's eyes widened as Quinn's narrowed.

"What did you say?"

The brunette looked awkwardly at Sam before averting her gaze completely from Quinn. Neither of them had to say a word for him to get the hint.

"Okayyy, looks like I'm not needed here anymore."

After Sam was gone, Quinn stepped in closer to Rachel. "What did you say to Santana about her?" she asked in a tightly controlled voice. "I need it word for word, Rachel."

"I feel absolutely horrible about it! She just made me so angry, I didn't even think about what was coming out of my mouth. I wish I had never said it at all. However cruel Santana can be, I don't have to sink to her level, and I did..."

"Rachel," Quinn pleaded, "what did you say?"

She gave her a sad look before repeating her words to Santana.

Quinn stared at her for a long moment. Then, without a word, ran off to find Santana. Rachel watched her go with a twisting feeling in her stomach.

The look on Quinn's face...

Disappointment.

The way the blonde had reacted, Rachel knew she'd done something even worse than she thought she had. Guilt weighed her down that much more.

"Come on!" a voice behind her said and an arm slid around her shoulder. She looked up in surprise to see Puck standing there. "You coming to Glee or not?"

"Of course."

"Everything cool?"

"Not exactly," she admitted, looking down the empty hallway in the direction Quinn had left in.

"We cool?"

"It has nothing to do with you, Noah," she said tiredly.

"Ah, good. I thought it might have something to do with me telling the guys that you wear hello kitty panties, but nevermind, let's go."
Rachel stared at him in horror as he led her down the hall.

Chapter End Notes

"I'm Not That Girl" from Wicked the Musical
Quinn couldn't imagine what Santana might be feeling right now.

Strike that.

She knew exactly what Santana was feeling.

All she had to do was imagine that someone said that to her about Rachel and Finn. In fact, hadn't she heard it a hundred times since the two of them started dating over the summer? She tried not to let it hurt back then, pretended that whatever pain it was that squeezed her chest was just a remnant of her feelings for Finn. It never worked completely. Quinn was a good liar, very good, so good she had herself convinced sometimes, but there were moments...just moments...when the truth would slip through.

That's why, as furious as she was with Santana Lopez for trying to get into Rachel's head like that, she also felt an overwhelming amount of sympathy for the girl. If Santana even felt an ounce for Brittany what Quinn felt for Rachel - and she knew she did - then having someone fling that in your face would cut deeper than the bone. She knew all too well what it was like to see the girl you love with someone else and be too terrified to ever admit the truth, to think that she could never love you the way you wanted, rather the way you needed, her to.

"Hey..." she said, carefully approaching the Latina at her locker. "How's it going?"

Santana didn't buy it for a second. "What do you want, Q?" she snapped.

Quinn sighed, relinquishing any hope of easing into it. "I know what you said to Rachel."

"And?" Santana never looked away from her locker, still searching for something.

"I know what she said to you."

She was startled by the loud bang from Santana slamming the metal door shut.

"Get to the point! I have better things to do with my time than stand around here chatting about the glorified sideshow freak you're hooking up with."

She let that one go with some difficulty. Santana was looking to get a rise out of her, but like hell Quinn was going to give her what she wanted that easily.

"Look, the only reason I'm not tearing that ridiculous weave out of your head right now is because Rachel was wrong to say what she did."

"That thing talks so much I never hear a word it says anymore. It's just a bunch of white noise. So no worries." Santana shrugged uncaringly before stepping back, looking like she was about to walk away.

"What happened?"

The Latina stopped in her tracks, looking around everywhere except at Quinn.
"I don't know what you're talking about."

"We were okay, I thought we settled it. And then you pulled a stunt like that! Did you think I was going to let it go? I warned you about going near Rachel! Why did you have to be so-"

Then something clicked in her head.

"Did something happen with Brittany?"

"Bri- No! Nothing," she stammered awkwardly, "just shut up. I swear Berry must be contagious."

Of course...

It all made sense now.

"Santana..." she said softly, "I told you...we're friends. You can talk to me."

"There's nothing to talk about!" she replied shrilly.

"Then why are you acting like there is?"

"Just leave me alone!"

"Not when you're like this," Quinn retorted firmly. "Something is going on with you and Brittany, I can tell. And don't even think about lying. We've all been friends since first grade, I know you too well. Now, what happened?"

Santana fell against the lockers heavily. She was gritting her teeth so fiercely, Quinn worried she might break her jaw. Then she saw the tears brimming.

"What is it?" she whispered, leaning in with her hand on her friend's shoulder. Santana didn't shrug her off, so she took that as a good sign. "Hey...S..."

"I sang to her."

Quinn could have sworn that's what she said, but it was so quiet, she barely heard it.

"You what?"

"I sang to Brittany," she admitted miserably. "I-I sang 'Landslide' for her when we were alone. That stupid assignment of Mr. Schue's put the idea in my head. God, I hate that sweater vest puke excuse for a teacher. It's all his fault! And yours!"

"What are you talking about? What did she say?"

Santana turned on her venomously. "I told her how I really felt. I told her that I was in love with her, just like you said I should. Only, you were wrong, Q, she doesn't want me. She blew me off for the cripple. Are you happy now?"

"Oh, Santana..."

"Don't even try!" She shoved Quinn away. "This is all your damn fault anyway. If I hadn't been so stupid to actually listen to you when you were spouting that stupid lovey dovey crap about Berry, I wouldn't be in this hellhole! Everything would be fine! I'd probably even be hanging out with Britts tonight! Instead, I-I can't even look at her without feeling like I'm dy..."
Her voice cracked and Quinn wanted so badly to hug her, but hugging an angry Santana Lopez was like trying to hug a rattlesnake.

"Everything was fine until you had to sleep with the enemy and now it's all screwed up!" she spat bitterly. "We're done, Q. I'm keeping my side of things, don't you worry your pretty little blonde head about it. No one will find out about your new bed buddy from me, but don't think for a second we're anything close to being friends. And if I were you, I'd watch my back."

Quinn sighed heavily as Santana walked away, squeezing her books to her chest tightly as she tried to process the conversation that just occurred. Out of the corner of her eye, she caught Brittany standing a few feet away. The taller blonde met her gaze sadly for a moment before she walked away too.

Quinn couldn't believe this was happening.

Rachel didn't even fully understand at first why it was that Santana's words had affected her so profoundly. She knew in her heart of hearts that Quinn would never do such a thing to her. She trusted that what they had was real. She did!

But there were so many cracks in the armor of their relationship right now, so many places for doubt to slip its way through and break the whole. Santana found one and she used it. What was Rachel to Quinn if not a filthy little secret tucked away in dark corners and beneath the sheets? For all that she tried to accept their current situation, thoughts like those could not be held at bay. Rachel had faith, but her faith was not unshakable.

She didn't even understand why she was pushing Quinn away as she had. Only that seeing the blonde brought back Santana's mocking words to echo in her head. Rachel was so turned around, she could hardly see what was in front of her. All those doubts, the fears, the nagging dark thoughts that lurked in the wings whenever Quinn denied her in public, whenever she saw Sam take Quinn's hand, they came bursting through in a tidal wave of emotion.

Then Quinn pulled her out.

Rachel had thought she was coping so well with having to hide their relationship, even managing Sam's presence, but she was wrong. She'd only been holding on by a thread and all it took was a little nudge from Santana to bring it all down on her.

But what Quinn said to her that night…it changed everything.

More than ever Rachel found a reason to believe in them, in their future, in their happiness. She'd faltered, and she may very well falter again, but this time she knew Quinn would be there to save them again, just as she would be there for Quinn. They would save each other until the time came where saving was no longer needed.

There would be a time. She knew that now.

She'd always harbored that sickening fear that Quinn only saw her as temporary and that Rachel was a way to pass the time in Lima. She feared that she was only…a phase, a phase where Quinn was able to safely explore her sexual appetite without having to reap any consequences.

Rachel felt ill for ever having such terrible thoughts about Quinn's motives. She couldn't help but think those terrible things sometimes, but she also didn't fault Quinn for it either. They were just struggling to make it through this together right now. She knew that the more secure she felt in their relationship, the sooner those thoughts would disappear. Until then, she was pressed to find more
faith than she’d ever thought she possessed.

But the way Quinn held her, the way she had spoken to her, her voice so raw, her eyes so honest and filled with pain, it pushed the thoughts away and barred them behind a locked iron gate. They weren't gone, but they wouldn't be so easily released again.

After that, she knew she was going to have to try much harder to understand the mystery behind Quinn Fabray, to pay better attention, because that was the only way they were ever going to make it through.

She hoped Quinn wasn't too upset with her for the dispute with Santana. She felt just as guilty as she was sure Quinn was disappointed. If she didn't think that the Latina would knock her teeth down her throat, Rachel would have gone to apologize. Instead, she'd have to wait and see what Quinn came back with. There had to be a way to fix this. Why was there so much animosity brewing these months when instead it should be just the opposite? She couldn't make sense of it.

Quinn came into the choir room just then, clearly upset about something. Rachel didn't know if it was because she was still angry with her or if the discussion with Santana hadn't gone over too well. It was probably both. But Quinn sat down next to Rachel without a word and she knew that the blonde couldn't be very mad at her if she was still choosing to be next to her. They didn't get a chance to talk because Mr. Schuester was already starting the lesson as a few stragglers were still making their way in. Brittany and Artie were the last to find their seats. Rachel noticed, with some confusion, that Quinn was scrutinizing the two with a severe frown. She would have to ask her girlfriend about it later.

She also noticed that Santana was absent.

It was Sam's turn that day to perform for Mr. Schue's 'express your deeper feelings' assignment. Quinn was still staring at Artie and Brittany in the front row while they were completely unaware. Rachel watched Sam questioningly as he made his way to the middle of the floor. He had purposely hid his song selection from her, which prompted endless inquiries on her part. The fact that he was hiding it from her, of course, only piqued Rachel Berry's intense curiosity all the more. These days, Sam always talked to her about music. Now she was completely in the dark, and while a part of her was intrigued, the other was painfully annoyed that she was out of the loop.

It didn't get any better when Puck stood up as well, standing further back, and slung his guitar strap over his shoulder. Tina was up too, then Brittany, then Mercedes!

Rachel gaped in amazement that Sam was able to recruit all of these people for his assignment without her ever catching wind of it.

Tina handed Sam his guitar, and he nodded gratefully to her, before going to stand off to the side next to Brittany and Mercedes.

"I want everyone to know that this song really means a lot to me, especially because of the person I'm singing it for." He slipped the guitar strap over his head and smiled directly at Quinn who was finally paying attention. She looked slightly bewildered, which was far more contained than Rachel's open astonishment.

"Quinn, I know I've told you this before, but sometimes people need to hear it a hundred times over and in a thousand different ways before they can believe it. So…I hope you believe it, because I mean it more than you'll ever know."
Quinn frowned at first and tilted her head to the side, but then she smiled softly, closing her eyes with a chuckle. Rachel shifted uncomfortably in her chair, her chest constricting at the intimate exchange between the two of them. She should be used to this sort of thing by now, but she was starting to understand that it was impossible for her to ever fully accept this - and that she never should.

"Oh, and thanks to the guys back here for helping me out." He jerked his thumb towards the girls and Puck.

The band began to play while Sam and Puck joined with their guitars. Most people in the group knew the song within a few seconds of the music starting. Sam grinned up at Quinn and sang:

"You and I must make a pact, we must bring salvation back.
Where there is love, I'll be there."

The three girls joined in as backup vocals. "I'll be there."

"I'll reach out my hand to you, I'll have faith in all you do.
Just call my name and I'll be there."

Rachel gripped the seat beneath her so tightly it hurt when Puck stepped up beside Sam to sing a solo part, his gaze on Quinn as well. She was watching them both carefully.

"I'll be there to comfort you.
Build my world of dreams around you; I'm so glad that I found you."

His smile, his oddly sad demeanor, everything screamed of an intimacy between him and Quinn that made Rachel feel sick to her stomach.

"I'll be there with a love that's strong,
I'll be your strength, I'll keep holding on."

Puck stepped back, letting Sam take over again. Quinn was swaying gently beside Rachel. She could feel her moving, but couldn't bear to look at her. The boys held her focus right now, two boys who shared something with Quinn that Rachel never would. Yes, she had it better than them. She had Quinn's love. But Puck and Sam... they held pieces of her that Rachel would never have. That was the way life worked of course, but it still hurt more than anything. Sam was singing again, playing his guitar lightly, glowing as he never took his eyes off Quinn, his smile never faltering.

"Let me fill your heart with joy and laughter.
Togetherness," he shrugged with a playful wink, "well that's all I'm after."

Quinn snorted and shook her head laughingly. Rachel could swear her heart broke a little more at that.

"Whenever you need me, I'll be there.
I'll be there to protect you, with an unselfish love that respects you,
Just call my name and I'll be there,"

Then Sam's tone changed, if only just for a moment. Rachel heard it so clearly. It was a good thing she was sitting next to Quinn because she knew, without a doubt, that Sam had turned his eyes to her. No one else would notice the subtle shift in his gaze, but she could feel it.

"If you should ever find someone new,
I know he'd better be good to you.
'Cause if he doesn't, I'll be there."
The seriousness of his tone, the eyes clamped on Rachel in fierce challenge, vanished into lightheartedness once again and he turned away to dance a little bit in the middle of the room. He swayed over towards the girls and then made a jump to strum alongside Puck.

"Don't you know, baby, yeah yeah. I'll be there, I'll be there! Just call my name, I'll be there!"

He came back again to face the rest of the group and moved as close to Quinn as possible on the risers, so close that Artie actually had to roll back to let him through. Quinn never took her eyes off him. When Rachel finally let herself see her girlfriend's face, she saw unshed tears and a brilliant smile. At that moment, she wanted nothing more than to run out on that god-awful situation, away from this suffocating school, and far, far away from Lima.

"Don't you know, baby, yeah yeah. I'll be there! I'll be there! Just call my name...I'll be there."

Sam played the last note with a quiet strum and everyone rose to their feet, clapping, cheering, slapping him on the back. Sam gave Quinn a knowing look and held out his hand. Quinn gave it to him without hesitation and he kissed her knuckles with a smile. She took her hand back and instead pulled him into a bear hug.

Rachel didn't get to hear it over the chatter from the rest of the Glee club, but she knew Quinn whispered "thank you" in the boy's ear.

To make matters worse, she stepped down to find Puck who was putting away his guitar and hugged him too. They talked to each other quietly, Quinn with reverence, Puck with sadness.

Then it was over and Glee was dismissed for the day.

Rachel heard him running after her, but she didn't want to stop. She just wanted to get the hell away from that room and everyone in it. She didn't even say anything to Quinn before she left, just slipping out before anyone noticed.

Except one person did notice.

Sam put his hands on her shoulders, gently pulling her to a halt. She spun around with a fierce glare. He sighed and put his hands in his pockets, not having to ask why she was upset.

"He was the only choice I had to sing that part, Rachel. I wasn't about to ask Finn."

"Kurt or Artie would have been perfectly adequate substitutions for Noah," she tossed back.

Sam gave her a look and she knew she was beat. Neither of them had the right sound for the song. She wrapped her arms around herself tightly, even more annoyed that she couldn't even argue with Sam about this.

"He's always going to have a piece of her. You know that. Can't change what they went through together. They're tied, whether they like it or not."

How did he know? How did he know to break through to the very core of her feelings? Was it some sort of gift he had? She hated it sometimes. And others… No, she hated it then too.
"How can you bear it?" she asked after a while, unable to meet his eyes.

"I deal with you, don't I?"

Rachel sighed. Her anger was dissipating more and more by the second as they stood there.

"I'll never hurt her," she said quietly, thinking back to his unspoken, rather sung, warning.

Sam watched her for a moment. "You have the power to do that, you know? You could really…break her." He shook his head. "I love Quinn too much to see that happen."

Rachel wondered, with some incredulity, about how she was yet again being told that Quinn was the one more at risk of heartbreak between the two. It sounded so wrong.

"Never," she promised. It was all she could think to say. "I could never."

He sighed and licked his lips, silently acknowledging their truce once again.

"I am sorry about Puck," he said with a knowing glance. "I didn't do it to rub it in your face or anything. He just… He was right for it, you know? I wanted Quinn to see…" he rubbed the back of his neck awkwardly, "that she has other people who care too. She never seems to understand that."

He was right again. So…infuriatingly…right. She really did hate it.

Rachel took a deep breath as the memory of that performance a few minutes ago forced itself back into the forefront.

"It hurts…" she rasped, "knowing that they…"

"I get it," Sam replied kindly. "Really. I get it. Do you ever talk to Quinn about it?"

"It's…a sore subject with her," she said tentatively, but followed it up with a quick reassurance. "Understandably, though!"

He nodded and they walked in silence for a few moments. Then Sam wrapped his arm around her shoulder and kissed the top of her head.

"Someday," he told her quietly.

Rachel leaned into his embrace and reciprocated by slipping her arm round his waist with a sigh. He really was a good friend.

Then a sickly sense of foreboding managed to sneak its way in for a fleeting moment.

What was this all going to do to them?

As quickly as it came, the feeling disappeared and she was back in the real world again with Sam's arm around her.

"That seems to be all I ever have. Someday."

"Better than never."

She looked up at him sadly. It was pity and Sam knew it. He shook his head.

"Don't do that. I happen to have a pretty freaking awesome life right now. Best rep in school, first-
string on the football team, co-captain of the Glee club, two gorgeous girls to hang out with all the
time, and definitely no lack of action in the romance department. I'm doing just fine."

"You amaze me, Sam Evans." She rolled her eyes.

"Right back 'atcha."

After the hubbub died down from Sam's performance, all the girls cooing about how sweet Sam was,
Puck acting all nonchalant about his part in it, Mr. Schue praising everything about it, Quinn finally
got a chance to look for Rachel, but she wasn't even in the choir room anymore. She saw Sam come
back in and was surprised. When did he manage to slip out?

"Where's Rachel?"

"She went home."

He didn't have to say any more than that.

Quinn called her as soon as she was alone, but Rachel acted as though everything was fine. She
explained that she left so quickly because her Dad was in the parking lot waiting to pick her up.
Quinn told her that her that she wouldn't be able to come over that night, but before she could
explain why or say anything else, Rachel cut her off with a breathless ramble. She praised Sam's
performance, said some things about how, if she had been involved, she would have tweaked this
and that to really get the best sound possible. But it was an admirable performance all the same; then
she excused herself quickly and said that she would talk to Quinn tomorrow.

Quinn didn't even get a chance to say good night.

The next day went along as it usually did, but there was a something off between them. Both girls
knew it. When the day was over, Rachel asked Quinn to go with her to the auditorium and Quinn
was relieved because that meant that they would finally have the chance to talk about what happened
yesterday.

She knew it couldn't have been easy for Rachel to witness Sam and Puck singing to her like that. In
fact, had she been in Rachel's place, she would have handled it far, far worse. Still, she wanted to
clear the air about the whole thing.

"I'm sorry I couldn't come over last night," she said as they made their way into the auditorium,
down the aisle.

"It's okay."

"It's just, my Mom really wanted to have dinner together, and have, ugh," she made a face, "quality
time because we're never really home at the same time these days."

"Quinn, really," the brunette glanced up at her with a tight lipped smile, "don't worry about it. I
understand."

They were walking up the stairs to the stage now, Quinn stepped back to let Rachel go first.

"I know yesterday upset you," she blurted. The words she had been holding on her tongue all day
long finally escaped. "That thing in Glee club, Sam's song… I'm sorry. They weren't trying to do
anything like win me over or something stupid like that; it was just...nice." She swallowed thickly.
"It really meant a lot to me. B-but I understand how it would-"
Rachel turned around, frowning.

"What are you sorry for, exactly?"

The other girl didn't seem prepared for that question as she stammered through a few starts and stops before giving up altogether.

"I don't know?" She shrugged helplessly. "I feel guilty."

"You feel sad because it upset me, not because you have anything to be sorry for."

"Rach-"

"It hurt," she admitted, lowering her head, "a lot actually. But it's no one's fault. I can't blame you for having a past, Quinn, or for having a connection, a deep connection with other people. I'm just selfish. I don't want to share you. Any part of you. I realize that's entirely irrational and unfair, but-"

This time Quinn interrupted her.

"I know what you mean," she said softly. "I feel that way every time I see you and Finn in the same room or even when you just laugh at one of Puck's dumb jokes. You shared something with them; you still share it. The past never goes away, even if we want it to."

"I know you love me," Rachel said suddenly. "I know I'm the one you want and not them."

"Do you really?" she pressed, searching for some sign of doubt, some reason that Rachel needed reassurance, but none was there.

"Yes," Rachel replied firmly. "But Sam…and Noah…" she choked on Puck's name, "they have something with you I can never have. I was jealous. I still am. I-I have to work on that."

"But you know that there's nothing I feel for them beyond platonic-"

"I know."

It sounded more convincing that time so Quinn sighed and gave her a smile before letting the subject drop altogether. She wanted so badly to be able to at least hug her, wanted even more to kiss her. Those full lips were just begging for her attention, but they were both acutely aware that they were not alone. The Audio-Visual club was backstage working on Prom decorations. Even if it looked like they weren't paying attention, the girls knew better than to risk it. Rachel nodded towards the piano, urging Quinn to follow, which of course she did.

"Are you sure you still want to go to Prom?" she asked as Rachel seated herself on the bench.

"Of course!" she insisted, bristling as if the mere idea of doing otherwise offended her. "Kurt bailing on me as my date hardly affects that decision!"

"For Blaine Anderson, star of the Warblers." Quinn shook her head disappointedly. "I told him he shouldn't get involved with the competition. Learn from your mistakes."

"You mean my mistakes," Rachel huffed.

She lifted her eyebrow. "That's what I said: your mistakes."

The brunette stuck her tongue out at her and Quinn only smiled.
Rachel tried to focus on the sheet music in front of her, but had a difficult time concentrating. Her girlfriend was infuriatingly adorable sometimes.

Mostly just adorable.

Always beautiful.

Other people would say that Quinn was also scary. Finn said it; Noah said it. She was sure even Santana said it at some point, but in all the years Rachel knew her, she was never once afraid of Quinn Fabray. She should have been. All the taunts, the threats, the slushie facials, the seemingly never-ending barrage of humiliation… But she never thought of Quinn as scary.

And now she knew why. Actually, she'd always known why. She was just too scared of herself to believe it.

Rachel shook her head. "Date possibilities aside, I need you to listen to one of my carefully selected song choices for Prom and give me your feedback. Seeing as how we're the entertainment, I need to make sure I cater to my audience."

"You mean another one of your choices. I've heard five of them already."

Rachel ignored her. "Just tell me if I was brilliant or simply outstanding."

Giggling, Quinn lifted herself up onto the piano.

"What's this one?"

"I felt an Adele song would be suitable seeing as how…" Rachel trailed off distractedly.

Quinn had slid herself closer to Rachel and swung her legs around to perch her heels on the edge of the piano and leaned back on her hands. Her knees, which were directly at Rachel's eye level, parted ever so slightly. A deep flush started to spread throughout her body.

Of course she was wearing a dress today. Did Quinn ever wear pants?

No.

Almost never.

And, for that, she thanked God every day.

"Q-Quinn, what are you doing?" she managed to get out hoarsely.

Her mind was taken over by a fiercely visceral image of her shoving Quinn's legs open and burying her mouth…

Stop it!

The blonde gazed down at her curiously. "Uh…waiting to hear you sing?"

Right.

Singing.

Well, it was a good thing she didn't actually need to play the piano because Quinn was blocking any attempt of that.
"You're trying to distract me!" she said accusingly.

Quinn smirked ever so slightly, the innocent façade starting to fall.

"What would I do that for?" She let her legs fall open a tantalizing little bit more, much to Rachel's delight and consternation.

The urge was growing so strong, she didn't think she'd be able to hold on much longer. Only the people behind them were serving as a barrier to Rachel right now. She couldn't stop picturing herself between Quinn's thighs, making her cry her name again and again.

There was music, the most glorious experience in the world that could infuse the soul and then there was the way Quinn Fabray sounded when she was at Rachel's mercy…the breathy moans…the pleading…the sharp cries…groans of pleasure…sobbing for release…

Rachel couldn't decide which was better.

Never in a million years would she have thought she'd have to make a decision like that, that it would even be a possibility! It was simply inconceivable!

Now with Quinn Fabray in her life like this… possibilities suddenly became endless.

"Come on! I'm not waiting around all day for this."

Wait? Waiting for what? Did she really want…

Rachel looked up in a panic at her expectant girlfriend who was simply watching her with an odd look.

Singing! Remember? You're supposed to be singing! That's why you're here…in the auditorium…on stage…to sing!

The corners of Quinn's mouth turned up ever so slightly. She knew oh so very well what she was doing and relished every moment of it.

Annoyed, Rachel glowered at her, but she couldn't help looking back between Quinn's legs, unconsciously licking her lips at the very clear view she had of her girlfriend's panties. They were sky blue.

She always had a way of spinning Rachel off into the clouds…

"Quinn!" she pleaded.

The blonde sighed exaggeratedly, as though put upon, and swung her legs back around dutifully. Instead, she lay down on her stomach atop the piano, using her elbows for support. She crossed her ankles in the air and swung them back and forth lightly as she waited. This wasn't much better because now her breasts were spilling out right before Rachel. That creamy white, silky smooth, mouth watering flesh displayed before her and all she could think of was…

No!

Quinn would not win this battle of the wills! Not if she had anything to say about it!

So Rachel cleared her throat, somehow managed to find the strength to tear her eyes away from that utterly delicious sight, and took a deep breath before starting to sing.
"There's a fire starting in my heart,  
Reaching a fever pitch, and it's bringing me out the dark."

Quinn smiled serenely as she listened to her girlfriend. No one could ever make her feel the things Rachel did when she sang. It went deeper than anything, deeper, higher, and all around her. She could feel her spirits lifting, rising almost to a point of giddiness. Rachel could do anything to her with just that voice alone.

Quinn was so enraptured that she never saw what was coming. She let her guard down and she was damned. Bad things always happened when she did that.

Another voice had joined in from further away.

A strong voice.

A beautiful voice.

A male voice.

Quinn and Rachel snapped up to see Jesse St. James up by the doors to the auditorium.

"Finally I can see you crystal clear,  
Go ahead and sell me out and I'll lay your ship bare.  
See how I'll leave with every piece of you.  
Don't underestimate the things that I will do."

Quinn didn't notice, but Rachel did. The blonde literally growled. The decorating committee had unfathomably decided it was appropriate to join in and harmonize with the rat demon bastard. Quinn spun around and glared at them so frighteningly that they immediately shut up, dropped their tools, and hightailed it out of there, rolling the giant star with them.

Of course, that didn't stop Jesse. He kept singing like Rachel was the only one in the room. The people backstage didn't exist as they loudly, recklessly, made their escape. The school didn't exist.

"There's a fire starting in my heart,  
Reaching a fever pitch, and it's bringing me out the dark.  
The scars of your love remind me of us.  
They keep me thinking that we almost had it all."

Three steps and she could probably choke the life out of him…

Yes, she was legitimately considering it.

Rachel still hadn't said a word. In fact, she hadn't even moved, only enough to keep her gaze fixated on Jesse as he came up the stairs and around the piano. Quinn felt like she should have steam pouring out of her ears right now. Her heart thumped wildly against her chest; blood roared in her ears. That sickly feeling of…she didn't want to say it…made her stomach churn and her muscles ache. Everything hurt right now.

"The scars of your love, they leave me breathless.  
I can't help feeling..."

Rachel suddenly jumped in again to join him with "We could have had it all!" and Quinn's vision
swam before her.

"Enough!" the blonde leapt off the piano, angrily smoothing down her dress. Rachel at least had the decency to look somewhat embarrassed. She averted her gaze while Quinn spun around to face the boy with a fierce glare.

"What are you doing here, St. James?" she spat, not caring to mask her feelings about his sudden appearance in the slightest.

"I came back to see Rachel," he replied and looked at the brunette with a gentle smile. "It's good to see you."

"Jesse," she said warily, "what are you doing-"

"You're not wanted," Quinn snarled. "Turn around and get out."

"Pardon me, Quinn, while you're looking lovely as ever and, oddly, rancorous enough to tear me from limb to limb-"

He leaned in as if to whisper and she dug her nails into her palms at his unwanted proximity.

"it's a good look on you by the way," he moved back again, "but I did say I was here for Rachel and Rachel is the one who gets to decide whether or not I stay."

Quinn was debating which method of homicide would be better, pushing him off the stage so he broke his neck and she could claim an accident, or wait until later when she could push him into oncoming traffic…

"You need to leave, Jesse." Rachel stood up and went to Quinn's side. She still wasn't looking him in the eye. "Whatever it is you're up to this time, I'm not interested."

"But that's just it," he pleaded. "I'm here to make amends. Rachel, what I did to you…that's my one great regret."

Quinn huffed loudly.

"Yeah…" Rachel mumbled. "It was kind of weird. One day you were telling me that you loved me and then you were inexplicably throwing eggs at my head the next."

"I know, I know." He nodded remorsefully. "I traded love for a fourth consecutive National Championship. It was a bum deal. For a first maybe, but for a fourth, no way."

"That's it?" Quinn cried, disgusted. "That's all you have to say? You egged her and you have the nerve to talk like that? Just say 'it was a bum deal'? Screw you! Take your ridiculous, so three years ago, metrosexual scarf, gelatinous hair, and get out of my school!"

Jesse ignored her and kept his gaze on Rachel who was standing still as stone.

"I know what I did was horrible; I need to fix that. Rachel…I haven't been able to stop thinking about you."

Quinn was so angry…and beneath it so frightened…that she was speechless. She could only turn to Rachel for help, praying that what she found there wouldn't cause her pain.

The brunette watched Jesse for a long moment before finally turning her eyes to the floor with a sigh and then back up at Quinn.
She knew what was coming before Rachel even opened her mouth. She could see it in her eyes.

*Please don't do this to me…*

"Quinn…" Rachel said timidly, but then cleared her throat so she sounded stronger. "Could you excuse us for a moment? I need to speak with Jesse. Alone."

Quinn was shaking her head before Rachel even finished speaking.

"No. There's no way I'm leaving you here with-"

"I promise, it's fine. Just wait for me outside? It won't take long."

"Rachel-"

*Don't ask me to do this. Don't push me away for him. He doesn't deserve you! He hurt you! Let me protect you… for once.*

With all her heart, Quinn pleaded with Rachel silently. Though the other girl could see it written desperately across Quinn's face, she was resolute. She had made her decision and Quinn had to leave.

Devastated and angrier than she could hold in, her expression grew hardened. Rachel looked like she wanted to say something to comfort her, but there was no comfort available then. Quinn threw another fearsome glare Jesse's way before storming off the stage, ready to tear something apart with her bare hands.

Rachel winced when she heard the thunderous crash of the doors to the auditorium slammed closed behind her girlfriend. She swore to herself that she would make it up to Quinn later, but right now, Jesse was the most pressing issue at hand.

Things were never completely resolved between the two of them. She knew that they needed closure - she *wanted* that closure - and as much as it hurt Quinn, it was necessary that she had time alone with Jesse to achieve that.

She just hoped Quinn wasn't too upset. Unfortunately, the fire in her eyes and the booming crash that followed had Rachel leaning otherwise.

She was really going to have some making up to do…

"Ah so that's it then," Jesse said under his breath, bringing Rachel out of her musings.

He was staring at the solidly closed doors at the top of the aisle that Quinn just exited.

"What's 'it'?

Jesse turned back to her with a rueful smile. "I would have thought you'd wait until your first off-Broadway casting to experiment like everyone else does, but it's good you're getting a head start on this too."

Furious indignation bubbled over in her and Rachel exclaimed, "She's not an-!" She clapped her hand over her mouth, realizing what she'd just admitted to, what Jesse had just tricked her into.

He leaned against the piano causally, too casually to actually be casual, but that was Jesse.

"I told you once, you deserved an epic romance," he sighed, sounding more serious than she ever
remembered him being.

It was strange. He was dramatic, intense, and passionate about everything he did, but never had he sounded so sincere before. Rachel didn't know what to say. Then he broke the moment by slipping right back into the Jesse St. James she knew so well.

"Of course, I had myself in mind at the time," he shrugged with a wave of his hand and she rolled her eyes. "But even so...I still meant it."

"Why are you here?" Rachel asked, exasperated. "Really? I mean, after all you were only pursuing me at my birth mother's behest, led me on to believe you loved me, and then ended with an extraordinarily dramatic and humiliating break up which climaxed with you cracking an egg over my head."

"Okay, yes, I admit it's all true. We went over it and it doesn't exactly sound so great when you put it together like that..."

Rachel scoffed.

"But can you honestly tell me you don't believe that I had real feelings for you? That I still have them?"

She considered it. "No. I guess I can't." She flipped her hair over her shoulder. "You're not that good of an actor."

"A criticism I accept and have vowed to improve upon. I've gotten feedback from people saying that no matter what character I play, I come across as a creepy stalker and incredibly homosexual."

"Are you gay?" she cried, horrified, and put her head in her hands. "That would just be another thing to add to the trauma that was our relationship."

"No. I happen to continue to enjoy the pleasure of women, thank you. But you're one to talk, Miss Rachel Berry."

"Not that it's any of your business," she sniffed, straightening her back, "but I have not chosen sides."

"Bi?"

She shrugged. Indeed she had explained to Quinn a while ago that she considered herself bi, but the more time she had to ruminate on it, the more she began to question any label. Was it true that she was sexually attracted to both men and women? Yes. However, being with Quinn made her realize that gender wasn't really relevant at all, at least not for her personally. Love defied labels, and now Rachel was reluctant to label herself beyond a human being, one who was very much in love.

"So you're not floating in the sea of Sapphic lovers?"

"There is no either or, okay?"

He nodded understandingly and slid onto the piano bench next to her. "Well, now we both feel better."

"It's not exactly at the top of my priority list to make you feel better, Jesse," she replied dryly.

"Fair enough, I only wanted to-"
"I thought you were in LA, in college," she said brusquely. "What happened?"

"Ugh, *that.*" He made a face. "It was such a waste of my time. They say I flunked out, but it's a total lie and completely unfair. I mean, how was I supposed to know that I was actually supposed to show up to those other classes? I was majoring in show choir! I just assumed it would be like at Carmel and the school would get some Asian kid to take math, English, and scientific for me."

"Oh," she replied awkwardly. "That's…awful."

"Hey, Rach!"

Sam came running down the aisle, out of breath and cheeks flushed for some reason. He waved awkwardly at Jesse and turned back to her, trying to look the picture of nonchalance. He wasn't fooling anyone.

"Aren't you coming to Glee?"

She didn't even bother to look at him, just pointed her index finger at the door. "Go away, Sam!"

"But you're going to be-"

"I know Quinn sent you in here," she cut him off impatiently, "so just go back out and tell her she needs to wait like I asked her to do. I'm not finished here yet."

Sam shuffled his feet a little, not contradicting her, before reluctantly leaving. Rachel sighed and turned back to Jesse who was watching Sam's departure with interest.

"Now who was that?"

"That?" Rachel raised an eyebrow ruefully. "That would be Quinn's boyfriend."

"Ah. Let me guess, while he plays 'white picket fences' with Quinn, he's got Kurt on the other side with you?"

"No!" Rachel protested, indignant, but laughed anyway. "Kurt's actually dating someone else and Sam's not gay."

"So you say."

"Ironic coming from the boy who knows all the lines to 'Funny Girl' by heart."

"That's just the test of a true show choir talent!"

"It's also a product of stereotypical judgment."

"Touché, Miss Berry."

Rachel rested her elbows carefully against the piano. "It's just...complicated. Okay?"

"It wouldn't be your epic love without it."

That threw her.

"W-what makes you think that...Quinn..." she stammered, blood rushing to her cheeks, which surely gave her away.
"Come on, Rachel." He rolled his eyes. "I may have lied to you, manipulated you, humiliated you, not to mention broke your heart, but that doesn't mean I don't know you. Quinn? That girl? She's always been there. I should have seen it before. Maybe I did and just didn't want to accept it. It was easier to deal with that Paul Bunyan freak you had slobbering over you at the time than to think... Well, denial is a man's best friend."

In that moment, she realized how right he was. Memories flooded back, all the time she spent with Jesse, countless hours of just talking about music and dreams and Broadway and stardom... He may have been pretending in that time, but she never did. Rachel felt that old connection between them surge to life again as she remembered what it was like to share things with someone so like her once again. That same familiarity she encountered the day she met him, the first time they sang together... She had never felt such an instantaneous kinship before.

"Do you think I'm a fool for doing this?" she whispered.

"Yes." He shook his head with a kind smile. "I think you're in love, which very well means the same thing as being a fool."

"Thanks," she groaned. "You've been such a help today, really, good job on that 'making it up to me' thing. Can you just leave now?"

He pretended he didn't hear that and leaned towards her. "I saw the prom campaign posters in the hall. Safe to assume she's going with him?"

"Yes."

"Well, if it isn't too much for me to presume, I'd like to take you to Prom, Rachel. Let me try to give you a great night."

"I know it may not look it, but I'm with-"

"I understand. I propose this entirely under the guise of friendship. I told you I needed to make amends. How about I start with one extraordinary night? Everyone deserves their Prom night to be special."

She looked at him warily. "As friends?"

"I swear it."

He placed his hand over his heart and she believed him.

"Then I accept your proposal, Jesse St. James." Rachel gathered her sheet music and stood up. "Don't forget the corsage."

"Hey, Rachel?" He called after her from the stage as she made her way up the aisle. She looked back at him over her shoulder.

"For what it's worth, I'm happy for you. Even if I wanted it to be me."

"We're too much alike," she replied quietly. "As much as I love our shared passion for all things show, our drive, our determination...it was never right. I think you know that."

"Apparently. Seems blondes are more your type."

"Blonde," she corrected him firmly. "As in one. Just one. You may be my counterpart, St. James, but
"Yeah?"

"Nevermind." Rachel waved him off with a sigh and looked at him sadly. "Jesse...I-I really cared about you."

"And I loved you. I just didn't know it at the time."

"As much as I hate to admit it, you're one of the few people in the world who really get me. You know me, the good and the bad."

"I do." He nodded.

"So," she said nervously, "as a person who knows me, do you think it'll be...what I want it to be? Is it?"

He gazed at her for a long moment before sighing and settled back on his heels.

"You know the answer to that better than I do. And I know I don't have a chance in hell of winning you back, which I freely admit was a driving force behind my intentionally abrupt and dramatic return to McKinley."

Rachel tilted her head thoughtfully. For some reason, it felt nice to have him here again. She liked seeing him on the stage like that. She liked being around him. She liked having another friend who understood her, what most would call, tendencies towards insanity.

"Are you going to be around for awhile?"

He chuckled. "Only if you insist."

Smiling, Rachel hugged the sheet music closer to her chest and it wasn't until she reached the doors that a knot in her stomach formed.

How was she going to break this to Quinn?

Chapter End Notes

"I'll Be There" by The Jackson 5 - (Would you believe I've been waiting to use this song since APRIL, before we ever even heard of an MJ ep? Crazy...)

"Rolling in the Deep" by Adele
Quinn did not like the look Rachel gave her when she finally…finally walked out of the auditorium. At least it looked like Jesse hadn't followed.

"Are you okay?" she asked briskly.

"Everything's fine, Quinn." Rachel gave her a reassuring smile that didn't work in the least. "He apologized and we've…worked things out. No more loose ends there."

"Is he gone?" she asked bluntly.

The brunette faltered slightly as she was held captive by fractured hazel eyes.

"Um, no, not exactly. He left college so he's…he's thinking of maybe staying in town for a little longer."

The very second after Rachel finished relaying her conversation with Jesse, she wished she could just take it all back, because the look on Quinn's face made her feel like she'd just torn apart their world.

"SHE'S TAKING HIM TO PROM! JESSE ST. JAMES, THE EX-FREAKING-BOYFRIEND THAT SMASHED AN EGG OVER HER HEAD! SHE'S GOING ON A DATE WITH HIM WHILE I'M HER GIRLFRIEND!"

"You're going with your ex-boyfriend too," Sam pointed out in bewilderment.

"THAT'S COMPLETELY DIFFERENT!" She whirled around on him angrily.

"How?"

"I BROKE UP WITH YOU!"

"And you think because Jesse was the one who dumped Rachel, she's going to go running back into his arms? Quinn, you need to get a grip here. Besides, why are you here in my room yelling at me about Rachel when you should be yelling at Rachel about Rachel?"

"I can't yell at her!" she cried wildly, tugging her fingers through her hair. "I can't say anything about it! My hands are tied, Sam. I'm screwed. How can I argue with her about who she goes to Prom with when I'm…"

"Going with your ex?"

"But it's different! She knows that! Why would she… She knows how much it would hurt me to see her there with Jesse."

"It seems like she just wants a friend for that night," he reasoned. "She deserves that. You're right, Quinn. You can't argue with her at all. So just let it go."

"LET IT GO? LIKE HELL! Forget it. I'm so sick of this whole charade! I'm not going. I refuse. I
won't go to that stupid dance and watch her laugh and flirt and dance with Jesse all night. It's not worth it."

"We're going to be Prom King and Queen!" he protested. "You can't bail on me!"

"You can still win," she muttered, waving him off. "I don't have to be there."

"That's not the point and you know it. You can't not go, Quinn. After all that I've done for you, that I'm still doing for you, you are not going to make me go stag to Prom!"

"I'm sorry. I know it's awful of me, but I can't."

"You can and you will!" he insisted. "You're going to suck it up, put on your dress, and go to this dance. You really should do it for me with all the crap I put up with, but I know you won't, so you're going to do it for Rachel."

"What are you talking about?"

"If you don't show, it'll ruin her whole night. You don't think she's not going to spend the entire time worrying about you and feeling guilty that you're not there? It's a big night, Quinn. The point is to enjoy it. High school only happens once in a lifetime, we won't ever get to have these chances again once they're gone. I know you're not selfish enough to ruin this for Rachel, so you're going to go through with this, no matter how much it kills you."

She covered her face with her hands, desperately trying to hold the tears at bay. "But how am I going to be able to…?"

He sighed. "You're making it into a bigger deal than it is. It's not like she's going to have all this super intimate alone time with him! Think about it. We're all meeting up at Breadstix pre-Prom. Then the four of us are going with Tina, Mike, Santana, and whoever she's taking, in a limo to the school. We're just going to be with our friends and dance and have fun. It won't even be like a date."

"And what about before that?"

"Before?" he echoed in confusion.

"You know…" Quinn swallowed thickly, "the part where he goes to her house, makes small talk with her Dads." Her voice grew unsteady. "She'll…she'll walk down the stairs in her dress and she'll look…" Tears formed in her eyes. "He'll give her a corsage and tell her how beautiful she is. They'll stand together and take pictures while her fathers coo over their baby girl all grown up. Rachel will walk out of there on his arm."

Quinn wiped away the tears on her cheeks.

"I want it to be me," she said brokenly. "That should be our moment to share, but instead he gets to have that, and I can't do anything about it."

"It's just one night, Quinn," he said softly, "just one moment when you'll get to have all of the others."

The way his kind blue eyes bore into hers, Quinn felt her heart twist just that painful bit tighter.

What was she doing to this boy? Had her selfishness reached such terrible heights now that she cared nothing for the fact that they both very well knew he harbored romantic feelings for her still? Yet, she took his friendship for granted and wielded it for her own sake with little thought to how it may
still affect him? She was better than this. She was a better person than this. She wasn't the Quinn Fabray that had barged into Rachel's room all those months ago, blindly trying to fix her own world, without pausing to think of the others she would inflict pain upon.

The realization stopped her dead.

"Sam..." she whimpered after a gasp and raised her hand to her mouth, "I'm so... I wasn't thinking, please, I'm so sorry. Here I am complaining endlessly about not getting to go with Rachel when I have this incredible guy who's giving up his own Prom night just to be a good friend. I'm sure you would much rather be able to take..." She struggled through the vague list of female names in her head that she'd heard him mention in the past few months. "Emma? Emily?"

She sagged down next to him on the bed, her hands in her lap in a gesture of helplessness.

He shook his head resolutely. "I'd rather take you. Listen, Quinn, it's not ideal, but the person at the bottom of the stairs doesn't have to be the love of your life. Just as long as it's someone you care about, then that's the only thing that matters. That's what will make the night memorable. Who can you think of that ended up happily spending the rest of their lives with their prom date? It's crazy rare. Most people just try to burn their prom pictures anyway."

She shrugged. "We won't have to worry about that."

"We're way too pretty to have bad Prom pictures," he agreed.

She laughed softly and he grinned back at her, eyes twinkling.

She really did love this boy and she knew she would love him as a man when the day came. There was no breaking this apart. Whatever it was they had, she couldn't break it, nor did she ever want to.

"No matter how hard this is, Sam," she took his hand in hers and squeezed meaningfully, "I need you to know how proud I'll be to walk in there with you. I'm proud to even be able to call you my friend. You're one of the most amazing people I've ever known. I don't deserve to have someone like you." She chuckled ruefully. "Though I'm sure you regret the day you ever met me."

"Sometimes," he nodded in all sincerity, "but mostly? I know that meeting you was one of the best things that will ever happen to me, Quinn. I'll know that for the rest of my life."

She gazed at him tearfully and her voice stuck in her throat. "How can you say that?"

After all I've done to you? All the hurt? All the lies? How can you know me like this and still love me?

How can Rachel?

He gave her a crooked smile and lifted his eyebrows innocently. "Uh... with words? I think that's what they're called anyway."

She rolled her eyes in exasperation and shoved him lightly. "Shut up."

"Hey..." he nudged her back, "Rachel loves you, not this Jesse kid."

Her present situation came roaring back with a vengeance. She felt like she was being stabbed in the stomach every time it came up or she thought about it, and so she felt it endlessly.

"You don't know what it was like with them," she replied despondently. "You weren't here. He
always had this...hold over her! They're so much alike. You thought Rachel was a diva? He's even more of one!

"So they have stuff in common. Big deal." He shrugged. "She told him first thing about the two of you. You were the one on her mind, not him. Rachel doesn't have any interest in getting back together with this guy."

"You don't know that!" she insisted.

"Are you really that scared she'll go back to him? I thought you had more faith in Rachel than that."

"It's not about me trusting her," she said sadly. "Jesse...he can give her what I can't. He can take her to Prom. He can keep up with her on stage. He...he can see that world inside her head better than I can, that completely insane yet extraordinary warped world of dreams, passion, and ambition. If there was anyone in our lives that I thought could make Rachel leave me, i-it's him."

"Well," Sam sighed, leaning back on his hands, "there is one thing he can't give her."

"And what's that?" she asked wearily.

Sam looked her straight in the eye.

"You."

"Hello, Santana."

The Latina stared at Rachel for a long, hard moment, before looking around at the crowded hallway filling McKinley High early that morning.

"Berry..." she said carefully, "what the hell are you doing?"

Rachel pretended as though absolutely nothing was out of the ordinary, that Santana didn't look like she was going to have her dumped in a vat of hot oil, and continued perkily.

"I realize that I'm risking my physical safety by speaking with you, but I hoped to do this quickly in a very, very public place to lower the risk of you pummeling my face."

Santana only stared at her.

"Firstly, I need to apologize for our exchange the other day. Both of us said things that I'm sure we regret and though you'll never admit it, I'm just going to believe you do, so please accept my apology for my transgression."

The Latina looked ready to bolt...or murder...Rachel didn't know which and thought it best not to dwell.

"Secondly, you need to sing to Brittany again."

Oh, that was definitely murder.

"What...did you just say to me?" she hissed, stepping in so close that Rachel was forced to stumble back a little bit.

"I-I said you need to sing to her again. Now that she and Artie have broken up, this is the most opportune time for you to-"
"Quinn is dead! She is so freaking dead!"

"Santana, please just hear me out! I've been in a similar position as Brittany and you could use my perspective on this. When a person you love has been mistreating you for such a long period of time-

"I'VE NEVER!" Santana started to yell, but cut herself off when the crowd started noticing them. "You don't know a thing about me and Brittany," she snarled, "so my advice would be to shut your Streisand-whining mouth right now before I permanently close it for you!"

Rachel knew what a risk she was taking by daring to call Santana out on such a thing. The Latina was so fiercely protective of Brittany. To imply otherwise was like signing your own death warrant, but Rachel needed to make her see that while she was good to Brittany in so many ways, there were also many ways that she was not.

"Every time you denied your feelings for her, every time you went out with another boy after likely spending the night with her, you don't think that was hurting her, Santana? Now that you've admitted your real feelings, you can't just expect her to come running into your arms with all forgiven. It's confusing and it's not fair of you to be angry with her for rightly feeling that way."

"This is NONE of your business!" She was starting to grow desperate. "And if you even think about telling anyone-"

"You're not listening to me!" Rachel said stubbornly. "If what you feel for Brittany is as strong as you say then you need to prove that, over and over, however many times it takes. You were wrong, Santana, and you've been wrong for a long time. Now is not the time to think about yourself, but to think about Brittany. Prove it to her. Prove that you mean it. Prove that this is what you want." She lowered her voice. "Prove that she's what you want."

Santana swallowed thickly.

"Brittany obviously cares deeply for you, Santana, but speaking as a person who has been in a place somewhat similar to her, it's hard to understand such a change when it's so abrupt. It's hard to believe it's real. You need to make her know it's real. So...sing to her again. Something simple, beautiful, and very direct – leave no room for interpretation. If you want this, if you really want it, then you have to fight."

Santana narrowed her eyes at her. "Why are you doing this?"

"Because I believe you deserve to be happy. And I want Brittany to be happy too."

She couldn't think of anything to say. Not a single word found its way to her tongue.

"Um, well, that's everything." Rachel nodded, pleased that she was able to voice everything that she needed to. "I'll go back to leaving you alone now. Thank you for not...causing me bodily injury."

Santana watched the smaller girl leave with a lump in her throat.

Quinn was sitting on the steps in the courtyard alone for once. She was hardly in the mood to socialize with anyone today and so the book in her hand was a well-known signal by now for her friends to avoid her. It's not like the only reason Quinn ever read was so that people would leave her alone; she actually really enjoyed it. It was something that had helped to keep her on top of the rest of school in academics, in addition to being on top of everything else.
Rachel, however, never paid attention to Quinn's book signal. She pretended not to understand what it meant, though she very well did. She just liked to ignore it. Today was no different.

"Hey there," she said, tucking her dress beneath her carefully as she sat beside Quinn on the concrete steps. "You've been kind of MIA today."

Quinn couldn't bring herself to look at her.

"I haven't missed a single class. I'm where I always am," she replied curtly.

"I didn't mean physically absent."

She snapped her book shut. "I'm going to go get something to eat."

"Quinn."

That stopped her.

"I know you're upset about this thing with Jesse, but why won't you talk to me about it? Why are you just shutting me out?"

"We're not going to talk about this!" she barked with more vigor than she intended and tried to rein it back in. "We're just going to get through the next few days," she said tersely. "Prom is on Saturday, and then we can go back to normal, forget about everything."

She tucked her book into her bag and started down the stairs.

"You have no right to punish me for this," Rachel said quietly.

It was all Quinn could do to keep from breaking down. This is exactly what she was trying to avoid. It was all she could do to put one foot in front of the other today, keeping on a brave face, just so that she could get through this without having her insides torn apart. She wasn't trying to hurt Rachel; she was just trying to save herself. But it wasn't working out for either of them.

With her back to her, Quinn replied as calmly as she could, "I'm not punishing you. I'm not trying to stop you or ask you... Look, I won't do anything to-" She took a deep breath. "Just...please...let me get through this."

And she walked off, furiously blinking away the tears.

It seemed like everyone was ignoring the book signal today. Quinn groaned when Santana plopped down in the chair next to her at the otherwise empty cafeteria table that she had escaped to after leaving Rachel on the steps outside.

"I hate your girlfriend."

"I'm stunned," she deadpanned, never looking up from her book, "bowled over, never saw this coming."

"She's loud, obnoxious, egomaniacal, completely self-absorbed, her nose is huge, and those clothes are so hideous they need to be burned in a landfill."

"Could we go back to that part where we weren't speaking? I liked that. That was better."

"She's also freakishly small." The Latina shuddered. "I don't know how you make it work when you
scissor. It must, like, defy the laws of physics or something."

"Santana!" She slammed her hand down on the table loudly.

"Thank her for me, okay?"

Quinn snapped her head around in bewilderment. "Tha-? Wait, what?"

But Santana had already walked away, pushing through the cafeteria doors. Quinn rubbed her forehead to ease the building ache there.

"I must be hallucinating…"

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"So no more college?" Leroy asked as he and Hiram waited with Jesse at the bottom of the stairs while Rachel was getting ready.

"No, sir. And times are rough. I couldn't even get a job as one of those singing waiters at Johnny Rockets, but I've got an idea."

"And, pray tell, what is that?" he asked dryly.

It was always far too difficult to hide his amusement with this kid. For as similar as he was to Rachel in some ways, there were so many other things that set them on opposite ends of the spectrum. Jesse took the high strung intensity and passion that was his daughter to a whole 'nother land of make believe.

"They say that the best time to start any business is during a recession. I don't know why or even what a recession is, but it's my understanding that we're in one."

"He's so smart, honey!" Hiram said in gaping amazement to his husband and turned back to Jesse. "I can't believe you flunked out of college."

"It was really more of my decision than anything else, but thank you, sir."

Leroy just did everything he could to remain stoic, even having to suppress an escaped chuckle with a coughing fit.

"So I was thinking, what are the two things that I'm great at? Show choir and destroying the competition."

Hiram turned to Leroy with wide eyes, as if to say, "Can we kill him and bury him in the backyard now?" But Leroy was still desperately trying to keep his amusement under control.

"So what if I opened up a dance studio where I could act as a consultant for show choirs looking to get that extra edge?"

The two men couldn't decide where to begin to explain how many flaws there were in this so called "inspiration" of Jesse's, but Leroy decided to go with tarest one.

"Do you think there are enough show choirs to keep you in business?"

"Of course there are!" Hiram said loudly and smacked Jesse on the back. "It's a brilliant idea! You could be like…the Show Choir Whisperer!"

Leroy couldn't hold it back anymore and broke into a belly laugh until there were tears in his eyes.
Jesse laughed along too, thinking it was just about the joke, and Hiram simply rolled his eyes and excused himself while he went to get the camera. As he walked away, he was muttering under his breath about the "idiot boys" his daughter continued to bring home.

"Well," Leroy gasped, trying to get himself under control again, "be sure to discuss that with Rachel. You two could come up with some great ideas."

"Dad, I'm ready!" Rachel called out, saving Leroy from any further torture.

Hiram came rushing out from the living room, fumbling with his camera to be ready in time. Leroy stepped out of the way so that he could get the perfect shot of their daughter coming down the stairs in her Prom dress.

He had gotten Rachel to agree to a temporary, one-night only, truce with Hiram by saying that it wasn't just her night; it was for all of them. Leroy asked her not to take this night away from her Daddy, and because it was an impressive display of Jewish guilt, Rachel had to give in. For one night, she would pretend everything was all right between her and her Daddy, pretend that there was no blonde void between them.

Rachel came down the stairs shyly. Jesse beamed up at her. There was a furious clicking of the camera. Then Leroy had to take over because Hiram had teared up too much to be on picture duty anymore.

"You are dazzling, Rachel Berry, and nothing short of a legend in the making."

She blushed and thanked him. Jesse held out the box that held her corsage for her to take, but Rachel told him to wait. Instead, she pulled out a red Care Bear doll out from behind her back and handed it to him. He stared at it for a long moment. Then his eyes snapped back up to Rachel.

"This isn't mine…"

"No," she shook her head, wrinkling her nose, "sorry. I bought you a new one because I burned your old one."

"You burned Bruno?" he yelped, turning white as a sheet, and dropped the box with the corsage.

Rachel didn't seem fazed.

"You broke up with her," Leroy said against his ear matter-of-factly, "therefore all items left behind are fair game."

"You should have made sure you had him with you before doing what you did…" Rachel shrugged.

"It was a lovely little bonfire we had." Hiram pulled out a batch of photos from his pocket to show Jesse.

"That was your Les Mis tshirt." Rachel pointed to a charred, unrecognizable object in a pit of fire.

"Rachel!" he wailed, clutching his chest. "That was from my Nana!"

"Oh and here," she held out another photo, "those are the legwarmers you lent me, next to the poster of-"

"Enough! No more! I get it." He took a deep breath. "I accept my punishment with grace and humility. I have greatly erred and if this is part of what it takes to make amends, then I accept the
pain.

Leroy clapped him solidly on the shoulder, but it was a little harder than necessary and knocked Jesse off balance. "Good for you, young man."

Hiram put away the rest of the pictures…except for one. This one he'd been saving.

"Oh, I think there's just one more you should see."

The boy whimpered and bit down on his fist, turning away from the gruesome sight. Hiram looked up at Rachel and winked conspiratorially as she giggled.

It was a picture of Jesse's old Care Bear half burned with one of his stuffed eyes hanging out.

"The cummerbund is perfect, dear!" Judy waved the glass of Chardonnay around a little too loosely for Sam's liking. He backed up a step just to make sure nothing spilled on him. Quinn would murder him if he went to Prom with a wine stain on his tux. Plus, he would never get that deposit back.

"Quinnie made sure you two matched, didn't she? Oh, wait till you see her! My sweet little girl all grown up!"

"Anything to make this night perfect for her, Mrs. Fabray." He nodded.

"Oh!" she gasped, touched. "That is just darling! I can see why Quinnie likes you so much. Sweet and good-looking!"

"Thanks," he muttered awkwardly.

They heard Quinn’s footsteps on the stairs and both turned to see a vision in blue coming towards them. Sam couldn't help but stare in wonderment. She took his breath away. She always did.

Then it hit him like a punch to the gut. This was the moment Quinn had been talking about. The moment she grieved for with Rachel. He understood everything she meant now, why it hurt her so much. For as much as he loved this girl, woman, the moment felt wrong. He felt like he was taking something that wasn't his to take.

Quinn stopped on the last step and smiled at him.

His heart constricted in his chest. The lovely curve of her lips, the startling sweetness in those hazel eyes he had first fallen into and never left. How much could a person take of this before it destroyed them? How much could they bear? To love someone like this and never have it…he felt like it would kill him one day.

It might.

He vaguely heard Judy saying something somewhere far-off about getting her camera.

Quinn was all that existed right now.

"You look handsome," she said.

All he could hear was his heart pounding against his chest.

"You're the most beautiful girl I've ever seen in my life."

The light in her eyes dimmed ever so slightly and it was as if it physically pained him to see it. There
it was - the ever constant reminder that he was not who she wanted. He would never be what she wanted.

As if to fix this somehow, to ease the pain, Quinn leaned over and brushed his cheek with a reassuring kiss. She may have been trying to help. It only hurt him more.

Struggling to pull himself together, Sam remembered the box he was holding and hoped that would be enough to snap him out of this daze. He could do it sometimes; he was learning how to control these feelings when they were together. Sometimes he really could just think of Quinn as a friend.

Yeah, that was a lie.

He just really wanted to believe it.

"Um…" He swallowed thickly and fumbled with opening the box. "T-this is for you."

Sam held out the wrist corsage for her and that light that had dimmed momentarily was back again with a vengeance. He couldn't say that didn't hurt too.

"The ribbon matches my eyes," she murmured.

He knew he didn't have to tell her who had picked it out. The way Quinn was glowing as she slipped it onto her wrist said everything.

"She wanted to be here for you somehow, even if it wasn't in person." He sighed. "A-and I'm also to tell you that even though it's not a yellow rose, this flower means something too. If you want to know what it means, you're supposed to ask her."

Quinn giggled lightly, tears shining. "Of course I am," she whispered.

"Okay, you two!" Judy's excited voice jarred them out of the spell. "Picture time!" She grabbed Quinn's arm happily and beamed up at her daughter. "Oh, you look like Cinderella!"

She ushered them together for pictures in the usual Prom poses, chattering away about how perfect and lovely they looked together. The perfect couple.

Sam did exactly as he was told and held Quinn's waist and smiled into the lens, holding his eyes open till the flashes blinded him.

Once Jesse had recovered enough and they took more pictures together, Hiram and Leroy sent them on their way. When they got into the car, Jesse finally had the presence of mind to give her the corsage again. He slipped it onto her wrist shakily.

"That was absolutely brutal."

"You made it through."

"Should I expect any more of those surprises tonight?"

"Nope!" she said brightly. "Now we're just going to dance and have a good time."

"Thank God!" He exhaled loudly.

"It's a beautiful corsage," Rachel said, looking down at the soft pink petals with a knowing smile.
"I should tell you-"

"It's from Quinn." She nodded, sniffling lightly, and then looked up at him with tear-filled eyes.

"I would have picked out something perfectly exquisite on my own, but the girl insisted. If I had denied her, I shudder to think what would have happened."

"It's an orchid," Rachel sighed happily. "She knows it's my favorite."

He watched her with a little sadness as she traced the corsage reverently with the lightest touch of her finger. She couldn't take her eyes off of it.

"It also matches your dress," he pointed out quietly.

Rachel tore her gaze away from the flower on her wrist and looked out the window with a sigh. "Promise me we'll have fun tonight?"

"We all will."

The night turned out, surprisingly, to be relatively drama-free. A big group met at Breadstix to kill some time before the limo arrived. Mike and Tina looked amazing; Santana arrived looking pissed off with some guy on the football team whose name no one really remembered, not even Santana.

Quinn had watched Brittany's latest *Fondue for Two* and when Santana was a no-show, she knew there was more to the story. Brittany didn't look that devastated for nothing. When she approached Santana, afterwards, she found the girl in tears. She'd taken Rachel's advice and everything happened perfectly. Brittany wanted to ask her out publically to Prom. She wanted to be with her. As much as Santana was terrified by the notion, she couldn't bear to tell Brittany no. She wanted to try, she had to try. In the end, her fear got the better of her. She was so ashamed of herself for it.

Quinn couldn't do much more than hug her and promise that it would get easier; she just had to give it some time. The one thing she did say, that Santana obviously ignored, was to talk to Brittany about it and explain what she was going through, why she couldn't do it yet.

No, in true Santana Lopez fashion, she denied everything and grabbed on to the nearest boy for protection.

Quinn looked on disappointedly as Santana practically dragged her 'date' around behind her like a dog on a leash. The guy didn't care though. He was on a date with Santana Lopez. The writing on the boy's bathroom wall was like having something written in stone. He knew no matter what happened, he was definitely getting laid tonight so he put up with whatever she did, which was mostly ignore him and tell him to shut up if he tried to talk.

When Rachel and Jesse arrived, Quinn just made sure she did everything possible to avoid looking at them. They hadn't spoken since Rachel approached her on the steps in the courtyard. Quinn couldn't bear it. She chatted with Sam, complimented Tina on her dress, made Mike promise to save a dance for her, and even struck up a dull as bricks conversation with Santana's date, until it was time for them to go. In the limousine, Quinn made sure she and Rachel were on opposite ends of the stretch.

For all that she did to avoid her, it didn't help. Quinn didn't have to see Rachel to feel her there, to hear her voice, her laughter, even catching the scent of her perfume every now and again. Every single bit of it was as painful as the next.

It never occurred to her that this was what it was like for Rachel to see her with Sam. Because Quinn
knew so unequivocally that her feelings for Sam were platonic and not even close to being a threat to Rachel. She had never even harbored a true attraction to him. Now, all she could think about was that Rachel had once been genuinely attracted to the boy she was sitting with now, had once considered giving herself to him, had once proclaimed she was in love with him.

How was Quinn supposed to survive this?

But she did.

If Rachel had enough faith in her to endure everything that she did with being forced to stay a secret, with all the lies, with Sam, then Quinn had no choice but to return that faith in kind. Rachel deserved her trust. She deserved that and so much more.

So they all went in together. Everyone from the Glee club had showed up except for Finn. He ended up not being able to get a date and didn't want to face it alone. They all danced, the Glee club took their turns performing, Artie tried to spike the punch bowl…with lemonade. Brittany danced with anyone and everyone she could find. There was one moment where Tina had to pry her off of Mike, but otherwise there really wasn't a problem with it. Santana sat at a table in the back with her date looking miserable. The guy was starting to get a little pissed off at this point. He was bored as hell and wanted to dance, but she kept turning him down until he finally just up and left her to dance with another girl. Santana didn't even notice.

Quinn tried to let herself have fun, twirling around the dance floor with Sam, and even getting more than one dance in with Mike. When Sam was up on stage singing his song with some of the other guys, Blaine offered to take her out on the floor. The only bad part was whenever she heard Rachel through the music, laughing, or saw her happily dancing around in Jesse's arms.

Each and every time she saw them, she had to close her eyes and will the tears away until she was composed enough again to put on a convincing front for whoever she was with at the moment.

By the time they were set Prom King and Queen, she was so numb, she couldn't bring herself to care. Around that same time, Santana and Brittany had disappeared from the gym. No one knew where they were. When her name was called after Sam, the spotlight found her and blinded her. She felt a tiara placed on her head and there were roses in her arms. Quinn just tried to remember to do what she was supposed to do and smiled. Sam was cheering loudly and kissed her on the cheek, spinning her around. She felt a little better at that. At least he was happy.

When Sam led her out onto the floor, in the middle of the circle formed for them to have their dance, Quinn looked around the sea of faces desperately for Rachel. She didn't know why she needed to see her just then after doing everything possible to avoid it all night, but she did. Yet, Rachel was nowhere to be found.

Sam took her waist and held her hand. She looked up at him and it must have been written all over her face because the jubilation he had moments ago from winning, vanished. The ever-present guilt gnawed at her stomach. She swore that by the time she graduated, guilt will have emptied her out from the inside.

Music started to play and she swayed with Sam as he led her through. She leaned against his chest and squeezed her eyes shut, trying to will the time to go by faster so that she could escape. All eyes were on them now. She used to love that. She used to love being admired and feared and envied. It was a measure of her worth, or at least, what she had been taught was her worth.

What was she worth now?
"You're in my arms,
And all the world is calm.
The music playing on,
For only two."

Quinn whipped around in shock to see Rachel standing on the stage behind the microphone. She was singing for them...just as she had promised.

"So close together,
And when I'm with you,
So close to feeling alive."

How could Quinn have forgotten? Rachel smiled at her, so sweetly, so reassuringly, so lovingly, the tears were in her eyes before she could do anything to stop them.

"A life goes by
Romantic dreams will stop
So I bid mine goodbye and never knew
So close was waiting, waiting here with you
And now forever, I know
All that I wanted was to hold you
So close"

What had she been doing this whole night? What was wrong with her? Rachel was right there. Right there. Sam spun them around so he was blocking her view of Rachel and she glared up at him out of instinct before realizing what it must have looked like to have her staring at Rachel for so long. So instead she swallowed and shrunk back a little apologetically. He only shook his head and winked, before unsuspectingly spinning her out and back again dramatically.

For the first time that night, when Quinn laughed, it was real.

"So close to reaching that famous happy ending
Almost believing that this was not pretend
And now you're beside me and look how far we've come
So far...we are...so close"

As they turned, she used every chance she could to look over Sam's shoulder at Rachel who was singing to her and to her only. Rachel's gaze never left her. When she pressed her face against Sam's chest again, it wasn't to hurry the moment, it was so that she could listen to Rachel's magnificent voice and let it wash over her as she let the song, meant for only her, sink into her soul.

"How could I face the faceless days
If I should lose you now?
We're so close
To reaching that famous happy ending
Almost believing that this was not pretend
Let's go on dreaming for we know we are
So close...
So close...
And still so far."

After their dance was over, Quinn left the gym as quickly as she could. Everything she was feeling was just too much. So overwhelmed, she needed to be away from that stifling crowd, the
increasingly heated gym, and even Sam. All she had done tonight was wallow in grief for her lost night with Rachel and the circumstances that forced them to be that way. She was ruining everything, just the way she had promised herself she wouldn't.

Of course, she should have known that she couldn't escape Rachel. The brunette had managed to follow her into the locker room, where Quinn had been so sure no one would look for her. Silly.

"Found you…" Rachel said softly and she looked up with a sad smile.

You're the only one who has ever been able to find me.

"Yes, you did."

Rachel sat next to her on the bench as Quinn watched her every movement. It was the first time she really let herself look up close at her girlfriend all night. What she saw took her breath away.

Rachel's hair was swept up, exposing that sensitive, glorious neck Quinn loved to play with so much. Even though they had bought their dresses together, Quinn had forgotten how incredible she looked in it. It was strapless, showing off all that delicious tan skin, the delicate curve of her collar bone, and her breasts were exquisitely displayed. Even then Quinn couldn't help a fleeting thought of just tugging it down and wrapping Rachel around her. There was gold in her dark hair, no doubt her homage to a gold star, and the corsage…the corsage was perfect. Just like she knew it would be.

"You are so beautiful," she murmured.

Rachel blushed, feeling giddy to the very tips of her toes.

The way Quinn made her heart race…

She'd been so worried tonight with how hard Quinn was trying to avoid her, thinking that maybe she would never forgive her for coming with Jesse, that she had gone too far by doing this. But Quinn's genuinely startled face when she heard Rachel singing made her realize that the blonde had just been in so much pain; she was doing everything and anything to make herself get through the night.

Rachel felt awful for being the source of it, but she was going to make her understand, no matter what it took to get it through to her, that Quinn was all she wanted. Rachel remembered what it was like in the beginning with Sam, before she started to understand more of what their relationship was about, and could sympathize with Quinn wholeheartedly. While she never wanted to cause her pain, a part of her was the smallest bit grateful that at least Quinn could understand better now what she had asked Rachel to endure. Maybe that was wrong of her, but she couldn't help it. After this night, maybe they'd at least be on more equal footing.

"Nothing compared to you."

Quinn smiled absently, but it lacked its usual glow. It was as if she was trying to ignore what Rachel just said.

"Are you having fun tonight?"

"Yes." She nodded honestly. "Jesse is an absolute gentlemen and a superb dancer. We're all having such a good time out there! Why don't you join us? It's your night. You won!"

"It doesn't feel like my night."

"Oh, Quinn…"
"I'm really glad you're having a good time."

Hazel eyes bore into Rachel's as Quinn tried to make her understand just how much she meant it.

The brunette reached out to cup her cheek, brushing her thumb across the smooth skin. It amazed her how much a simple touch could do when she was with Quinn. It was as if she was just given the smallest of tastes and now she needed so, so much more.

"I would have a better time if you were out there enjoying it with me."

"How can I?"

Rachel dropped her hand disappointedly. "Look, we both agreed to this situation, Quinn...against our better judgment. But I don't want us to worry tonight. I want us to be happy and have fun with our friends. It may not be perfect, but we have each other. And for me, that's more than enough."

"Are you mad at me?"

"For what?"

That was a loaded question, Quinn thought. The list of possibilities stretched a long ways. It still needed to be said though.

"For not bringing you as my date tonight," she answered. "No, baby," Rachel shook her head, "I'm not mad at you."

"I am."

"You're mad at me?" she gaped indignantly.

Quinn couldn't help but laugh at how outraged Rachel looked and covered her girlfriend's mouth with her hand to smother the protest that was spilling out.

"I meant me." She gazed at her purposefully. "I'm mad at me."

Rachel's eyes lost a bit of their fury and Quinn knew it was safe to drop her hand. She sighed and took off the tiara they had placed on her head earlier.

"All that for this cheap, plastic, toy."

"Careful! I've heard about diseases you could contract from shoddily made material from third world countries. They put asbestos in it to poison us because they hate America so much."

"They do not!"

"I read it somewhere."

"It's called one of your nightmares, Rachel," Quinn said pointedly. "Reality versus your deranged subconscious."

"Now that you've said that, you're probably right..." she agreed with a wince. "A combination of a bad dream and falling asleep to Stephen Colbert..."

"You do remember he's a comedian, right? He makes jokes."
"He's also a valuable source of information! His show is a colorful and entertaining commentary on
the world's political state. It's important to stay informed with information from all perspectives! The
media is not the impartial bipartisan source we'd like to believe it to be."

The blonde didn't seem to be listening anymore; her mind had drifted somewhere else.

"My sister was Prom Queen for her last two years of high school," Quinn murmured as she ran her
fingers over the tiara. "So was my mother, my aunt, my grandmother. Her mother was too. It's a
Fabray tradition. I guess it's something I share with them now."

"So that's why you wanted it," she said simply with a nod.

"All my life I've been told I was beautiful, Rachel. Everything I was taught revolved around that. Be
Have perfect children that will be just as beautiful as I am; then that's it. That's my life's worth. It was
what I was born to do. So what happens when this fades? When I'm not *young* and *pretty* like
everyone thinks I am now? My grandmother, my aunt, my mom, my sister, they all peaked in high
school. This was their shining moment of glory and afterwards?" She shrugged. "They didn't do
anything worth talking about - at least, not according to my family's standards. This is where it ends.
Right here. So what's left for me? I did it." She held up the crown. "I'm done."

"*I know* you don't believe that, not in your heart," she replied fiercely. "Quinn…it's true. You are the
most beautiful girl I've ever known, but how can I make you see that you are so much more than
that? What more can I do to show you? I can't. It's your turn to believe in yourself now."

"I've already done everything else wrong with my life, Rachel. Everything they disapprove of. For
the first time in a long time, I'm going to go home to a mother who's *proud*." She scoffed. "Not even
that. Just grateful, probably. Grateful that I at least didn't mess this one up, that I carried on the family
tradition."

Rachel opened her mouth to reply, but never got the chance because the other girl suddenly threw
the tiara against the lockers. It cracked apart on impact and she gasped, eyeing the broken pieces on
the floor in shock. Quinn didn't seem to care.

"It means nothing to me. I won't let my life be the way they want it. I won't!" She said fervently.
"This was such a waste of time! All of that, what I put you through with this campaign thing, it was
for nothing!"

"It wasn't a waste," Rachel replied soothingly. "*This* is exactly why you did it, Quinn, to have your
answer. No regrets."

"I have too many regrets."

She sighed. "Someday you'll start listening to me."

"That's something else I would regret."

"Don't be mean!"

Quinn laughed softly and she felt Rachel touch her chin on her shoulder lightly.

"This isn't even close to being the end for you, Quinn. You haven't even started your life yet. Neither
of us have really. Now is where we're starting, not ending. You *are* beautiful, Quinn, and you
always will be, but I don't love you because you're aesthetically pleasing to the eye. What I see in
you? Inside of you? *That* is what makes you so beautiful to me. The fact that you're also super hot on
the outside is just a small bonus to the overall package," she teased lightly.

Quinn had to smile at that. It was a real one this time, one that glowed as it should. Rachel squeezed her arm tightly, pleased that she had been able to at least convince her girlfriend in some small part. It wasn't everything, but it was a very good start.

"Well," Quinn said with a sigh, looking down at the glittering pieces of plastic that littered the locker room floor, "now there's nothing to add to Mom's prized collection and I don't care at all what she's going to say. When did I outgrow this?"

"All that matters is that you're starting to realize that you matter more than any ridiculous aspirations and demands your family puts on you," she replied firmly. "It's time for you to be Quinn, not just another Fabray."

The blonde flinched, but it was so slight, Rachel never noticed.

"Thank you for my corsage," she mumbled, ready to change the subject…more than ready.

Rachel beamed and held up her own wrist. "Thank you for mine. I didn't expect…" She ducked her head shyly. "Well, you were so angry with me, I didn't think you wanted anything to do with-"

"I was never angry with you," Quinn cut her off.

She gave her an exasperated look. "You weren't even speaking to me!"

"Because it hurt, Rachel," Quinn replied as if it were the most obvious answer in the world. "It just…hurt too much."

The brunette watched sadly as Quinn's gaze strayed back over to the broken pieces on the floor.

"And I was scared," she added in a whisper.

"What were you so scared of?" She knew the answer, but a part of her still wanted to hear Quinn say it.

Quinn shook her head to tell her that she wasn't answering that question. As disappointed as Rachel was, she didn't push it.

"Tell me what the flower means?" she tried after a long silence. Rachel didn't seem to know what else to do, so Quinn gently led them away from the heavier things of tonight. "I received instructions to specifically ask you about it."

Rachel's touch on Quinn's wrist was light as she lifted her hand into the air and kissed her palm. When Quinn finally met her gaze, she interlaced their fingers and answered, "It's a Gardenia."

Smiling, Quinn scooted closer to her and pressed her nose to Rachel's cheek. "And what do Gardenias symbolize?"

The brunette turned to face her so their lips were mere inches apart and rested her forehead against Quinn's, both of their eyes wide open and trained on the other.

"Secret love."

Quinn's lips found hers almost at once and they kissed sweetly, lovingly. Taking their time to revel in the familiarity and comfort of their mouths meeting again, the tingle there, the taste, the way it spread to touch every inch of their bodies and ignite fires that were impossible to extinguish. Quinn slipped
her hand behind Rachel's neck at the same time Rachel took hold of Quinn's face and the kiss deepened. It was as if both were trying to hold the other there, right where they wanted, so that neither would try to escape.

They just didn't realize that neither one of them was trying to escape.

Rachel drew back first when the kiss began to grow too passionate to control and hands were finding places that they just didn't have time for right now, and it wasn't the proper place either. Breathing unevenly, she cupped Quinn's cheeks once more, stroking softly, before letting them fall, slowly tracing her silken neck and bare shoulders, down her arms, drawing a shiver from the other girl, before finally stopping at her hands.

Quinn licked her lips with her eyes closed, still tasting Rachel there. "Are we going to Puck's party tonight?" she rasped.

"For a little while? I don't want to spend our whole night there, but we should at least make an appearance."

She smirked knowingly. "Well then, what are we going to do to fill the rest of the night? We can't let this 'no curfew' night go to waste. It'd be a tragedy."

"I'm sure we'll think of something," Rachel said slyly.

"Or perhaps you've already thought of something?" she offered innocently.

The brunette eyed her suspiciously and then her mouth dropped open.

"How did you find out?"

"I heard you on the phone yesterday in the choir room," Quinn explained and laughed, wholly amused by how indignant Rachel looked. "You really need to learn to be sneakier if you're trying to plan a surprise like that."

"That's not fair! You were eavesdropping!"

"I was not! Now, come on." She tilted her head towards the exit. "We have some partying to do and a room waiting for us. We also have to stop by the ladies room because you totally messed up my lip gloss."

Rachel wiped her mouth to clean off some of said gloss that had smeared across her face and shot Quinn a look.

"I messed it up? We both know who started this one."

Quinn feigned ignorance, which Rachel couldn't help but be amused by.

"Fine," she caved and grumbled, thoroughly annoyed that her carefully planned, though hardly original, surprise was ruined. "Do you know which hotel it is?"

"There's only one motel in Lima," Quinn answered matter-of-factly.

The brunette lit up again, her giddiness renewed. "Hah! Something the illustrious yet devious, devil-in-a-gown, Quinn Fabray doesn't know!"

"Huh?"
Rachel just giggled.

Quinn was wracking her brain for where Rachel could have possibly planned for them to go within a reasonable driving distance while the brunette dragged her off the bench and back towards the gym.

"Oh and you were supposed to return the crown. Principal Figgins is going to make you pay to replace it."

"I hate this school."

The party was already in full swing by the time Rachel, Jesse, Sam, and Quinn arrived. The rest of the Glee club had ducked out of Prom earlier in favor of getting a start on their alcohol consumption for the night. It was Glee clubbers only, which was actually pretty nice of Puck considering he could have had the entire school there like usual. It was a nice opportunity for all of them to get together and have fun outside of school. Whether most of them wanted to admit it or not, they really were a close knit group of friends by now. Somehow in the last two years, that strange amalgamation of misfits tied up in the choir room all for their own personal reasons, had become friends. Gone were the old ways. Now they were all there for the same singular reason, because they loved Glee club. They loved the music, the dancing, performing, and they especially loved each other. Even if they were often trying to kill each other while they were at it.

Brittany and Santana were already three sheets to the wind and grinding up on each other like there was no tomorrow in a poor excuse for dancing. They had obviously gotten their party started long before the others did. Artie was throwing around beers while Mike and Puck worked on tapping the keg. Lauren was the first one to start chugging and probably beat some world record by the look on the guys' faces when she was done.

Sam instantly leaped into the fray, grabbing a beer, and started to dance with Tina and Mercedes in the middle of the den. He gestured wildly to Quinn and Rachel to join him, but they laughed and waved him off for the moment.

Jesse moved in front of Quinn, fleetingly put off by how her eyes had suddenly turned into flaming daggers, but he braved it.

"Quinn," he smiled, taking a deep breath, "I've been meaning to tell you all night how absolutely stunning you look, the ghost of Grace Kelly."

She sighed and rolled her eyes at the compliment. Still, Jesse pushed forward.

"We didn't get a chance back at the school, but if you're not too tired, I'd be honored to have a dance with you. You can find out what it's like when a guy doesn't stomp all over your feet."

"He is a very good dancer, Quinn," Rachel joined in pleadingly. "Why not take him up on it?"

Jesse looked to the blonde expectantly, but wasn't at all surprised when she shook her head.

"But…thank you for the offer," she added reluctantly.

Both Jesse and Rachel were buoyed by the peace treaty Quinn seemed to have resigned herself to and grinned excitedly each other. He offered to get them drinks, which Rachel declined, but Quinn accepted in another conciliatory gesture. Then he was yanked away by Lauren in a sneak attack and was thrust into the growing crowd of dancers as the music blasted from Puck's subwoofers.

Quinn gulped down her vodka and cranberry before going for another. Rachel's wide-eyed look of
disapproval made her go slower on the second one though.

"What? It's a party and I'm not the designated driver!"

"I will not be dragging you around drunk tonight, Quinn!" she said shrilly.

Quinn crossed her heart and sipped her drink lightly to show Rachel that she meant it. The other girl rolled her eyes. Sam reappeared out of the pack and pulled them both in to dance, getting no protests this time.

After about an hour, everyone but Rachel and Quinn were making it look like they were in for an insane night. Brittany was using a standing lamp as a stripper pole while Santana cheered her on and sobbed at the same time. Sam was trying some of the strangest dance moves Quinn had ever seen; Kurt was twirling around playfully while Blaine was acting like he was in a metal band with all the head banging he was doing. Tina and Mercedes were laughing hysterically over each other; Mike tried a back flip but ended up laid out painfully on the hardwood floor. Jesse was fighting Puck for control of the music, but Lauren got involved and quickly resolved that.

Rachel looked to Quinn and nodded towards the door, seeing that it was the perfect chance for them to make their escape. Excited, Quinn bit her lower lip to hide the enormous silly grin on her face and grabbed their jackets and purses, only to turn around and see Finn Hudson towering in the doorway.

Rachel and Quinn just stared at him while he stared back. It took a while longer for someone else at the party to realize they had a newcomer, but Puck saw him and cut the music.

"Look who we got here!" he shouted above everyone protesting the interruption.

The whole group turned around to see Finn still standing there with his hands in his pockets, looking sheepish.

"What are you doing here, Manboobs McJiggers?" Santana slurred and draped herself across Brittany's lap, who added, "Didn't you, like, quit us?"

"Party's for Glee club members only," Sam said, pointing at him with a red cup in his hand. "V-I-P."

"If he needs to pee, he should just use the bushes in the backyard like all the other guys," Brittany whispered to Santana who was half passed out on her lap.

"Why are you interrupting the party, Finn?" Rachel chimed in finally. "We're all here to have a good time. Why do you need to spoil this too?"

"I'm not here to mess anyone up," he muttered, looking like a kicked puppy. "I just thought…well, I missed you guys. I wanted to-"

"Crash and hope we all forgive you?" Quinn snapped.

"Yeah. Kind of."

That elicited a wave of raucous disapproval and Finn had to shout over them all to finally get it back under control.

"I didn't mean it like that!" He shuffled a little bit towards Rachel and Quinn took an involuntary step forward, as if she needed to protect the brunette from him somehow. "Look, Rachel, I've been really bummed about what happened with us. When you didn't want to get back together, it sucked, and totally messed with my head." He turned back to the rest of the group that was watching, swaying a
l little bit as they did. "I was a jerk to you guys."

"Try 'giant ass,'" Puck shouted from the back.

"Okay! I was!" He threw up his hands. "I'm real sorry about all of it. So, please, with your permission, I'd like to come back to Glee club."

"Sam is co-captain now," Rachel said carefully, watching Finn for any sign of insincerity. "You can't come back thinking that-

"I'm not!" he replied quickly and walked over to Sam who had his arms crossed protectively on his chest. "Dude, I messed up. I get that. It's your turn now and I'm willing to accept that. So if you guys let me come back, I'll just be here to support the team however I can."

He stuck out his hand hopefully.

"I just really miss Glee club. I miss my friends."

Sam looked at him warily and after a moment's pause, stuck his hand out as well. The rest of the group whooped and cheered loudly. Puck hit the music back on full blast and Finn was pulled into the party, all forgiven. Rachel looked at Quinn who was hardly pleased by this turn of events and rolled her eyes. Finn had chosen the perfect timing to stage his 'tail between the legs' act. Everyone was too inebriated right now to really care about what he'd done and by tomorrow, it wouldn't really matter anymore. They'd all be hung over, miserable, and Finn would be back in the club like nothing ever happened.

As Rachel drove them out of Lima, Quinn groused about how ridiculous it was that Finn got away with his pity party just because everyone was drunk.

"You have to admit, while the spirit of the club had markedly improved, it did feel like there was something missing. We were an incomplete set."

"That's not true! We were fine!" Quinn insisted, but she knew full well that Rachel was right.

You may not like everyone on your team, but everyone played a part, and when one was missing, the team suffered the absence. It threw things off balance. They had gotten this far together and now they needed to go even further. If Finn had to be there for that, then Quinn would just have to accept it. So she stopped complaining and instead just sulked in the passenger seat.

Rachel laughed and took her girlfriend's hand with a knowing shake of her head, but said nothing else.

Before Quinn knew it, they were suddenly being driven over the state line. She sat up in her seat with a start, looking around wildly. The whole Finn drama had her completely distracted and she'd forgotten that Rachel was actually driving her somewhere. And she had no idea where that was!

"Are you kidnapping me?"

"Do you want to be kidnapped?" Rachel purred seductively.

Quinn sucked in a sharp breath and was lost in the fantasy of that scenario when they finally arrived at their destination. She saw the towering hotel before they even got within a mile of it.

"Rachel…tell me you didn't…"
"It's just a Marriott, but it was the only place within a reasonable driving distance that wouldn't involve us having to take keys from a guy named Sparky behind a metal cage."

"Where did you get the money for pay for a room here?" she asked suspiciously.

"I used Daddy's frequent flyer miles. They were just sitting there practically begging to be used… How could I ignore it?"

"He's bound to notice they're missing at some point!"

"Right, which is when I will explain that I arranged for the Glee club to have an after-party at the hotel where we could all get away and experience a wonderful prom night while safely enjoying ourselves in a contained area where no one would be driving under the influence. I'll be punished and then forgiven quickly because, after all, I'm only young once and this is what young people do. I'm experiencing life! My fathers are very lenient when it comes to this sort of thing."

"Could have fooled me…" she muttered under her breath.

Rachel started to turn into the driveway to park in front of the hotel, but Quinn saw something else and nudged her to keep going straight.

"W-what? Quinn! What are you doing? You made me miss the entrance! Now I'll have to double back and, ohhhh! I hate having to do U-Turns!" she whined.

"Just go there." Quinn pointed ahead of them. "Please? I'll drive us back to the hotel in no time."

Blindly following Quinn's directions, Rachel found herself stopping in the middle of an empty parking lot where it looked like there might be a soccer field nearby but she couldn't see it in the dark. The outline of the lit hotel stood tall behind them. The glow of the pool light reached just far enough so that the two of them weren't completely overwhelmed by the dark.

"Quinn, wha-"

The blonde had already gotten out of the car and she was at the driver's side, beckoning Rachel out.

"We are stranded in the middle of a dark, empty, parking lot, two hours from home! Do you want us both to die horrible, excruciating deaths? They won't even find the bodies! I'm only 17! I refuse to die before I get my starring role in the revival of either Funny Girl or Evita! At the very least we can just hope to be mugged…"

Quinn was ignoring her as she ducked back into the car and Rachel heard the radio come on. After a few minutes of searching, a ballad started to play, and suddenly Quinn was standing before her.

_The first time ever I saw your face,  
I thought the sun rose in your eyes._

Rachel watched her carefully for a moment.

"You want to dance with me, don't you?"

Quinn nodded just barely.

_And the moon and stars were the gifts you gave.  
To the dark and the empty skies, my love,  
To the dark and the empty skies._
"I know it's not the giant, light bulb outlined, stars in the McKinley High gym, but..." she turned her palms up to the midnight twinkling sky, "it's something?"

Tilting her head at the suddenly very insecure blonde who was standing before her, breathtaking as always, in her prom dress, waiting...Rachel was so overwhelmed by the moment, she found herself at a loss for words. Not for the first time, nor the last, she wondered how it was possible to love one person so much.

Quinn was still standing there in the dark, she'd gotten them to this point, but couldn't seem to take the final step. Drawn to her through the dark by some unseen force, as it always seemed to be with them, Rachel bridged the divide, and then she was just simply in Quinn's arms.

"This is the first time we've ever done this."

"I know."

"How does it feel?"

"A little strange," she admitted. "I've never danced with someone vertically challenged before."

"Quinn!"

She gave her a look. "How about instead of asking me, you feel for yourself?"

_The first time ever I kissed your mouth,_
_And felt your heart beat close to mine,_
_Like the trembling heart of a captive bird,_
_That was there at my command, my love._
_That was there at my command._

The cool spring night gave Rachel a chill and she shivered. Quinn wordlessly wrapped her arm around Rachel's bare shoulders. She wasn't cold after that.

Quinn was right. It _was_ different than any slow dancing experience she'd had before. Instead of being pressed against the solid wall of a flat chest, feeling more child-like than anything, she could actually reach the crook of Quinn shoulder and settle into it. They seemed to fit together so perfectly, like Quinn was molded just to have Rachel in her arms. She never knew it could feel like that.

Looking back on her other dance partners, she couldn't help but see the startling difference between how their bodies worked together. Actually, that was just it, they didn't work together. Just as Quinn was made to fit her, she was made to fit Quinn.

Rachel could feel Quinn's warm, bare skin beneath her cheek, press her lips against it, and even nuzzle her neck. So ridiculously delighted that she had this new avenue open to her, Rachel did it again, this time eliciting a soft giggle from the blonde. She curled Quinn's hand against her breast so that her knuckles were pressed against the naked warmth of her skin. Rachel knew Quinn could feel her heart was racing. She wanted her to feel it.

The blonde dropped her head down a little further in response and turned her face into Rachel's hair, tightening her embrace. Even with how wrapped up they were, pressed against each other's bodies as if to make one, they still moved together with such ease, you'd think they had practiced for this very moment their whole lives. In a way, they kind of had.

When Quinn sighed against Rachel's ear - this little, sweet, contented sigh - it brought tears to her eyes. She knew she was the only one who ever got to hear Quinn make that kind of a sound.
And the first time ever I lay with you,
I felt your heart so close to mine.
And I knew our joy would fill the earth,
And last till the end of time, my love.
It would last till the end of time, my love.

Rachel knew what Quinn meant now.

It felt right.

"Oh," she whispered.

"Yeah."

_The first time ever I saw your face._

Chapter End Notes

"So Close" by Jon McLaughlin

"The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face" by Roberta Flack
Can I Kiss You?

That Monday morning, Rachel was still riding high from the ecstasy that was her Prom night with Quinn. It was better than anything she could have ever fantasized about. Quinn was always doing that. Somehow making reality both better and worse than fantasy, but even so, Rachel would always choose reality.

After they had their first dance, Quinn had driven them back to the hotel, saving Rachel the unnecessary anxiety. When they were in the lobby, they both felt a little silly being decked out in their prom dresses among people in far less formal attire. A few odd gazes lingered on them.

They were at the front desk, checking in, when Quinn pulled awkwardly at her gown and grumbled, “I’m going to look so stupid coming back down in the morning still wearing this dress.”

Rachel merely pointed to the bag slung over her shoulder. “I brought you clothes too. Don’t worry about a thing.”

She rolled her eyes. “Oh and wearing your clothes that don’t even fit me isn’t going to look just as bad?”

Rachel spoke briefly with the clerk and then he went back to clacking away on the computer.

“I brought your clothes, Quinn,” she said exasperatedly. “You’ve left a few things at my house. Stop Worrying.”

Feeling a bit chastised, the blonde pouted and squeezed her hand apologetically. Rachel smiled and leaned in for a kiss, only to have Quinn jerk away out of habit.

It stung for all of a few seconds until Rachel remembered that Quinn had yet to discover the bigger reasons that were the cause of her choosing this hotel. Instead, she sighed and waited.

Quinn looked around them wonderingly. It wasn’t like her girlfriend to be so careless. What if someone had seen…? Wait.

Rachel simply raised an eyebrow when the realization finally washed over Quinn’s face.

They were two hours away from Lima.

In a hotel.

In the middle of the night.

Where no one would ever know them.

Rachel considered it their first real taste of what freedom would be like.

She could almost see the connections being made in Quinn’s head and before she knew it, instead of receiving a sweet peck on the lips as she had originally wanted, Quinn’s mouth was on hers, devouring her ravenously. All breath escaped her as Quinn’s lips found her again and again, in every which way. Her tongue plunged in without hesitation to tangle with Rachel’s passionately. It was like she was claiming Rachel’s mouth for her own…as if it hadn’t already been.
They were interrupted by someone obnoxiously clearing their throat and broke apart, panting, to see the clerk glaring at them disapprovingly. He was holding out their key cards for them.

“You’re in room 512.”

Blushing furiously, Rachel took the keys, while Quinn picked up the bag she dropped and they ran for the elevators. More than a few eyes were on them now after that display in the lobby, but except for that fleeting moment of embarrassment with the clerk, neither girl cared. Quinn practically jumped on Rachel when they finally made it into the elevator, pinning her in the corner.

“Aw, that’s so sweet. Young love.”

“It’s a cliché. Prom night? Ugh.”

“Shush! It’s still cute.”

Rachel never saw the couple that had passed them before the doors closed, but it was safe to say that was the last true coherent moment she had for the rest of the night.

The brunette was still beaming in her first class of the day, grinning so much that Kurt told her she was exuding *too much* of a post-coital glow.

Rachel gaped at his brash audacity then panicked, wondering how Kurt had figured it out, but Mercedes jumped in to answer that question before she gave herself away even more.

“So you’re definitely back together with Jesse?”

Rachel stared at them both blankly.

“Jesse?” she echoed.

*OH! Right! Jesse! Her Prom date!*

“No!” she said quickly, despising even the attempt to profane that night with thoughts of Jesse in Quinn’s place, and then tried to calm herself. “No, it’s not like that at all with him. We’re just friends. Besides, wasn’t he with you guys at Puck’s for the night?”

“He left about an hour after you did…” Mercedes said.

“Therefore giving us evidence as to why you’re embodying the spirit of the Cheshire cat this dreary Monday morning,” Kurt drawled.

“Well, it’s ridiculous. I did not have sex with Jesse! I haven’t even seen him or talked to him since I left Noah’s on Saturday. Why does *sex* have to be the reason why I’m simply enjoying my day? How can that be the only possible conclusion?”

“With *that* kind of a grin on your face,” Mercedes rolled her eyes, “there’s only one reason for it.”

“So if it wasn’t Jesse…” Kurt tapped his chin thoughtfully, “then we’ll have to do some more investigating to find out just who it is you’re canoodling with, Miss Berry - and the horror! - without the knowledge of your very best friends!”

“I’m ignoring you both right now seeing as how you’re being completely preposterous! I had a good
time at Prom, as did we all! Nationals is right around the corner and soon we’ll be on a plane to New York! That’s all I’m thinking about and that’s all you should be thinking about too.” She sniffed. “We have a lot of work to do!”

The bell rang and class was in session so Mercedes and Kurt were forced to hold their wagging tongues for the rest of the period.

Rachel couldn’t bring herself to worry about it. She just daydreamed.

“Enjoy yourself this weekend, princess?” Santana sat in her usual seat next to Quinn for their one shared class.

“Queen,” she corrected her with a smirk. “And wipe that look off your face. I know you spent the weekend enjoying yourself too.”

“Baby girl, I’m on a whole ‘nother level from you. Don’t even. You’re a fledgling dipping her little webbed lesbian foot in the pool compared to me.”

She ignored her. “Everything worked out with Britt now?”

“I think so,” Santana admitted quietly. “At least, mostly.”

Quinn smiled. “That’s good. It’s a start.”

“What about your drama?” she asked.

“Still drama…but we’re okay.”

“Damn.” Santana shook her head in amazement.

She frowned. “What?”

“This dreamy expression on your face… You’ve really lost it, haven’t you, Quinn?”

“Lost what?” she replied, confused.

“With Berry, you’re just totally gone. I can’t believe Britts called it.”

“What are you talking about?” she huffed in frustration. “I don’t understand a word you’re saying.”

Santana rolled her eyes. “In first grade, when we were all in the same class, Brittany told me that you like-liked our one and only Rachel Berry.”

“She what?” Quinn yelped.

“My thought exactly. She told me that you and Rachel were going to be together ‘forever and ever’. I told her it didn’t work like that - that girls couldn’t like-like girls, they had to like boys.”

“Ironic.”

“I know, right?” She shrugged. “So Britt told me I was wrong and that you could like-like anyone you wanted, boys AND girls.”

“Did she like-like you?” Quinn teased.
To her surprise, Santana had no sarcastic reply and instead just evaded her gaze. If a girl with her color could blush, she would have been beet red right then.

“Forget it,” she waved Quinn off, “looks like my girl was right about all of it.”

“Brittany’s smarter than anyone gives her credit for.”

Santana looked at her sharply. “I’ve always known how smart she is.”

Quinn squeezed her elbow with a smile and Santana swatted her away, still thoroughly embarrassed. Class began so they opened their notebooks and focused on the lesson.

Then it occurred to Quinn what she had missed.

“Wait…” the blonde whispered and leaned in so she was against Santana’s ear. “You’re saying that Brittany knows about me and Rachel now?”

The other girl started laughing outright, getting a stern look from their teacher and some glances from the other students. Quinn was about to break off a piece of her desk with how tightly she was gripping it as she waited for Santana to calm down.

“Q…” she whispered in bemusement once the teacher had his back to the board, “Brittany has known about you two for ten years.”

Quinn could only stare at her.

Rachel’s phone vibrated in her pocket as she stood at her locker, changing books in between periods.

Meet me in the auditorium now.

She frowned down at the message. The one-minute warning bell had already rung.

But we have class!

Berry.

Oh, not this again.

Rachel.

One more time…

Please?

Race you there.

Quinn was rushing through the hall, haphazardly trying to fix her clothes and smooth down her hair to make herself presentable enough for the class she was already late for when she ran smack into Brittany going in the opposite direction. The taller blonde lit up at the sight of her and bit her lip in amusement.

“You look sexy with sex hair, Q.”
“Britt!” she cried, mortified, and desperately combed her fingers through her hair to solve the problem.

“What?” she replied blankly. “You do. You have that ‘just fucked’ look about you.”

Quinn turned a brilliant shade of red.

“I knew I was right about Rachel.”

“What are you talking about?” She shifted her bra into place while Brittany wordlessly helped her by tucking in the tags on her dress. “What about Rachel?”

“I knew she’d be, like, a total sex goddess. Santana doesn’t believe me, but I can tell. Especially with the way you look right now…”

Quinn flashed back to minutes before, soft lips, lost clothes, deft hands, heated flesh, breathy moans, her name…

Yes! Yes, she is! Rachel Berry is a sex GODDESS!

But she wasn’t about to start shouting that through the halls.

“Brittany!” Quinn hissed. “Can you not? I know that Santana told you about us, o-or you guessed or whatever! But you have to promise to keep it a secret, okay? It’s really important. No one can know about Rachel and me.”

She knew Brittany had obviously managed to keep it to herself all this time, but it still didn’t curb the impulse to make sure they were still safe. Quinn still hadn’t really managed to wrap her head around the fact that Brittany had been so casually aware of their relationship all this time, understanding it before even they themselves did. Were they that blind or was Brittany just that intuitive? It was probably a combination of both…

None of this really mattered though because Brittany didn’t seem to hear her...or care.

“San’s a sex goddess too you know, she’s really…really good at stuff. Like, just yesterday, we spent the whole afternoon rubbing against each other. It’s her favorite thing. I just keep coming over and over again, but she never wants to stop.” She sighed with a dreamy, far off look in her eyes. “She’s amazing.”

Quinn was about ready to make a run for it, screaming with her fingers in her ears and trying to find some way to gouge out her eyes to rid herself of the images Brittany just conjured up, but then she remembered…

She remembered how she’d regretted not listening to Brittany and Santana’s sexual exploitations before she made love with Rachel for the first time. Had she listened, she might have known more about what they were doing, she could have been more confident, known more about ways to please her. While it wasn’t a disaster, far from it, she still regretted not being more prepared. She had promised herself never to let that happen again. So with that heavy thought in mind, Quinn steeled herself, taking a deep breath, and planted her feet while she looked up at the taller blonde.

“Brittany…” she said in a carefully controlled voice, “what exactly do you mean by…rubbing?”
Judy and Quinn walked Sam to the door after another “family dinner”. After dessert and helping to clear the table, Sam had politely excused himself from the offer to stay and watch a movie. Judy wanted more time to get to know him.

“Sorry I can’t stay,” he said again, “but my Mom really wants me home early tonight.”

“Don’t give it a second thought, dear. It was lovely as always to see you.”

“Thank you for dinner, Mrs. Fabray. It was really good.”

“I’m glad you enjoyed it! Just know you’re welcome over here anytime. It’s a pleasure to have you.” She squeezed his arm and gave Quinn an excited look as she turned away.

Quinn just rolled her eyes. “Thanks,” she whispered to him, still aware that Judy was watching them. “I’ll talk to you later.”

Sam nodded with a wink and kissed Quinn on the cheek before he waved goodbye to Judy and walked out the door. Quinn closed it behind him and took a deep breath before walking into the kitchen where her Mom was cleaning up.

“I like him, sweetie. He’s so much better for you than that other boy. What was his name? Something about a fish? Ugh, he could hardly string a full sentence together. Besides, this one is far cuter.”

“Thus my reasons for dating him,” she muttered dryly.

Judy turned around from the sink. Her scrutinizing gaze was starting to make Quinn incredibly uncomfortable until she finally spoke. “Are you being careful with him, Quinnie?”

“Mom!” she cried in disgust.

Quinn was not about to have this conversation with her mother. They didn’t even have a real “I’m pregnant” conversation, so really, too little too late anyway.

“We’re not doing that. Believe me I learned my lesson in spades.”

Well, it was one thing she didn’t have to lie to her mother about anyway…

“Still, I think-”

Her cell phone rang just in time and Quinn eyed her mother pointedly before picking it up and sat down at the counter while Judy finished putting the dishes in the sink. She needed her within hearing distance for this.

“Hey, Santana!” she said perkily.

“I cannot believe I am actually enabling your psychotic fall down the Berry hole.”

“No, he couldn’t stay,” Quinn replied innocuously, watching Judy. “His Mom wanted him home tonight.”

“I understand having needs and all, but seriously, Q? I don’t get it. The dwarf? What’s the appeal? Does she bring you back diamonds from the mine?”

“I’m just staying in, I guess. Nothing better to do.”
“Enlisting me as support must mean you’re pretty desperate to get under that perverted little schoolgirl skirt, but whatevs. You must be creaming yourself for the chance to fuck her tonight. Hm, I don’t know - if you’re this into her, maybe there is something to it after all. Does the Berry juice taste as good as-”

“Sure, that sounds fine!” She chirped a little too loudly and lowered the phone. “Hey, Mom? I’m gonna stay over at Santana’s tonight.”

Judy nodded, wiping her hands dry with a dishtowel and refilled her wine glass. “Alright, sweetheart. Have a good time.”

Quinn walked out of the kitchen, phone in hand, and lifted it back up to her ear as she made her way up the stairs.

“Could you be any more disgusting?” she hissed.

“As a matter of fact-”

Quinn hung up on her.

Hiram and Leroy were out on their weekly date night, which had easily turned into a “date” night for the girls as well. While Rachel’s fathers went out, they stayed in. It was a lot easier than the other nights when Quinn would have to sneak in at some ridiculous hour that always had them exhausted the next day, but they still believed it was completely worth it. And it was.

At least, for tonight, Quinn got to walk in through the front door - though she parked a few houses down as always - without fear of one Rachel’s Dads coming around the corner in the hall.

“Rachel?” she called.

“Upstairs!” was the faint reply.

Quinn bounded up the steps and eagerly made her way to Rachel’s room, closing the door behind her. The brunette was on her bed in her pajamas with her laptop, ipod, and homework surrounding her.

“You’re early!” she reprimanded her with a pout. “I was going to change into something nicer for you…”

“Why bother?” Quinn replied, tongue between her teeth. “It’s just going to end up on the floor in a few minutes anyway.”

Rachel chuckled and licked her lips, partly out of anticipation, partly out of shyness.

“I have a present for you.”

Instantly intrigued, Rachel sat up straight on the bed like a puppy waiting for its treat, knocking a number of things off her bed in the scramble.

“Yes?”

Quinn took off her jacket and Rachel saw the t-shirt she was wearing. It was bright pink, with a big white arrow pointing up and block-letters that said RACHEL BERRY’S GIRLFRIEND.
Underneath, it had a picture emblazoned of Rachel’s grinning face right over Quinn’s stomach.

“What do you think?” Quinn asked, peering down at her shirt. “I thought about putting “lesbian lover” but it wasn’t fitting right on here…”

Rachel only stared.

“I know it’s been hard on you, all of what we’ve gone through, keeping us secret. You’re doing it for me and I…there’s no way I can ever thank you for loving me enough to put yourself through this. I just need you to know that it kills me too, every day, but then I think about the time when we won’t have to hide anymore and it helps me get through. I hope you think about it too.”

She kneeled on the bed in front of Rachel.

“I had this shirt made because I swear - the very second we leave Lima together - I will wear this ridiculous thing every single day just so you know how truly proud I am to be with you. I’ll get a bunch more made up with different colors! I’m not joking, I really will-”

She couldn’t say anything more because Rachel was kissing her.

When their tongues met so quickly and unexpectedly, Quinn gave a sound that sounded almost like a whimper. Rachel slipped her hands under the t-shirt especially made for her and raked her nails lightly down Quinn’s back. They matched stroke for stroke, passion for passion. She was so sweet…so seductive…so incredible. What had started as a gentle kiss was spiraling out of control. Groaning, Quinn slid her fingers into Rachel’s hair and held her there.

Then they were tumbling backwards onto the floor. Rachel had leaned too far off the bed and she ended up sprawled out on top of Quinn. Neither gave it a second thought. The floor was just as good as anywhere else.

They had done away with most of their clothes when her conversation with Brittany the other day came into her head. Quinn traced the hem of Rachel’s underwear, biting her lower lip as the brunette squirmed against her. What was the worst that could happen? She pulled them off swiftly and lay back down so she was resting against every naked, glorious inch of Rachel.

Kissing her deeply, she hooked her hands behind Rachel’s knees and opened her legs more for her, at the same time pulling the brunette closer, and thrust her hips into her. Rachel grinned and eagerly reached for her, bringing Quinn back down for another kiss. Quinn rolled her hips against her slowly, again and again, finding a rhythm. She buried her face in Rachel’s throat and moaned at how good it felt.

Rachel was breathing hard against her ear, moving her hips as well to match Quinn, and then she slipped her hand down between them. Before she managed to reach her destination, the blonde snatched her hand just in time and yanked it above Rachel’s head. She lifted her other hand up there as well and entwined their fingers, ensuring that she wouldn’t be able to try that again.

“No, no hands there,” she panted.

“W-why?”

“I want to make you come this way,” she husked against her ear. “Just this.”

Rachel swallowed thickly, breathing hard. “It’s my o-orgasm too, Quinn. I should be able to have some say in it!”
“I'm the one giving it to you, so you'll just have to take what you can get.”

“That is entirely-!”

“It's my turn,” Quinn said breathlessly. “I promise you can do anything you want with me next time.”

“Anything?”

“Anything!”

“Does it have to be of a sexual nature?”

“RACHEL!” Frustrated, Quinn bit down on her throat a little harder than she should have and the brunette yelped.

“Ah! Ow! Quinn, that hurt!”

She was already soothing the sting away with her tongue. “You are not thinking about blackmailing me to watch *Funny Girl* right now!”

“I must take advantage of any opportunity I- ohhhh god!” she groaned as Quinn hit a particular spot. “Oh, do that again!”

“You were saying?” she purred mischievously.

“I wasn't saying! I wasn't saying anything.” Rachel moaned and grasped Quinn's ass, grinding into her harder. “Just keep going!”

“What I thought.”

“Quinn!”

She smirked victoriously and swooped down to capture Rachel’s lips. The brunette didn't have any more to say that was the least bit comprehensible.

Quinn was always going to listen to Brittany after this.

It was approaching the end of the day when Sam ran up to her eagerly.

“Look at what your best fake boyfriend ever got for you!”

Quinn peered down at the enormous brownie he held out for her in a napkin.

“More like worst fake boyfriend ever,” she replied with a frown. “I can't eat that! I've already gained a pound since I quit the Cheerios. I'm going back on the Sue Sylvester diet.”

Still Sam held out the brownie for her, she noticed then that he had one for himself. It was surprising because Sam was usually just as wary about fattening foods as she was, if not more.

“Which is basically saying you're going to starve yourself until you hallucinate about people turning into food and nearly pass out. Nope. We're not going to do that.”

“Excuse you?” She raised her eyebrow warningly.
He was unfazed. “I've adopted a new attitude when it comes to food. If the craving comes, then go for it. Just make a promise to yourself that you'll work it off tomorrow, amp up your usual routine, that way you never feel deprived!”

“Have you been reading my mother's women's health magazines again?”

“Well, I got bored when I was waiting for you to get ready... But that's not the point! The point is it’s a good strategy. Now take the brownie and we'll go for a run together tomorrow to burn it off.”

Quinn took it reluctantly. “A run isn’t gonna burn off this monster.”

“Then we'll do a super charged workout after in the gym! Rachel can stand by with a whistle and be our slave driver. You know how much she loves doing that.”

“Her imitation of Sue Sylvester is scarily accurate…” Quinn agreed.

“Come on.” He waved the treat in front of her face teasingly and pouted. “Don't make me eat this by myself.”

But Quinn was already thinking about a different kind of work out to burn off the remaining calories and drifted back to a few days ago.

_They had sequestered themselves away in the privacy of the catwalk in the auditorium for some much needed alone time. She was just about to undo Rachel's dress when the brunette giggled, muffled against Quinn's shoulder._

“...such a horn dog...”

_She reared back in shock, the pounding of her heart meaning something entirely different now. Rachel blinked dumbly, like someone had just turned the lights on after her eyes had adjusted to the dark, thrown by the sudden emptiness in her arms._

“D-do you really think that?” Quinn stammered.

_The idea that she was pushing Rachel too much, being all about sex like the stupid boys in their school - she didn't want to be that and she didn't want Rachel to think that!_

Okay, yeah, she really liked being with Rachel like that...more than like...loved...all right she was downright addicted. Making love with Rachel was just about the most incredible thing she’d ever experienced and it never got old. The more she had, the more she wanted. Today she was craving her so badly she had them both skip class just to have this time together. She loved any minute spent with Rachel, however fleeting; she loved talking to her about everything and anything - even Rachel's long winded rants - and she loved the nights when they did nothing but hold each other, but she also really..._really_ loved this.

_Was that wrong? Should she not like it this much? Want it this much? Before Rachel, Quinn had always passed off her apathy for sex or anything in that area as normal because it was supposed to be just a guy thing. Then Rachel happened and she discovered something else entirely. Now...was she going too far? Had she switched from one extreme to the other? Did Rachel feel pressured? Was that why Santana had gotten under her skin like that last week? Did Rachel believe deep down that this was all Quinn wanted?_

_Such thoughts raced through her head in a flurry of panic and fear. Was she still screwing things up_
without even realizing it?

“What are you talking about?” Rachel asked with a frown, reaching out insistently for her, wanting Quinn back where she was so they could resume, but she stayed where she was.

“Am I pushing you too much? Because, Rachel, if you don't want to...you know you can tell me. It's okay. Santana was lying when she said those things. You know she was! You have to know that's not how I-”

Rachel laughed, cutting Quinn off easily, and instead of responding at first, she just crawled into Quinn's lap and straddled her.

“You don't have to worry, Quinn. I know better than to listen to Santana Lopez. Especially with how emotionally unstable she was at the time. That wasn't what upset me, we talked about all that.”

“But why did you...”

“Because sometimes I still have difficulty wrapping my head around the fact that you want me like this. That you desire me so much that I can...I feel it so acutely. I've never had anyone be so passionate with me before...or for me. It's something I have to remind myself every day.”

“Remind yourself of what?”

“That it’s real.”

“You don't just think I'm a horn dog?”

She giggled brightly. “Of course you're a horn dog! You can't keep your hands off me.”

“But that's what I'm saying, Rachel, it's not-”

“I'm a horn dog too,” she interrupted with a sly smile. “I can't keep my hands to myself either. We match each other perfectly.”

Relief flooded Quinn's body.

“Yeah? You too?”

“Of course, me too.”

“I'm worried that I'm becoming obsessed, that it's unhealthy. Look at us! I practically ordered you to skip class for me.”

“And did you hear a word of protest from me? Do you really think if I didn’t want to, I would be here with you right now?”

“No...but, Rachel, sometimes there are days where I can't think of anything else except for when I’ll have the next chance to touch you, more than sometimes, actually. It's...it's a lot of times.”

“Then I guess we’re both unhealthily obsessed with each other,” she shrugged, “because I can't get enough of you either, Quinn Fabray.”

Grinning, Quinn let Rachel push her back and moaned when those hands took over again.
The glassy eyed look on Quinn's face puzzled Sam, and he snapped his fingers in front of her nose to make her come back to the present.

She glared at him, not happy to be broken out of her Rachel-induced haze.

“You're the one who practically cries after eating a bag of Doritos from guilt!”

“Duh! The point! It’s not healthy and it’s gonna change.”

“Stay away from Mom's magazines.”

“Eat the brownie, Quinn.”

She rolled her eyes and took a small bite. When the chocolate hit her tongue, her eyes widened, and she moaned.

“Okay. That's kind of...amazingly good.”

Sam took a giant bite out of his own with a grin.

“Told ya!”

It was so delicious, Quinn couldn't help herself, she took a bigger piece this time and licked her fingers happily. Sam was right, there was nothing wrong with indulging every once in a while. Besides, she had every intention of burning it off in the most pleasurable way possible. Two birds, one stone.

“Unbelievable!” She mumbled with her mouth full of melting fudge. “Where did you even get these?”

Sam was already finished with his and wiped his mouth on his sleeve. “Oh, Puck gave 'em to me, said they were from his Nana's secret recipe.”

“Mmm,” Quinn nodded, “he made some really good cupcakes for our bake sale last year with one of her recipes. Maybe Rachel can ask her for some of those recipes. She knows her from Temple.”

After that, things became a bit hazy.

Rachel was chatting aimlessly with Mercedes and Kurt when she saw Kurt’s eyes narrow in disgust at something behind her.

“Really? Is necessary to subject us to that explicit display of tonsil hockey?”

Frowning, Rachel turned around to see just what he was talking about and her stomach bottomed out. Sam and Quinn had walked into the choir room practically joined from the waist up. Sam had his hands in Quinn’s hair as they appeared to be trying to swallow each other’s tongues in disgusting, sloppy kisses.

Santana gagged while Mercedes groaned and covered her eyes, along with Kurt's, to protect them both.

Bile rose in Rachel’s throat, only held down by the tears that had instantly formed in her eyes. She
would have run out of there, but her legs were frozen. She was a useless mass of nothing sitting in that chair right now, unable to take her eyes off the two that were so clearly enjoying themselves.

Mike cleared his throat loudly, but that wasn’t enough to even catch their attention. They were still going at it until Lauren picked up a chair and slammed it down on the floor loudly. Startled, the two blondes turned to see the rest of the group, as if aware of their presence for the first time.

“Welcome back, pervs.” Lauren rolled her eyes. “Keep it in your pants ‘til after the meeting, all right? I feel like I gotta wash out my eyeballs or something after that.”

Quinn’s gaze wandered absently through the group until she zeroed in on Rachel and her face lit up with a brilliant smile. She bounded over to the shell shocked girl like a rabbit on speed and yanked Rachel out of the chair before she could say a word and lifted her into an enormous bear hug that threatened to squeeze all of the oxygen out of her lungs.

“Quinn!” Rachel gasped and tried to wriggle out of her hold to take a breath in again.

Something was very…very wrong here.

When the blonde finally released her she beamed at Rachel, looking like a little girl who’d just gotten the biggest cookie in the jar.

Why did her eyes look so strange?

“I love my Berry!” Quinn squealed and swooped down to kiss Rachel in front of everyone.

Fortunately, Rachel had managed to regain some motor function after a few seconds and narrowly dodged the attempt, not to mention avert complete disaster. People would have noticed if it hadn’t been for Sam and Brittany taking over and tonguing the hell out of each other.

Wide-eyed, Rachel stared at her girlfriend who couldn’t seem to stop giggling. Her brain was so fried! She had no idea what to make of this behavior.

“What on earth is wrong with you? Are you drunk?”

“They’re on something major, that’s for sure,” Finn said.

“Noooooo!” Quinn bounced up and down then pointed and giggled at Sam and Brittany. “They’re kissing! I wanna kiss!”

She tried to lean in again, but Rachel held her off with more certainty this time. Santana was smacking Sam over the head to get him off Brittany, cussing him out violently in Spanish, but Sam didn’t seem to care much. He just started making airplane imitations.

“Back off, Santana!” Rachel interjected when it looked like the Latina was going to escalate to real violence. “He obviously doesn’t know what he’s doing right now.”

“You stay out of this, dwarf!” She snapped.

Quinn giggled and nuzzled the top of Rachel’s head. “You are very tiny, baby.”

“No, Quinn, she’s too old to be a baby.” Brittany laughed. “She’s just very short. Like a troll, but a little nicer and with better hygiene. I don’t think Rachel lives under a bridge anyway.”

“Just what the hell were you doing?” Santana glared at Brittany. “How could you let him be all over you like that?”
“He’s a good kisser?” She gave Santana a sheepish look. “Plus, he’s being super fun tonight. Can we have him, San?”

“NO!”

Horrified, the Latina grabbed Brittany’s chair, dragging her as far away from Sam as possible with the chair scraping across the floor. Then she sat on Brittany’s lap to prevent her from getting anywhere near the boy again, but by that time Brittany had forgotten all about Sam and wrapped her arms around Santana happily, nuzzling into her.

Quinn grinned toothily at the group, her arm still wrapped around Rachel’s shoulders, whether it was to be closer to her or for balance, Rachel wasn’t sure. Quinn was swaying ever so slightly so she had to put her arm around her waist to steady her.

“Everyone's so pretty today.” She made a grand sweeping gesture. “You are all lovely. Really.”

“Yeah!” Sam jumped out of his chair excitedly. “Like, man, the colors, the...the colors. Whoaaa. Hey! Mercedes is black! Mercedes is black?” He tip-toed over to Quinn and tried to whisper, but really just spoke loudly against her ear. “Did you know that Mercedes was black?”

“Ohhhh…” He nodded like he understood when everyone could clearly see that he didn’t.

“But that one!” Quinn announced suddenly, pointing to Mike. “How could you lie to us all this time?”

“What? Me?” He looked at Tina in mirrored confusion and then back to Quinn. “What'd I lie about?”

“You're white!” she insisted, stomping her foot. “All this time we kept saying you two were ‘Chang-squared’, but you...are so...white.”

Sam guffawed, holding his stomach.

“You just lied so Tina would date you. That's racist,” Quinn said with an exaggerated emphasis on the word.

Rachel could only stare at her in horror.

“This is like the Twilight Zone,” Artie muttered out of the corner of his mouth. “Aliens have taken over their minds.”

“The aliens are super nice though. They called us pretty and didn't try to kill us with laser beams from their eyes,” Brittany pointed out helpfully.

“Someone so needs to be taping this,” Lauren snorted.

“On it!” came several replies and there was shuffling as people went for their phones.

“DON’T YOU DARE!” Rachel screeched. “If any one of you tries to record this right now, I will have you personally sued for defamation of character and invasion of privacy!”

She got a sea of blank looks staring back at her.
“…And I’ll smash your phones.”

At that, they grumbled reluctantly and put their phones away - all except for Artie, who was holding his up unapologetically.

“I’m an aspiring director,” he said. “This is art! You can’t stop me from capturing art in the form of live action. It goes against your values as an artist yourself.”

“Oh, you just try me…” the brunette growled and took a step towards him.

He yelped and quickly hid his phone under his chair. “Okay! You win!”

“Quinn...” Rachel said carefully, trying again. “What is going on with you?”

That did nothing but invoke more attempts to get Rachel to kiss her.

“Someone must have slipped them something,” Finn offered and the rest of the group readily agreed.

“Who would do that though?” Kurt asked. “What would they have to gain?”

“Practical joke?” Tina suggested.

This was getting dangerous and fast. They had to figure out what happened to these two! Finn was right, this was more than just drunken behavior. Sam and Quinn were undoubtedly under the influence of some kind of narcotic.

Sam was sitting by Mercedes now, staring at her in wide-eyed wonder. Mercedes shifted away uncomfortably. He looked like was a five-year-old in an aquarium, face pressed up against the glass in rapture. He reached out and poked her cheek lightly, as if trying to prove she really existed.

“Chocolatey...” he mumbled.

Mercedes was on her feet in a second, getting in his face, with Kurt and Lauren trying to pull her back before she did any damage.

“Boy, you touch me again and I'mma whoop your ass back to Texas!” she bellowed.

“And you stay the hell away from Brittany!” Santana added with a glare.

“Just sit over here, Sam,” Tina said calmly and pointed to the chair next to her.

Disappointed by how Mercedes reacted and Santana’s added animosity, Sam pouted and dutifully went next to Tina.

Puck walked in just then, whistling. When he caught sight of the two disheveled blondes and a frazzled Glee club, he spun on his heel and tried to make a run for it.

“NOAH PUCKERMAN, YOU MARCH RIGHT BACK HERE THIS INSTANT!” Rachel’s voice blasted through the hall, making him wince.

Sighing, he stopped and shuffled his way back into the room with the mark of a guilty man on his chest. Rachel was still trying to hold an extremely amorous Quinn at bay while he sheepishly explained his prank on Sam.

“I was just messing around! It wasn’t supposed to be a big deal. I thought it’d be freaking hilarious to see the Mouth over here tripping, but he swiped extras for himself behind my back! From the batch
that I put too much shit into! I didn’t even want to give him that one.”

“Are you trying to get yourself thrown back into Juvie?” Rachel screeched.

“What exactly did you put in there?” Santana asked.

“Just…some…party stuff?” he mumbled.

“NOAH!”

“Okay, okay!” He backed away from Rachel nervously. “So it was a big dose of my primo quality merchandise that I grow in the yard next door and I might have…maybe…slipped some X in there too.”

The entire group stared back at him with their jaws hanging.

Save for Sam and Quinn. Sam was fascinated by something behind one of the chairs and Quinn was too busy playing with the hem of Rachel’s sweater to notice that Puck was there.

“Were you trying to kill them?” Artie said in disbelief.

“Hey! I had no idea he was going to give any of it to Quinn! I would never have done that to her. It was supposed to be a joke. It’s not like it’s gonna hurt them, shouldn’t last more than half a day anyway.”

“Don’t worry so much, freaks,” Lauren said exasperatedly. “It’s not that big of a deal.”

“Not that big of a deal?” Kurt exclaimed, staring at her in disbelief.

Rachel stepped towards Puck menacingly, but Quinn’s hold stopped her, and Finn jumped in instead.

“This is so majorly uncool, dude. What if they get caught by one of the teachers?”

“There’s a zero tolerance drug policy on school property,” Tina said worriedly.

“They could be expelled!” Mercedes added.

Rachel was so furious, she thought she just might slap Puck silly, but Quinn took first priority right now. She kept talking about things she really should not be talking about, how pretty Rachel was, how much she loved her, how they needed to be together forever.

Right now, it seemed like they weren’t taking Quinn seriously, but that could easily change. Sam’s antics could only distract them for so long. She put all thoughts of making Puckerman pay for what he did on hold as she focused entirely on protecting Quinn.

Looking around, she was desperate to find one of the others to take Sam home before Mr. Schuester walked in and discovered the two of them. Brittany immediately volunteered, waving her hand in the air.

“No freaking way!” Santana frowned down at her girlfriend who shrugged as if to say, “What”? “But he wants it, San,” she protested. “Wouldn’t it be fun to play with him for a while?”

The Latina got off her lap angrily. “You know what? If you want him so bad Britt, go ahead and take him home! Just leave me the hell out of it!”
“Hell yeah!” Sam pumped his fist in the air.

“He says he wants to.” Quinn shrugged and pulled at Rachel’s skirt impatiently, making it obvious she wanted them to get out of there too.

Santana stormed out of the choir room with Brittany running after her spewing apologies. She really did just think they would have had fun…

“Obviously, that’s not going to work.” Rachel rolled her eyes and pulled Quinn’s hand away from her ass. “Someone else, please?”

“I got him, I got him,” Mike said reassuringly and ushered Sam up from his chair. “Come on, bro. Let’s get you out of here.”

Sam let him do it, pouting as Mike led him to the door.

“Do I get to kiss you then?”

“Don’t even think about it!” Mike exclaimed and leapt back behind Tina just in case Sam tried to go for it.

At that point, Quinn was back to trying to kiss Rachel again, but the brunette just spun her around and led her out of the room as quickly as possible. Mike would take care of Sam; she just had to deal with Quinn.

As they were walking out, she heard Finn behind her.

“Whoa, that was like…really gay. Is he gay?”

“NO!” came a vehement chorus.

Rachel grunted with effort as she finally managed to get Quinn’s feet into the car along with the rest of her body.

“Can you at least put your seatbelt on?”

The other girl nodded determinedly and started groping for it, missing the first few tries, but eventually got her hands on it. Then it took several more painfully long moments of Rachel standing there watching Quinn fumble with the straps as she awkwardly tried to pull it out, only to have it lock up on her.

“Oh…I guess that won’t work either.”

Rachel took the belt from Quinn’s hands and leaned over the blonde to do it for her. Quinn giggled and played with Rachel’s hair instead.
When she was sure that her girlfriend was safely strapped into the seat, Rachel stood up, and closed the door. She nearly jumped out of her skin, however, when Quinn turned abruptly and pressed her face up against the glass in a panic.

“Rachel…” she said seriously, trying to take deep breaths through her wide-eyed fear, “I'm trapped!”

Groaning, Rachel leaned her head against the top of the car. She didn’t know what to do, how to handle this kind of Quinn, this kind of situation, but darn it! She was Rachel Berry! She could handle anything that came her way! Quinn needed someone to take care of her and Rachel was going to be the one to do it!

With that in mind, she pulled herself together, walked around to the driver’s side, and got in. Quinn looked surprised that Rachel had managed to get herself trapped too and started freaking out even more until Rachel took her face into her hands gently.

“Sweetie, you’re not trapped. You’re just in a car.”

“But we are!” She pounded against the door to prove her point. “We are!”

“We’re not!” Rachel insisted and then leaned her forehead against Quinn’s, looking into her fearful eyes. “Even if we were,” she said soothingly, a tiny smile forming on her lips, “at least you’re trapped with me, right?”

That seemed to calm Quinn down. She nodded in agreement and started breathing more evenly again. Rachel let her go with a kiss on her forehead and they both settled back into their seats.

“I’d like to be trapped with you,” Quinn said thoughtfully, tapping her fingers against the hand rest, “but somewhere more awesome. Like, under the sea! I think we would make great mermaids! We’d have to dye our hair red though. You can only be a mermaid if you have red hair.”

“That’s not true.” Rachel shook her head in bewilderment. “Mermaids can have any hair color. Besides, I like your hair the way it is.”

“You wouldn’t like me with red hair?” Quinn pouted. “What about pink? You like pink! Would you
like me with pink hair?"

“I’d like you with any hair color.”

“Promise?”

Rachel giggled softly. As unnerving as it was to have Quinn in this drug-induced state, it was still endearing to see her so silly and carefree. Quinn deserved to be able act like this always, not the high part, but the free part. She just looked…happy.

“I promise,” Rachel whispered.

Quinn beamed.

Turning the key in the ignition, Rachel drove them out of the parking lot and turned onto the road, heading towards her house. It was a little strange to be on this side of Quinn’s car.

She’d only driven it a handful of times before and that was while Quinn was giving her driving lessons. Rachel had passed the road test (by some miracle), but it only took one ride with her behind the wheel for Quinn to make her pull over after five minutes. The blonde tumbled frantically out of the car, tripping over herself in the process, and ranted that if Rachel didn’t learn how to drive properly, she would never get in a car with her behind the wheel again.

As it turned out, Quinn proved to be a competent teacher because after a few lessons, Rachel’s fathers noticed a remarkable difference from her death-defying early attempts. And, of course, Quinn tentatively allowed her to drive every once in a while – Prom night was one example and that because she had wanted to be able to drink. She still claimed she had PTSD from those initial five minutes though.

Rachel was sure she was exaggerating.

If they had any luck on their side tonight, her Dads would have already left for their dinner party and she would be able to sneak Quinn into her room without too many problems. By now, the blonde had turned back to smashing her head against the window of the car, her lips pressed against it as though she were kissing it…or attempting to blow bubbles in the glass. It was a tossup, really.
Apparently, Quinn’s fascination with the window was extremely short lived because just as Rachel was making a turn, soft lips touched her neck. She jumped and swerved slightly, resulting in an obnoxious blaring horn from behind her.

“Quinn!” she cried, pushing her away with her free hand. “You simply cannot do that while I’m behind the wheel! We agreed! Remember what happened the last time?”

“We lived through it.”

“Yes, but my Daddy’s car still has that dent on the side door where I hit the fire hydrant!”

“So drive better,” she replied simply.

Instead of lips this time, Quinn ran her tongue teasingly along Rachel’s neck, and nipped at her jaw.

She bit her lower lip fiercely, trying not to moan, and doing all she could to ignore her girlfriend’s attention. “This is hazardous to our health!” she said shakily. “We both know I’m not the best driver to begin with. Sit back!”

“But I want you,” Quinn purred against her ear.

Rachel shivered at the hot breath against her skin. The blonde’s hand on Rachel’s knee was sliding up the length of her thigh.

“Quinn…” she whimpered, grabbing her hand before it slipped under her skirt, “you can’t do that. Not now. Just hold on.”

She placed Quinn’s hand back in her own lap with a pointed look before returning to the steering wheel. She always tried to keep to the rule of using both hands on the wheel, at exactly 10 and 2 o’clock, just as she’d been taught.

However, Quinn was not to be so easily deterred. Her fingers inched back towards Rachel’s leg, brushing the side lightly and rested there for a moment while she nibbled on the brunette’s ear.
“Don't you like when I touch you, Rachel?” she breathed against the curve of her ear. “You told me you did. You tell me all the time. How much you want me… I want you too.”

That damned hand was sliding up her thigh once again and she was too quick this time for Rachel to stop her, finally making her way underneath the skirt and between her legs. The tips of her fingers traced over Rachel's center, her touch teasing and light, but intently focused.

Rachel inhaled sharply and her head fell back against the seat. Her eyes slipped shut as Quinn slid a fingertip beneath her underwear and brushed against the already alert bundle of nerves. A slight moan escaped her lips, before she remembered that she was driving. She heard a blaring horn, and her eyes popped open. She sat up abruptly, realizing with horror that she’d drifted into the oncoming lane. Headlights blinded her, she was about to hit another car head on.

Rachel screeched and flung the wheel to the opposite side. They were both screaming at the top of their lungs as the car went flying off the road. She managed hit the brakes just in time before they dived into the cornfield.

“Oh my God!” Rachel cried. “We could have died!”

Her face was flushed while her hands had a white-knuckled grip on the wheel as she stared out the windshield at the crops in front of her headlights. Her chest heaved as she gulped for air. Every single nerve in her body was on alert as adrenaline pumped through her veins at an almost painful pace. She didn’t notice until later that she had narrowly avoided the ditch next to them. Thank God because she never wanted to have to explain to her fathers why or how she'd ended up in a ditch on the side of the road.

“That just makes me want to fuck you even more,” Quinn gasped.

Apparently their near death experience was nothing more than a turn on for her.

“Langu-!”

Quinn’s mouth muffled the rest.
The blonde clumsily unfastened her seatbelt and moved towards Rachel. She slipped her hand along Rachel's inner thigh once again, a smirk curling onto her lips. Unfortunately, her attempt was hindered when she tried to climb over the divider and she whimpered because her foot had somehow become tangled with the seatbelt.

“Quinn, what are you doing?” Rachel asked exasperatedly, moving a hand to help her.

The blonde came down on her lips again instead of answering and her hand went right back under Rachel’s skirt to resume its previous actions. Breathing heavily, Rachel couldn’t take it anymore. She pushed against her with a groan.

“Backseat,” she gasped. “Get in the backseat.”

There was no way that they were going to fit in the front of the car to do anything that her girlfriend so clearly had in mind.

Quinn obeyed her at once and simply flung herself backwards. She was at the strangest angle possible and flailed around like a cracked out puppet on a string. There was something painful looking about the way she was trying to get herself into the proper position.

Finally she had managed to right herself somehow and whined, “Rachel!” when she tossed her head back too hard and thumped it against the seat.

Shell shocked, but unable to do much more than what her girlfriend asked for, Rachel crawled after her, though she moved with significantly more grace and ease. Not to mention her smaller size helped a lot.

Quinn watched in awe as she came towards her. Her gaze traced along the line of her neck and her jaw before moving up to meet Rachel’s eyes.

“You are so...” she trailed off, not even sure what she wanted to say.

Instead she just grabbed the brunette by the waist when she was halfway through and pulled her underneath her. Rachel yelped at the swiftness of the change and didn’t even have a chance to move before Quinn was maneuvering herself to straddle her legs, pinning Rachel to the seat.
Delighted with herself, Quinn dragged her hands down Rachel’s side before delving under her skirt again. This time she didn’t bother to tease and instead just yanked her underwear down and off in one swift movement. Rachel didn’t know how she managed to do that so easily when she looked like she was having a stroke trying to get into the backseat in the first place.

“You’re so perfect,” Quinn breathed as she sucked at Rachel's throat, before moving down to nibble lightly at her collarbone.

She sat up again, pulling Rachel’s skirt up around her waist, and moaned softly at the sight of her. Impatient, she tugged at the brunette’s sweater until Rachel lifted her arms and let Quinn take it off completely, exposing even more of that gloriously smooth, soft, tan skin that Quinn loved to feast on.

Rachel struggled a bit underneath her, attempting to shift the balance. There was no way this could work properly with her drugged girlfriend at the reins.

“Quinn! Let me up. I want to be on top. Considering I’m the only one between us that's in their right mind here…”

Quinn, however, was having none of it. She pressed her body down onto Rachel firmly, as if to say, “You’re not going anywhere.”

It was then that Rachel realized the absurdity of what she was trying to do. She was actually trying to gain control of this completely out-of-control situation: splayed out mostly naked in the backseat of Quinn’s car next to a corn field while Quinn was on drugs and they had just narrowly avoided death with a head on collision.

It was surreal, to say the least.

Speaking of which, where was that other car? Awful excuse for human beings! They didn’t even stop to check and see if they were okay! Quinn’s tongue on her bare skin snapped Rachel back to the present. The blonde was being extremely persuasive about earning her place on top.

Quinn ducked down to kiss her way along Rachel’s chest, only a bra and a band of cloth around her waist stood in the way of her being completely naked while Quinn herself had yet to remove a single item of clothing. She trailed her tongue down Rachel’s belly until she stopped to nip at her hipbone.
“Your skin tastes like ice cream,” she mumbled. “The best and most delicious vegan ice cream in the whole world.”

Rachel stared up at the ceiling of the car with wide eyes. What was she doing? Quinn was out of her mind and they were just getting naked on the side of the road? She was just about to stop them altogether when Quinn undid the clasp of her bra and immediately took one of her breasts into her mouth, sucking hard. She moaned and slid her hands into Quinn’s hair encouragingly. They definitely weren’t stopping.

Replacing her mouth with her hands, Quinn palmed the mounds of soft flesh and rolled the wet nipples between her fingers as she moved herself down Rachel’s body until she was far away enough to get her mouth between the brunette’s legs. Teasing at first, she kissed and licked a line up one side of her inner thigh, then switched to the other. Gasping, Rachel put her own hands over Quinn’s and used both to knead her breasts.

The gasp turned into a moan when Quinn’s tongue delved into the center and she immediately wrapped her lips around the tiny bundle of nerves that had been her focus earlier.

“Oh, God!”

The blonde pulled one of her hands away from underneath Rachel’s hold and slipped a finger into the warm, wet heat waiting for her. Quinn groaned softly at the feel of Rachel clenching tightly around her finger, pulsing for more. She began to work her tongue with ease, knowing exactly what to do now, pretty certain she could be a certified expert at this by now. Rachel was writhing beneath her, her hips jerking slightly to meet her, and Quinn was losing herself in the sensations. Instinct and desire were all that existed. All for Rachel. She slipped another finger inside and her girlfriend rewarded her with a whimper of pleasure.

Working a steady rhythm, of her mouth, tongue, and fingers all in sync, Rachel began to tremble beneath her, her moans and breathy whines for more filled Quinn’s ears like the best song Rachel had ever sung. She lapped at her with long, even strokes, but that control was starting to slip. Quinn didn’t have the patience for this right now. She looked up to see Rachel staring back at her and that was it. Wetness pooled around her fingers that were working a furious pace and Rachel’s hips bucked off the seat, forcing Quinn to hold her down.

“God, you’re so wet for me, baby.”

“Quinn…” she whimpered.
“You have to come for me, Rachel.”

On cue, the brunette’s moans reverberated in the car as she ground her hips frantically against Quinn’s mouth and fingers until she exploded over the glorious edge.

Rachel didn’t know which was up or down, her body was still shuddering from the after effects, but when her vision cleared once more, there she was. A blonde beauty was staring down at her with a giddy smile.

“You’re so beautiful, my Berry,” she murmured, smoothing Rachel’s hair back, and ghosted her fingertips across kiss-swollen lips.

“When you’re sober again…” Rachel breathed, still a bit delirious, “I want you to keep calling me that.”

“I’ll do anything for you.”

“Then come up here.”

Rachel grasped Quinn’s ass and pulled at her insistently. The blonde was confused, but Rachel wasn’t. It wasn’t a position they had tried before, but if Quinn was so determined to stay on top, they could compromise. Rachel pulled at her again harder, urging Quinn up her body, until the other girl’s eyes lit up with recognition.

Anything else that Rachel probably should have been thinking about or worrying about didn’t exist right then. Where they were, what was happening, what was different with Quinn, none of it mattered. At that moment, there was nothing Rachel Berry wanted more than to know the feeling of Quinn on top of her while her tongue was buried deep inside of her.

Quinn had to duck awkwardly against the roof of the car as she got up enough for Rachel to slide down. She carefully placed a knee on each side of Rachel's shoulders, keeping herself just above Rachel's face. Delighted, the brunette wasted no time and disappeared beneath Quinn’s dress. She licked lightly along the blonde's inner thighs, kissing and nibbling her way upwards.
“Quinn Fabray!” she gasped when something became apparent. “We made a rule that you are always required to inform me when you’re not wearing underwear!”

“But I w-was wearing underwear!” she replied in a breathless whine. “I think I lost them.”

Rachel pushed her back so she could see Quinn’s face.

“How did you lose them?”

“I don’t remember. I think I wanted to take them off for you. I know! I told Sam I was taking them off and then they went away.”

“So…Sam…has them?” Rachel’s voice trembled.

“Yes!” Quinn said as though it were obvious. “I gave them to him so he would protect them for me! He’s a really awesome protector.”

Rachel closed her eyes, trying to steady the roller coaster her emotions were doing right then. Quinn’s lips were on hers as she kissed her sweetly.

“I love you, my Berry.” She ran her fingers through Rachel’s hair and traced her jaw. Her sweet breath against Rachel’s face made her open her eyes again and she saw an impatient, pleading Quinn looking down at her with doe-eyes. “Can you please make me come now?”

She kissed her again more purposefully, passionate and demanding. Rachel’s body was already reacting to what Quinn’s mouth was doing, showing her exactly what she wanted from Rachel.

“Oh, okay,” she panted and met Quinn’s eyes. “Just tell me, did you do anything else with Sam besides kiss him?”

She frowned. “What else would I do?”

“Like what we’re doing right now?”
“Ick! No. He has nice lips. He wanted to go to Dogs n’ Suds, but I told him we had to go to Glee club because I had to see you cause you’re a way better kisser. Then he got sad cause he wouldn’t have anyone to kiss, so I told him I’d kiss him until we got there and he found somebody else.”

“I don’t know how to handle this.”

“Rachel…” she whined. “Why are you doing this?”

“Because you’re under the influence of strong illegal narcotics, I don’t know how to take care of you, and I’m jealous that you were kissing Sam! It’s not fair, Quinn. What if you did more and you just don’t remember?”

“I would remember!” she insisted. “That’s silly, Rachel. I would never have sex with Sam. I want to have sex with you. But right now, you won’t let me! AH!” she screamed.

“What IS IT?” Rachel cried, trying to still the frantic girl wriggling around on top of her.

“Buzzing! It’s buzzing!”

“What’s buzzing? There’s no buzzing!”

Quinn reached inside the pocket of her dress and sighed, calming down. “Oh. Duh! It’s my phone.” She giggled.

Rachel dropped her head back on the seat in disbelief. If she didn’t have a heart attack by the time the night was over, it would be a miracle.

“Konichiwa!” she answered brightly, lifting the phone to ear. “Santana! What? Oh, I’m sitting on top of her, why? Yes…in the backseat…totally…on the side of the road…really yummy…okay.”

She handed the phone to Rachel without a word.
“Hello?”

There was only the sound of hysterical laughter on the other line.

“Santana,” she said through gritted teeth, “if you don’t mind, I am actually a little busy at the moment…”

“Look, I found that tripping 70’s style girl’s panties on the floor in the hallway. Actually, Britts found them. Tell Q in the morning when she’s not completely baked cause we had to wrestle the Jew-Fro for it. I threatened the perv, but I’m not sure it did the trick. He might blog about it so maybe you can do damage control before Quinn flips out again.”

Rachel never got to reply because the Latina had already hung up. She looked up at Quinn who was pouting big time now.

The hallway! Relief flooded her body. There was no way she was doing anything like that with Sam out in the hallway! They were severely incapacitated, but not totally without their heads.

Dropping the phone to the floor, she yanked the blonde back up to her without a word. Quinn giggled delightedly and got back into the same position as before, bracing herself by one hand clutching the seat and the other splayed against the window.

Tentatively, testingly, she reached a hand up to trace along the outside. She quickly discovered just how aroused Quinn already was. The idea that it had been because of Rachel’s pleasure that Quinn was whimpering above her was incredible, too incredible even, and she had the hardest time believing it even when the evidence was all over her.

Instead of wasting another second, she plunged her tongue into Quinn's wet heat. The blonde was whimpering and writhing above her, needing more, begging for more.

Who was she to deny her?

Rachel slipped two fingers firmly inside, biting her lip to stifle a moan at the feeling of Quinn tightening around her, pulling her in to the sopping heat. She never tired of this feeling, never wanted it to stop. Each and every time she touched Quinn, there was always something new to be discovered, and if not new, then there was always pleasure untold. Rachel would be the happiest girl
on earth if she got to make love to Quinn Fabray for the rest of her life, as long as her Broadway career went along with it, of course. She didn’t have those dressing room fantasies for nothing! They would be made reality if she had any say in it!

Working up a practiced rhythm, Rachel pressed in and out of her slowly. She wanted to draw this out for as long as possible, to have Quinn above her like this, to see her fingers drawing in and out of her, to see Quinn’s flushed face, to hear her moan, to make her cry out, to make sure she felt every second of pleasure that Rachel could possibly provide.

Of course, Quinn had different plans. Though they weren’t so much plans, as they were a determined goal. Tonight, she seemed to have boundless energy without a limit in sight. The way she moved restlessly above her made Rachel want to laugh. Quinn was so desperate for her own release it was almost comical.

The blonde started rolling her hips slightly, out of nothing more than instinct and desire. Realizing what she wanted to do, Rachel removed her fingers and replaced them with her tongue, slipping back inside of Quinn. She ran her hands up the back of Quinn’s thighs before grasping her ass again and urged her to keep moving. With a breathy moan, Quinn lost any semblance of control she’d managed to hold on to and surged forward, beginning to ride Rachel’s mouth entirely on her own.

At first, she was overwhelmed by all the sensations, the feeling of Quinn’s thighs by her head, the way she moved against her, so quickly, so forcefully. It was almost too much, but it wasn’t. Quinn was crying out above her and that spurred Rachel on all the more. She quickly figured out when to breathe, how to help, still using her tongue as much as possible. Quinn was everywhere, all over her, and Rachel loved every second of it. The blonde was frantic as she moved above her, chanting Rachel’s name, and it was only a moment longer before Quinn slammed her hand against the window, shuddering over her.

Rachel sweetly lapped at her still as she floated back down. Panting, Quinn moved back stiffly and finally collapsed on top of Rachel. Actually, she flopped down on top of her.

Glowing dreamily, the brunette reached up and ran her fingers through Quinn’s messy locks.

Did that really just happen?

They laid in silence for a few moments save for the sound of their own breaths evening once more. She didn’t even hear any cars go by. It must be getting late. Rachel dragged her fingers lightly along Quinn, wherever she could reach: the curve of her neck, the outline of her shoulders, along her bare arms, drawing circles on her back, before finally coming back to her hair again and rested there.

Then she heard it.
Quinn was snoring.

She slapped her hand over her eyes and tried to bite back the giggles that threatened to wake her obviously dead asleep girlfriend.

The real world came creeping back in and Rachel was starting to think clearly again. They couldn’t stay there much longer, naked and seemingly abandoned by the side of the road while it was already dark out. With a sigh, she reluctantly found a way to slip out from beneath Quinn, who never stirred.

She managed to find her shirt tangled around Quinn’s foot and after getting it off her, she pulled it over her head and fixed the skirt that looked more like a belt at this point with how bunched it had gotten around her waist. Her underwear was a lost cause for now.

She managed to get out of the back door without face planting into the dirt and shut it as quietly as she could behind her. Then she got back behind the wheel, glanced in the rearview mirror, and smiled. Quinn was still sound asleep, dress askew, hair a disaster, lips red and swollen. Reaching for the Cheerios jacket that was always in the car, she pulled it off the floor, and twisted back to tug it over the blonde. She was amazed at how sweet and angelic Quinn could look one moment when the next she was a wanton firebrand or a fearsome ice queen who made it seem like she could tear you apart from the inside out. That was her Quinn, all three, and nothing less.

Finally, Rachel turned the car back on and carefully pulled them back out onto the highway, praying the wheels wouldn’t spin out, and thankfully was able to head back towards her house again as she had intended before Quinn got them so unbelievably, wonderfully, insanely, sidetracked.

Pulling into the driveway, Rachel was relieved to see that no one seemed to be home. She got out and opened the passenger door, but she had to crawl over Quinn’s body to shake her shoulder softly.

“Baby, you need to wake up. We have to get you inside.”

Groaning lightly at the interruption, the blonde opened her eyes after a long moment and saw Rachel hovering over her. In a second, all trace of sleep disappeared and she was beaming again. She rolled out of the car, letting Rachel pull her dress down so it wasn’t bunched up at the waist anymore.

“Follow me, okay?”

“I will follow you anywhere,” she breathed, grinning widely.
However, her coordination wasn’t what she expected it to be, and Rachel heard a yelp. She looked back to see Quinn sprawled out face first on the driveway.

“Quinn!”

She ran over to help the struggling blonde, who didn’t seem to be too badly hurt. Her hands were a little scratched up, but that was about it.

“Are you okay?”

“Rachel?” she said in a small voice with more clarity than she had in the last couple of hours and looked at her worriedly. “I think I’m a little high.”

“I think so too, Quinn,” she said softly, wrapping her arm around the blonde’s waist and helped her up the steps to the porch. “Don’t worry. It’s going to be all right.”

“It was the brownie, wasn’t it?”

Rachel nodded at her sympathetically before fumbling to get the front door open.

She exhaled loudly. “I told him we wouldn’t be able to run away from the monster…”

And just like that, her slightly sober Quinn vanished. Rachel pushed the blonde strands of hair out of Quinn’s face for her and redoubled her grip on her waist as they went through the now open door, trying to prepare herself to support the other girl’s full weight if necessary.

“We have to go up the stairs now. Be careful. Hold on to me.”

“I am.”

It took far longer than Rachel would have liked to get Quinn into her house and up to her bedroom.
Every minute they struggled meant a minute closer they were to the possibility of her fathers walking in on them.

Finally, she'd managed to undress Quinn and get her into a pair pajama shorts and a tank top that the blonde had left behind. Quinn was safely curled up in Rachel’s bed and had her hands lifted up above her head while she made little beeping sounds that sounded like robot noises…

“I figured it out!” She announced loudly, startling Rachel, who clutched her chest as her heart raced wildly. “Lord Tubbington must have taken my underwear! I'm very mad at him, Rachel. I would never take his cigarettes, why would he take my underwear? Britt-Britt has plenty of her own!”

She went back to those strange noises again, it might have been an attempt at beat boxing this time, and twisted her hands into something like finger puppets or shadow puppets maybe. Was Quinn Fabray really attempting to beat box? Rachel was beginning to think she was the one who was high and not her girlfriend.

She made Quinn promise to stay right where she was, ordering her not to leave the bed under any circumstances, and quickly ran out to move Quinn’s car down the street so her fathers wouldn’t notice it. She ran back to the house as fast as her legs would carry her, dreading what Quinn might have gotten herself into in those few minutes alone. But the blonde was just where she left her. The only difference was that she looked sleepier than before. Rachel sighed in relief.

“See?” Quinn smiled brightly at her. “I didn’t leave the bed, just like you said.”

“I see that. Thank you.”

“Are you happy?”

“As…happy as I can be at the moment,” she replied carefully.

“Good.” She nodded seriously. “I only want to make you happy, my Berry.”

“I know, Quinn.” She smiled and kissed her cheek. “You make me very happy.”
The blonde sighed contentedly and snuggled into one of Rachel’s pillows. “Are you coming to bed now?”

“Soon. I’m going to get ready for bed, okay?”

“Okay!”

“Just call me if you start feeling…sick or have a panic attack or something. I don’t know. Do you feel sick? Should I make sure you’re on your side in case you start throwing up? Will I have to drag you into the shower to wake you up if you pass out? Because I’m not strong enough for that! Should I even let you sleep? What if it’s like a head injury and if I let you fall asleep, you’ll go into a coma? Oh! I should have had Puck or Mike or even Jesse come check on you. They would know better than I do. Who am I kidding? Anyone in the whole school would be better to take care of you than me! I don’t know what I was thinking trying to do this. Maybe I really should call Jesse? He’s been around both recreational and performance enhancing drugs before with Vocal Adrenaline…”

Quinn blinked at her.

“Yes. Right.” Rachel took a deep breath, trying to calm herself down. “I don’t have to do any of that. You’re fine. Everything’s okay. You’ll just sleep and this will all be better in the morning. I’m going to be right there in the bathroom, okay Quinn? Just there.” She pointed to the open door a few feet away.

Quinn simply nodded.

After Rachel finished her nightly routine, rushing her way through it and skipping several less important steps, she turned off the lamp on her bedside table and slipped under the covers next to Quinn. The few lights coming through the window made Quinn's hands visible in the dark. They were still raised in the air and she looked like she was trying airplane imitations like Sam had been doing earlier.

“Rachel, I swear to always give you my underwear from now on,” she said gravely. “You would never let Lord Tubbington steal them like Sammy did.” She looked at her worriedly. “Would you?”

“I’d never let…Brittany’s cat…take your underwear, Quinn,” she promised bewilderedly.
She was at a loss for anything else to say and didn’t have the energy to try to explain what had really happened.

Quinn seemed assuaged by that and curled up against her, muttering something incoherent. She dipped her hand under Rachel’s pajama top traced her fingertips along the bare skin of her stomach, giving the brunette goose bumps. She continued to walk her fingers up and down before she fell over Rachel’s side and was fully wrapped around her, even tossing her leg over the brunette’s for good measure.

Rachel circled her arms around her and hugged Quinn back.

“Not a clingy sleeper?” she laughed softly to herself. “You were so full of it back then. I’ve never even slept half as close to my stuffed animals as you do to me.”

Again Quinn mumbled something that she couldn’t understand, so Rachel simply shook her head and brushed a kiss against her hair.

“God, I hope this is out of your system by tomorrow.”

She was going to kill Noah.
Chapter 28: Aftermath

It was bright in the room when Quinn finally opened her eyes and she groaned. It took her a few moments to get her bearings. Figuring out that she was in Rachel’s room, Quinn sighed and fell back onto the pillow in relief. She really didn’t even remember coming here last night. Her brain was acting so foggy. It was weird. She figured maybe she just didn’t sleep enough.

The bathroom door opened and Rachel stepped out in a towel with wet hair hanging around her shoulders.

“Hey there,” she said softly and sat down next to Quinn on the bed as she used a smaller towel to wring out her hair. “How are you feeling?”

“Fine,” she answered groggily and tugged at the towel wrapped around Rachel with a pout. “You took a shower without me?”

They had first fallen into the habit out of necessity. It would be strange for Rachel’s Dads to hear the shower running twice every morning, so they made sure they always showered together before school on the nights that Quinn stayed over. While it was based on practicality, they would have been doing it even if it wasn’t. It had become such a ritual, Quinn sometimes felt lonely when she would shower at her house.

Quinn leaned up to kiss her good morning, but Rachel made a last minute dodge and she got her cheek instead of her lips. The brunette pretended not to notice and got up to start pawing through her dresser. It was strange and stung of rejection. Why would she do that? Rachel never turned away from kissing her in the morning. Was it her breath? That didn’t usually matter, but Quinn did a quick check while Rachel had her back turned and winced.

Oh, it had to be that.

Quinn groaned softly to herself. Already this morning was off to a bad start.

“My Dads aren’t home,” Rachel explained. “I wanted to let you sleep in. They already left for work, thinking I was right behind them. You should get moving though; we don’t want to be any later for
school than we have to be."

“We’re late for school?” Quinn echoed in befuddlement.

“You needed the rest.”

“Uh, why?”

“Y-you don’t remember?”

“No… What am I supposed to remember? Rachel, how did I even get here? I don’t…”

There were some hazy things floating around in her head, but she could hardly focus enough to catch them, just some strange pictures and feelings. It was like trying to remember a dream that was already fading.

Her mouth was so dry…

“Here,” Rachel handed her a cup of water without Quinn even needing to ask for it. The raspiness in her voice probably gave it away. “Drink a little and then get in the shower. I’ll explain everything.”

Quinn nodded dutifully, drank some water, and lumbered her way out of the bed.

Why did her body feel like she’d just been hit by a truck…twice? She was so sore and everything felt bruised… Even her hands were raw.

“Ow!” she cried when she bumped against Rachel’s bed and pain shot through her leg. She immediately lifted up her shorts and saw a distinct bruise on her thigh, below her buttocks. “When did I get that?”

Rachel peered around her with a sympathetic wrinkle of her nose. “You probably got that in the car.”
“The car? When in the car?” she asked, still bewildered. “Did I get into another accident? Rachel, what is going on here?”

Why was her brain so slow this morning? It was like someone had stuffed it full of cotton.

“Don’t worry about it. Just shower, okay? We’ll talk about it on the way to school.” She squeezed Quinn’s shoulder lightly, but Quinn couldn’t shake the feeling of something being wrong about all this. “I’ll get you some ice. Go.”

Unable to really argue with her, Quinn just shook her head and started peeling off her clothes as she headed for the shower.

She stepped under the warm spray and noted that it soothed her significantly more than it usually did. Did she rejoin the Cheerios and have to undergo Sue’s bootcamp of horror again? That’s what her body felt like, but even weaker.

What was Rachel talking about? She got the bruise the in the car? What car? Her car? Groaning in frustration, Quinn started to wash her hair and focus with everything she had on remembering last night. What was she missing? Rachel said she got the bruise in a car… A car… Her car…?

Rachel heard a screech from upstairs and knew exactly what it meant. She grabbed the bag of ice before running up the stairs to the bathroom and threw back the curtain to see Quinn standing there naked, covering her face with her hands as the spray beat down on her.

“I take it you remembered something?”

“In the backseat of my car, Rachel?” She whimpered, refusing to look up. “Did we really…did that actually happen?”

“Yes, but try not to freak out…”

“What was wrong with me? Was I possessed?”
“No…sort of…not really. Quinn, just finish in here and we’ll talk.”

“How could you let me do that to you?”

“Do what to me?” she asked, genuinely confused.

“T-that.”

“Quinn…I don’t understand-”

“When I was on top of you! Why did you let me do that? Why didn’t you stop me?”

“Why would I?”

“Rachel!” she said exasperatedly.

“Quinn!” she mocked.

Really, she had no idea what was going in her girlfriend's head right now, but Quinn was acting like she was about to have a full on meltdown and that's not what either of them needed right now, especially Rachel.

“Okay,” she said gently, “just finish here first. Everything’s going to be fine. Don’t freak.”

Quinn yanked the curtain shut, without once looking her in the eye, and quickly rinsed off. Rachel stood uncomfortably in the doorway watching as Quinn got out and wrapped a towel around her. By now she was dressed, even though her hair was still wet. She thought it would make it easier if at least one of them was fully clothed...easier for her anyway.

She still wasn’t entirely sure how this was supposed to go. She hadn’t even considered the possibility of Quinn not remembering what happened last night. Wasn’t that only for people who blacked out
after copious amounts of alcohol? Was Quinn drunk last night too?

She truly had no idea what she was doing.

Quinn’s cheeks were burning red, but Rachel just chalked that up to the hot shower. She held out the ice awkwardly and jerked her thumb back towards the bed.

“D-do you wanna lie down and put this on for a bit?”

“I thought we were late for school,” Quinn mumbled, her gaze fixated on the tiled floor.

“We are, but you need it. I also have this.” She held up a little tube which Quinn recognized at once and nodded her consent.

The blonde lay down on her stomach with just the towel around her and Rachel pushed it back enough to put the cloth covered ice onto the bruise. Quinn hissed at the cold contact against her shower-warmed skin, but said nothing.

“I’ll leave it there for a few minutes then put the Arnica on, okay?”

Quinn barely nodded.

Ever since Quinn showed up at her house looking like she’d gotten decked in a street fight after that disastrous Cheerios practice she’d been late to, Rachel had made it a point to have a supply of remedies at hand in her house should Quinn ever need it again. She even made up a separate First Aid kit, just for what Quinn might need. It came in handy seeing how often Quinn managed to get herself banged up. Rachel had to resist all temptation to bedazzle the kit and decorate it with stars and stickers of books and Quinn’s picture. It deeply saddened her that she couldn’t even label it with Quinn’s name in glitter. There was always a chance of her fathers coming across it - yet another example of her hidden life. She really was leading a dual life.

How did they even get this far?

“It was Puck.”
Rachel looked down at the blonde in surprise. So she did remember?

“Everything’s so…weird. It’s like I dreamed it. But all of that happened? The brownie…it was the brownie that Sam got from Puck.”

“Yes. Noah laced it with marijuana and ecstasy.”

Quinn slammed her open palm against the mattress. “That worthless, son-of-a-”

“Don’t,” Rachel warned her.

“I can’t believe him! He’s a moron - I know that - a giant ass of a moron, but for him to be stupid enough to pull this?” Quinn growled. “I’ll kill them both.”

“Both?”

“Sam was the one who gave it to me! Was it supposed to be a joke? Something they hatched up together? ‘Oh, let’s get Quinn high! It’ll be hilarious!’.”

Rachel felt a twinge in her stomach at hearing Sam’s name. The memory of turning around in the choir room and seeing…

No, she wasn’t going to think about it. It hurt too much.

“Sam,” she said carefully, “didn’t know what was in it. The so-called ‘prank’ Puck was trying to pull was meant for him alone. You both were really out of it…”

“Fine!” Quinn snapped. “I’ll just murder Puckerman then.”

“I’ll help,” Rachel muttered.
Quinn quieted down for a few minutes and Rachel didn’t know what else to say, so they just stayed there like that for a little while.

“Rach…” she whispered.

“Yeah?”

“In school…that happened too?” she asked in a small voice. She sounded so vulnerable. “I mean, with Sam. D-did you see?”

“Yes. I saw.”

It was all she could think of to answer and Quinn went silent again.

Rachel didn’t know how much more of this she could handle. She felt like bursting into a rage, letting everything that she so desperately wanted to scream fly out of her mouth right now, but it felt like she was still in shock. So she could only sit there stupidly while her heart raced and her stomach churned horribly.

“I don't want to go to school,” Quinn said flatly.

“We have to.”

“No, we really don't.”

“Yes, we really do.”

“How can I even think of showing my face there after what happened yesterday? I'll die from the humiliation!”

“Maybe that’s what you need!” Rachel shot back with such bitterness that it surprised both of them.
Quinn looked up at her with remorse written all over her face, but Rachel only shook her head. She couldn't take any apologies from Quinn right now. She couldn't take much of anything from Quinn right now actually. Last night was a whirlwind of emotions that she was only now beginning to process. She had just been trying to get from one step to the next, to somehow manage to keep Quinn alive and uninjured for the duration, but she hadn’t stopped to really let all of it sink in.

And now she didn't know what to do. Or what to think. Or what to say. Or how to even be near Quinn without thinking about the display she had been so horrifically subjected to. The logical part of her brain said that it wasn't fair of her to hold Quinn accountable for her actions when she'd been drugged and the actions that followed were not her fault. Yet there was the other completely irrational, emotional, lovesick side of her that was angry...and so hurt.

“I'm going to finish getting ready,” she said curtly. “When I come back, I'll take the ice off and put the Arnica on and then you can get yourself together too.”

Rachel got off the bed and went into the bathroom to dry her hair and apply her makeup. Quinn just laid there without a word.

Somehow that seemed to make it even worse.

Quinn didn't know what to say. She didn't know what to do. Honestly, she was still just having the hardest time believing that all these hazy, insane memories floating around in her head were actual things that happened rather than just pieces of a dream she couldn't escape.

Sam, the Glee club, what she did to Rachel in the car...

This was definitely one of those moments in life when you needed the earth to open up and swallow you whole. Maybe Brittany's time machine was working by now. She could go back to the moment right before she took the brownie from hell out of Sam's hands and instead just smash it into his face.

No, not Sam's face, Puck's face.
This was yet another disastrous life experience that she endured at the hands of Noah Puckerman. She wanted to rip the squirrel-monkey looking mohawk right out of his head.

It was easier to think of that than it was to agonize over what she'd put Rachel through. The stupid Sam thing and the car...oh god...

Quinn buried her face in a pillow to muffle the whimper.

How was she going to make it right with her after that?

It was bad enough that she was humiliated by how she'd acted with such wanton abandon, but the memory of being above Rachel and just grinding away... She'd never felt so vulnerable or embarrassed before - not like this. How could she have behaved that way? She could barely look her girlfriend in the eye. Then there was Rachel, holding her at arm's length now. Quinn didn't even know where to start or how to even begin to apologize for putting her in such an awful situation. It was no wonder Rachel was upset. She probably couldn't bear to think of it either.

The ice was off her thigh and Rachel was back on the bed again. She was sitting right up against Quinn so that their legs were touching, but there was such cold distance from her, they might as well not have even been in the same room.

“Thank you for taking care of me last night,” Quinn said thickly, clearing her throat.

“Apparently I didn't do such a great job seeing as how you still ended up injuring yourself.”

“Rachel, I'm so sor-”

“Don't,” she cut her off harshly. “We're not doing that now.”

“But-”

“I mean it, Quinn. Just don't.”
“W-what do I do then?” she asked helplessly.

She sounded so pathetic. God, she was pathetic.

“You let me put this on you and then you get ready for school. That’s all.”

“I’m surprised you’re even still willing to touch me after what I did to you.”

“Just stop!” she snapped. “I hate this. You don’t get to do this. You don’t get to act all sad and freaked out and wounded kitten-ish. It’s not right. I hate that I can’t even legitimately be upset with you because it wasn’t your fault that Puckerman decided to be even more of a colossal ignoramus by giving Sam doped up brownies that made their way into your system and caused you to act unlike yourself. I hate that I can’t be mad at Sam either. I have an intense need to kick something very hard and do one of those on-stage guitar smashing moves, but I don’t even have the upper body strength to actually break it. I’d just scratch it.”

“Rach-”

“It’s not your fault and it’s not Sam’s fault and I need to go to school right now so I can find someone that is actually at fault and take out all this excess anger on them!”

“Wait,” Quinn sat up suddenly, “that’s why you’re so upset? Because I kissed Sam?”

Rachel gave her a face to rival all “are you fucking kidding me?” faces.

“I-I thought you were mad at me for the car!”

“The car?” she echoed in disbelief. “Are you still high?”

“I kiss Sam all the time, you know it’s nothing. I mean, I cringe to think about it, but other than being gross...?”

Rachel slipped off the bed and onto the floor, pulling her knees to her chest. Quinn followed her
“So...you're embarrassed because you ran us off the road? *That's* why you're doing a laudable imitation of a tomato right now with your face?”

“Yes?” she answered timidly then shook her head. “No. Not completely. Not just that. It was...the other part... Rachel, I'm so sorry. I wasn't thinking, I was out of my mind, I just lost control.”

“Quinn...” she took a deep breath, staring at the carpet intently, “let me just get this straight because I really don't think it's possible to be hearing what it is I'm hearing right now. You don't regret nor care that you were making out with Sam... *in front of me*... but what you really regret, and are absolutely mortified by, is us having sex in the car?”

“Not the sex part!” Quinn whispered exasperatedly and cast her gaze downwards. “Just the...when I was on top of you...”

Rachel slapped her palm to her forehead, desperately trying to push away whatever pain had formed there.

“Just when I thought things couldn’t possibly become more insane...”

“You're *not* upset about that?”

“About you riding my face?” she replied bluntly. “*No*, Quinn. Having sex in a new position with my girlfriend actually does not riddle me with shame and self-loathing. Seeing my girlfriend tonguing another guy, however, yes, that would be something to upset me!”

“Oh.”

“OH?”

Quinn was upset about sex with her.
Quinn was not upset about kissing Sam. In front of her.

Rachel wanted to be hurt, wanted to be furious, wanted to have some kind of concrete emotion to latch onto, but it was all just such a mess that she couldn't do anything but sit there and stare at the floor.

Was it a good thing that Quinn thought so little of her indiscretion with Sam? Maybe it meant that she thought so little of the act that it didn't seem as hurtful as it looked? Maybe she didn't even feel like it was cheating because it was so insignificant to her.

Or was it an indication of a far deeper issue? That maybe Quinn didn't care because she didn't care about hurting her. That Rachel had let this go on for so long that Quinn felt safe doing whatever she wanted to her because she would let it happen, forgive her, and still be with her.

Now Rachel really did want to throw up.

“I know you said I can't apologize right now, but Rach...I'm so sorry about what I did to you. Please.”

“What are you talking about?” she asked wearily.

“T-the way I just used you...” her voice trembled. “I was so out of control. I never meant to make you feel like that or to do that to you. I wouldn't have...”

She put her face in her hands.

Against all other emotions that were at war inside of her, Rachel couldn't help but feel the tug at her heart to see Quinn so distraught.

“You didn't do anything I didn't want you to, if that's what you're thinking.”

The blonde couldn't face her, but Rachel saw how her body tensed in response.
“Oh, Quinn! You really do think that? You think you forced yourself on me?”

“How could you have actually wanted me to...”

Rachel pushed her arms away and took hold of Quinn's face so that she would finally meet her eyes.

“I know it's probably hazy for you and you don't remember it that well, but Quinn...I encouraged it. I wanted it. And it was really, really good.”

The blonde's eyes widened and Rachel laughed softly.

“I loved having you like that, the way you felt above me, how I saw you move, your thighs around my head...” Her voice dropped to a husky whisper, “the way I drove you so wild...you called my name over and over...”

Quinn's parted her mouth and she wet her lips, her breathing growing more and more unsteady by the second.

“Next time,” Rachel murmured, looking up through her lashes, “it's my turn.”

“Yeah?” she asked hoarsely.

“Yeah.”

“I didn't freak you out?”

“You being on drugs freaked me out. The other part? Not even close.”

Quinn sighed. “I really want to kiss you right now.”

Rachel's stomach had butterflies at the mere thought, her lips were tingling as if they were already
touching, just like it was every time Quinn would say that, but there were too many things for her just to be able to feel the butterflies this once. So Rachel dropped her hands.

“I-I can't. I'm still... I can't.”

“Because of Sam?”

Rachel didn't answer. She didn't have to. Quinn groaned, reached back to yank a blanket off of the bed, and pulled it over her head. If Rachel hadn't been so completely out of sorts, she would have found it ridiculously adorable. As it was, it just confused her even more.

“Can I take it back?” she asked from underneath the blanket.

“No.”

“Does it count that I want to take it back?”

“Maybe,” Rachel sniffed.

“You should just leave me in a ditch somewhere.”

“I should.”

“You could sing a song about ditches for Nationals. It would be empowering and emotionally provocative.”

“You ARE still high!” Rachel cried in horror.

Quinn huffed and pulled the blanket off, messing her hair up even more in the process.

“I am not high.”
“You just told me to sing a song about a ditch that I apparently need to leave you in.”

“Your point?”

Rachel narrowed her eyes at her. She knew what Quinn was doing and, despite her best intentions, it was working.

Damn her.

“Get back on the bed, Fabray.”

Quinn's eyebrow shot up curiously, but she did just as she was told. Rachel rolled her eyes and shoved her lightly so that she would lie down on her stomach again.

Rachel's touch was light as a feather as she smoothed the gel over the bruise on Quinn's thigh. The blonde sighed appreciatively and snuggled into the pillow as her girlfriend's hands worked their healing magic with the modern day miracle of ointments. Rachel's finger tips drifted down and over her leg, before switching to the other and worked her way back up. She was searching for any other sign of bruising, even the smallest little dot. Nothing would go untreated by her loving hands.

Quinn's response was so instinctive, she hardly realized at all that she had opened her legs even more to give Rachel better access that she didn't need for this particular task.

“Are you actually trying to make Arnica sexy?” she said in disbelief, cursing her body for being so responsive to Rachel's touch.

Rachel snorted and rubbed in some more of the gel.

“Um, no, actually, I wasn’t,” she replied. “Is this turning you on, Quinn?”

The blonde stuffed her face into a pillow. “You always turn me on,” she mumbled in embarrassment.
Rachel hesitated only for a moment before crawling forward and nipped at Quinn's throat affectionately. Then she kissed her cheek and urged her with a gentle whisper to get dressed.

It wasn't exactly resolved, but it wasn't the same awful mess it was before either.

So with that, they made their way to school.

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Jacob did end up posting on his blog last night as Santana predicted, but it didn’t have much of an impact on the rumor mill.

**LOST & FOUND: FORMER CHEERIOS CAPTAIN’S PANTIES DISCOVERED IN THE HALLS OF MCKINLEY.**

Unfortunately, he had no willing witnesses - Santana and Brittany claimed to have no idea what he was talking about - and no evidence, so all that really happened were a few snickers and Sam got a lot of pats on the back that day from the guys.

“It’s still all blurry,” she whispered to Sam as they walked through the halls to class. “H-how… Sam, how the hell did my underwear end up on the floor? I remember…well, do you remember?”

He blushed furiously and started mumbling so low; Quinn couldn’t make a word out.

“Come on!” She smacked his shoulder. “Just tell me!”

“You don’t remember?”

“I think I do?”

“So we don’t have to talk about it then!” he squeaked.
He looked exactly like Quinn felt, like he wanted to dig a hole and jump in it or find a cave and never come out again.

“I have to be sure!” she insisted. “We were kissing - right in front of Rachel. I don’t…I don’t know what to do.”

“We didn’t do anything else.”

“Are you positive?”

“Yes!”

“Then…”

He blew out a huge breath, his cheeks growing even redder.

“You…” he muttered something inaudibly, “it was something about Rachel and ‘easier access’ so you just took them off and gave them to me. I was supposed to keep them safe or whatever.”

Quinn put her head in her hands. “I cannot believe this is happening… Wait!” She snapped up. “If I gave them to you, then why the hell were they on the floor?”

“I don’t know!” he cried. “It's not like I was in my right mind either, Quinn! I think I tried to put them in my pocket or something, but I guess I missed…”

“That’s great,” she said bitterly. “That’s just really fan-freaking-tastic. I take off my underwear in the middle of the hallway, where everyone probably saw, and now I’m… I have to make it right with Rachel! I hate you!”

“It’s not my fault you started getting naked in public for your girlfriend!”
“You gave me that brownie from hell!”

“How was I supposed to know Puck put that stuff in it?” he exclaimed.

She held a hand up in front of his face. “Don’t you dare talk to me for the rest of the day.”

“Hey! You are so not blaming me for this! I’m a victim here too.”

“Then you better kick Puckerman’s ass before I do!” she snapped and stormed off.

He groaned and started knocking his forehead against the lockers.

Quinn was beyond mortified when Santana pulled out said underwear in the courtyard at lunch and stuffed it into Quinn’s bag without anyone but the two of them seeing.

“Taking your teen mom sluttiness to new levels? I’m mildly impressed.”

“Shut up,” she muttered, cheeks flaming.

“Hey! Britts and me saved your ass by getting them back from that pervert. He even tried to bite me!”

Quinn sighed and put her head down on the picnic table. “Thank you,” she mumbled.

“That’s better!” Santana patted her on the back. “So how was your ’trip’? To the moon and back?” she teased.

“It wasn’t exactly Black Swan levels…” she grumbled, “but closer than you’d think.”
“Oh, I know,” she said innocuously. “We had a little chat on the phone last night. Don’t you remember?”

“We did?”

“Of course! You told me that...” she pursed her lips and pretended to think hard, “you were riding Berry in the backseat of your car. That you made her pull off the road cause you were too horny to wait. That she tasted really good. And that-”

“Oh GOD!” Quinn cried, the memory flashing back, and she covered her mouth in horror. “STOP IT! Why, why, why would you do that to me?”

Santana looked at her oddly, as if the answer was obvious. “Because...I can?”

“Some friend you are.”

“One of the very best! But if you disagree, then fine. Jewfro can take whatever he wants next time. Maybe I’ll even give him some stuff myself...”

“This is so bad,” she whined.

Santana rolled her eyes. “Calm down, blondie; it’s not the end of the world. No one cares.”

“Rachel does!”

“About what?” she scoffed. “From those revolting tidbits I got on the phone last night, you guys were doing just fine for yourselves.”

“I was making out with Sam in front of her.”

“While you were on some serious shit!” Santana countered. “Besides, you forgot he ever existed the
moment you saw her anyway.”

“It’s still…”

“The hobbit will deal. You guys have kissed in front of her before. All part of your little act.”

“Not like that.”

“Did it mean anything to you, Q?”

“No! Of course not.”

“Then just make sure Berry knows that. You’re fine.”

Quinn watched her for a moment before relenting. “You’re right. I’ll just…have to make it up to her somehow.”

“See? What I’m here for. Santy’s got all the answers.”

“Please.” Quinn narrowed her eyes. “Get over yourself. Rachel told me about the spat you had yesterday with Brittany over Sam.”

Santana bristled. “It was nothing.”

“You flipped out on her in front of the whole Glee club.”

“I did not! It was just a misunderstanding. No big.”

“What happened?”
She rolled her eyes. “It was nothing, really. Brittany just…didn’t understand that I wanted all of the rules to change.”

“Rules?”

“We…” she sighed, “we had a way of doing things before I…admitted my feelings. So Brittany just didn’t understand that when I said I wanted us to date that meant the other stuff we did sometimes wasn’t going to happen anymore.”

“I see.”

“Like I said, it was nothing. I told her why I got pissed and she felt bad about it. She thought it was something I would want to do since…” she trailed off.

“…That’s what you used to ask her to do,” Quinn finished for her. “Use guys as an excuse to hook up with each other.”

“We’re done talking about this,” Santana snarled.

She held her hands up in surrender. “Fine by me.”

“So…” the Latina rapped her fingernails on the table, “wanna tell me more about your sexy car escapades?”

Quinn grabbed her things and stalked off, leaving behind a cackling Santana.

“Hi, Quinn!” Brittany chirped as she walked past. “Did you get your panties back?”

She moved faster.
Puck was at the end of the hall with a few of his football buddies when he saw a blonde bull charging towards him in a rage and knew what he was in for.

“PUCKETMAN!”

“Quinn, babe, I swear, I didn’t mean for- OOF!”

She kneed him directly in the groin.

The boys groaned sympathetically with a few muttering “damn, girl!” Puck whimpered and fell to his knees before face planting on the floor.

“It was either that or tell Figgins and get you expelled,” Quinn said calmly, looking down at him.

“Next time,” he gasped in an unusually high voice, “just - have me - expelled.”

“NEXT TIME?”

For that, he got smacked with her books upside the head before Quinn stalked away.

“Guys…” he groaned from the floor, hand still between his legs, “don’t ever give a girl a brownie.”

Quinn took a deep breath before walking into the choir room for Glee that afternoon. She spent at least ten minutes standing outside the door listening to Rachel rip Puck to shreds and threaten to, more than once, tell his Nana about what he did. That turned Puck into a whiny, whimpering mess of a boy, begging her to do anything except tell his Nana. Quinn was content to just let Rachel have her piece since she'd already gotten hers earlier. Finally, Mr. Schuester walked in and Rachel was forced to end her rant, but by then she'd managed to say everything she wanted to anyway.
When she entered the room, Puck looked like death warmed over, pale and clammy, while Rachel's cheeks were still inflamed. She was perched on a chair at the top of the risers, her arms crossed fiercely, as she stared down at him with her 'very displeased' face. Quinn also noticed that Puck winced every time he shifted in his seat. That gave her even more satisfaction.

She took her place next to Rachel and Sam sat directly in front of them.

“Hey,” she whispered, “I want to talk later. We haven't really...”

Rachel nodded, though she was watching their teacher. “I know. We'll talk.”

“Okay.”

Quinn sighed and settled back in her seat. Rachel didn't seem too upset with her anymore. Instead, things just felt a little off. They weren't fighting, but they weren't not fighting either. Whatever it was they were locked in, Quinn didn't like it, and she was determined to find some way to put this whole ridiculous disaster behind them.

Then Jesse St. James walked in.

Apparently the worst wasn't over yet.

“New Directions! I would like to introduce you to our new show choir consultant, Jesse St. James!”

Rachel was the only one who applauded happily. Quinn stared at her in disbelief.

“Did you know about this?” she hissed.

The brunette was unfazed. “Jesse called me yesterday to let me know he had a meeting with Mr. Schue about us being his first clients and I thought it was a brilliant idea. I was going to tell you, but circumstances got in the way...”

Quinn huffed and turned back to the grinning teen at the front of the room.
“I don't trust this guy,” Finn said. “How do we know he's not going to trick us into doing something stupid so his Alma Mater wins?”

“I don't think I need to do much tricking to get you to do something stupid, Finn,” he replied easily.

Quinn snickered along with a few others, while the rest just tried not to let it show just how true they knew it was.

“Jesse is just a consultant,” Mr. Schue explained, trying to defuse the situation. “I still make all the calls.”

“Like that's any better,” Quinn said under her breath and Rachel shrugged faintly in agreement.

“I have all the confidence in the world in you guys. I just think we could use all the help we can get.”

Quinn hated that he was right.

“Because,” he pointed at the board that had the word Nationals written on it, “this is it. We've been working so hard for two years for this moment and that moment is finally here. Now, I was talking with Jesse and he agreed that we should continue with our successful trend of doing original songs for the competition. I was thinking of doing one group number and one duet.”

“Rachel and I should sing a duet!” Finn jumped in eagerly. “We killed it last year at Regionals with 'Faithfully'.”

“Yeah, killed us,” Quinn replied dryly with a roll of her eyes. “We lost.”

“May I?” Jesse asked and Mr. Schuester waved him forward to take the floor. “I agree that Rachel should sing lead, but Finn, I think it's best if you sit this one out.”

Finn was about to argue, but Jesse didn't give him a chance.
“Fact is, most of the other guys in here are better singers, and Mike Chang, who can't even sing, can at least dance. You kind of sing and dance like a zombie that has to poop.”

Quinn didn't need to laugh at that one, the rest of the Glee club did it for her. Even Rachel was covering her mouth to stifle the giggles.

All right, St. James. You score points for that one.

"Y-you see?" Finn cried, affronted, and looked around frantically at all the snickering Glee members. "You see what I'm talking about? The guy's a jerk!"

"Jesse, maybe you could, uh, be a little bit gentler with your advice," Mr. Schuester suggested.

"Gentle?" he echoed.

"Yes."

"I'm sorry. I didn't realize that we were training for the 'Good Try!' ribbon at Nationals. I thought we were in it to win the whole damn thing!"

Rachel was nodding along with Jesse the whole time and for some reason, that really didn't sit well with Quinn. She didn't like how her girlfriend was focusing so intently on the boy, hanging on his every word like he was a show choir savior sent from Heaven.

"And there's only one way we can do that."

"Poison darts?" Brittany suggested.

"The Vocal Adrenaline strategy is simple: identify your best performer and build the entire performance around them."

Already Quinn could see several heads shaking in disapproval, including Sam's.
“So what does everyone else do?” Mercedes asked.

“And who's our star performer?” Puck added.

“Wait, hold up.” Sam waved his hand. “I get what you're saying, dude, but that's not how it works here and I don't think we want it to anyway.”

He looked around the room for support and got several murmurs of agreement.

“We're a team. I'm not saying we shouldn't showcase the best. Look at what we did at Regionals with Rachel's performance and the song she wrote with Quinn, but we have some major talent here that doesn't deserve to be thrown aside to sing back up for one person. You can deny it all you want, but when you said best performer, you were thinking of Rachel.”

Jesse shrugged. “I don't need to deny anything. As I said before, I think Rachel should sing lead. She's the best you have.”

Rachel beamed and Quinn's mood grew darker.

“That's so messed up! You're just saying that 'cause you used to date her and now you're just trying to woo her back or something,” Mercedes said heatedly. “As a show choir consultant you're supposed to be impartial. You haven't given anyone else here a chance. Rachel Berry isn't the only star in this club, unlike what she may believe...” She glared at Rachel pointedly, who returned it with one of her own.

Sam turned around to look at Rachel. “No offense, but this is New Directions, not The Rachel Berry Show. As good as you—

“I believe 'incandescently mind blowing' would be a more accurate description of my abilities.”

He gave her a look, but she refused to be chastised, raising her chin defiantly.

“...as you are, we have other people here who deserve a chance to shine. It's how we work best. We won Sectionals with Santana's solo and my duet with Quinn.” Sam turned back to Jesse. “There are people here that have proven themselves to be more than shadows swaying in the background.”

“I agree.” Rachel nodded. “This is not just about me, but all of us. I think—”

“Hold up!” Santana interjected. “I'm sorry, could you repeat that? I was distracted by the revolting smell wafting over here from the teen giant who apparently has forgotten what water and soap looks like and tried to cover it up with Axe for Douchebags.”
Finn looked around in confusion.

“But did I actually just hear Rachel Berry admit that the world doesn't revolve around her?”

Rachel rolled her eyes. “Yes, you did.”

Quinn couldn't help the proud smile and she ducked her head to make it less noticeable.

“I think this is a sign of the apocalypse,” Mercedes said.

“That said,” Rachel continued, “it still doesn't change the fact that I'm significantly more talented than all of you. Not to mention our best and really only chance of winning Nationals.”

“And she's baaaaack,” Kurt sang teasingly.

Everyone, except Quinn who was smothering her giggles, groaned in unison. Santana was muttering foul things under her breath until Brittany started rubbing her shoulders and she forgot all about it.

Rachel ignored them. “Look, Sam's right, Jesse. Vocal Adrenaline is amazing, but if we want to beat them, we have to be better, not just follow their lead.”

The boy frowned. “Then what do you suggest?”

“Vocal Adrenaline is known for how flawlessly their performances are woven together. It's easy to do when the focus is on just one person. If we can make that same kind of impact utilizing several voices, instead of just one, I think that's our best chance to beat them.”

“So you want to focus on a core group of voices instead of just a duet and a group number?”

“Yes. I think we need to make it more complicated than that. Complicated, but appearing harmoniously, effortlessly flawless. Perhaps we could keep the duet, I could sing with Sam...”

Finn mumbled something that no one understood under his breath, but could easily guess.

“...but then the group number could be a very different style than what we usually do.”

“And how do we decide who gets to be showcased and who doesn't?” Santana snapped. “He's already admitted to favoring Berry!”

“We'll hold auditions. That's the fair way,” Mr. Schuester said.

Jesse nodded somewhat reluctantly. “Whoever thinks they have the vocal strength to get us through should audition.” He focused again on the brunette. “You're taking a big risk here, Rachel. I know the formula that's been successful time and again, but you're turning it down for something that we don't have the slightest clue will work or not.”

“You don't win without taking risks,” she replied confidently.

Sam nodded enthusiastically and grinned proudly at her.

“Who's going to judge these auditions?” Finn asked, staring at Jesse.

“Myself and Mr. Schuester, of course.”
“I'll post a sign-up sheet,” their teacher said.

“Fellow Glee clubbers,” Rachel clasped her hands tightly, “I understand your wariness about all of this, but I promise you, if there's nothing else you all know about Jesse - it's that he has an insatiable thirst for victory. He wants us to win so he'll do whatever it takes to get us there. *No favorites.*” She directed the last sentence at Mercedes who made a face.

"Can't argue with that,” Quinn said.

"You actually think he's the right person to be involved in making this kind of decision?” Tina asked.

“Like Rachel said, we've seen it firsthand. Jesse will stop at nothing to win.”

As soon as she said it, the uneasiness she felt before reappeared, but this time in the form of a sickening feeling of dread in her stomach.

“He's still a jerk!”

“I don't know about this.”

“Are you sure we can't just use poison darts? Is it, like, in the rule-book or something?”

Quinn tuned out the Glee club squabbling back and forth. Her eyes were locked on Jesse St. James as he stood in front of the classroom with his dazzling smile.
"So..."
"So..."

Rachel rocked back and forth on her heels as she wrung her hands nervously. They were on the stage in the auditorium, but there was nowhere to sit because the A/V club had cleared away everything for one of their projects. So the two girls were left to just stand there uncomfortably in front of each other.

"Are you really okay with Jesse helping us? You were kind of trying to burn holes in his head with your death glare for a while."

"I'm fine," she replied curtly. "He's talented. We need the help anyway."

"Oh. Good!" Rachel chirped just a little too brightly. "G-great even."

"Plus he totally smashed Finn into the floor...which was awesome."

Rachel laughed. "I knew you were going to say that."

"It's true!"

An awkward moment of silence fell between them. Rachel scuffed the floor lightly with the toe of her shoe while Quinn just kept her hands clasped in front of her.

"So you wanted to talk..."

"Yes. Talk."

"So talk."

She took a deep breath. "What happened with Sam was wrong. I was high and out of my mind, but on some level, it was still me. I can't explain it to you any more than it didn't feel like the wrong thing to do at the time. It was just Sam, and Sam was sad, and I, in my twisted state, thought it was only natural to want him to feel better, that I was being a good friend."

"Okay..." Rachel said warily.

"Even though it meant absolutely nothing to me, that I felt nothing, it was still wrong and I hurt you."

"Yes, you did." She nodded.

"I can't take it back, since you won't let me." She quirked a smile which Rachel rolled her eyes at. "But I can promise you something."

"The moon?"

"I'll work up to that."

"A starring role on Broadway?"

"You don't need me to promise you that; it's already destined."
Rachel smiled shyly.

"I can promise to never kiss him again."

The brunette watched her for a moment. "You're going to break up with Sam?" she asked tremulously.

Quinn winced. "No...I can't. It's still...I-I can't." She shook her head helplessly. "But I can swear to you that my lips will never go near his again! We barely do it anyway, but I'll make it so it never happens again."

Rachel wasn't surprised, but the disappointment stung all the same. It was a dull aching pain by now, a chronic condition that she lived with on a daily basis.

She sighed and turned her back as she took a few steps away. Maybe this wouldn't be as hard if she wasn't looking at her.

"If you're dating him, how are you not going to kiss him?"

"I don't do PDA. Besides, it's not like anyone's going to notice Sam and I not making out under the bleachers when we never did that to begin with."

Rachel looked at Quinn over her shoulder curiously.

"You're really never going to kiss him again? Not even so much as a-a peck?"

"Not even a peck," she assured her. "Barring some life threatening situation where it means someone dies if I don't kiss Sam Evans, then yes. Never."

"Just let them die," she sniffed.

"What if it's you?" Quinn countered.

"Oh, right." She frowned and turned around again to face her completely. "Okay. On the off-chance that my life or yours hangs in the balance, then that's your 'get out of jail free' card."

Quinn tilted her head thoughtfully, peering at Rachel. "You're going to spend the rest of the week thinking up scenarios where that could actually happen, aren't you?"

"That's just silly," she said, frowning. "I'm not that crazy, Quinn!"

"You so are! You've probably even thought of three by now!"

Rachel glared at her but Quinn only stared back knowingly until she finally relented with a huff.

"I hate that you know me that well," she grumbled.

The blonde grinned victoriously.

"Are you serious about this?" Rachel asked again, just to be sure, just to hear it one more time.

"Never?"

"Never. My lips are yours and only yours, Miss Rachel Berry."

She ducked her head with a blush. "I like the sound of that."
"Does that help make it better?"

Rachel thought about it. "A little bit."

The blonde took a deep breath, allowing a tremulous smile. "Okay."

It wasn't much - they both knew that - but it was something. And right now? They really needed that something.

"Quinn?"

"Hm?"

"I'd very much like to have that kiss now. You know, the one we didn't have this morning?"

"Thank God." She exhaled in relief and closed the distance between them in a heartbeat. "I've been dying to do this all day."

Rachel was still smiling long after Quinn's lips met hers.

She didn't get a chance to tell Rachel until later that day because they'd gotten distracted, but Quinn had also bought tickets for them to see Idina Menzel perform on tour in Cleveland. *Wicked* was one of Rachel's favorite musicals and the reaction she got when she finally told her made the loss of two month's allowance more than worth it. She wanted to see Rachel smile like that every day and prayed that she would be able to make that happen.

She definitely wasn't going to mention how scarily similar Idina Menzel and Shelby Corcoran looked. They could have been twins separated at birth.

That was just too weird.

It was one of those rare nights when Judy insisted on 'quality time' and Rachel's fathers coincidentally had her tied up with family obligations as well and the girls were forced to forgo their usual nightly meetings. Rachel didn't help by whispering into the phone all the things she would have wanted to do to Quinn had she been there. The blonde almost tossed her phone out the window out of pure sexual frustration, but Rachel was too good to resist. So she endured the pain. Instead of taking an ice cold shower as she typically would, she pushed herself to keep practicing what Rachel had asked of her those months ago. It still wasn't the easiest thing in the world for Quinn to adjust to, but she was doing better. Having Rachel talk like that certainly made the transition simpler, so instead of heading into the shower, Quinn let her hand slip between her legs. It wasn't an adequate substitute by any means, but it helped a little.

She'd have to tell Rachel about it tomorrow.

Quinn woke up the next morning in absolute misery for reasons having nothing to do with the lonely night without her girlfriend. Her Mom tried to talk her out of school, but Quinn refused. She would just have to suck it up and get through the day as best she could. That was the mantra she repeated over and over in her head as she trudged into McKinley. She was walking towards her locker when Sam called out to her from behind. Quinn slowed down for him, but didn't stop.

"Hey-ho, it's off to...whoa." Sam's cheery morning greeting stopped dead in its tracks when he saw her face. "You don't look so good."

"Thanks," she replied dryly, glaring at him. "Really. Just what every girl wants to hear."
"I-I just meant you look like you don't feel well," he said worriedly.

"I'm fine. Just a little under the weather, I guess. It's nothing. It'll pass."

He held a hand up to her forehead and Quinn swatted him away.

"You have a fever!"

"I do not! I'm fine. Just go away already," she grumbled.

"Why didn't you just stay home if you weren't feeling well? Get some rest?"

Quinn sighed as she opened her locker. "I can't miss Glee today. We're supposed to officially start writing for Nationals. Rachel's really excited; she talked for hours about it on the phone last night. She wants me there so we can write another song together. I don't want to let her down."

"She would understand you missing it if you're sick, Quinn," he said firmly.

"I'm not sick!" she snapped. "And don't you dare say a word to her about it. I'm fine."

"But you really don't look- UGH!"

Quinn slammed her books into his stomach and he doubled over in pain, wheezing from the impact. Without another word, she just walked off to class as the bell rang.

Someone patted Sam on the back lightly and when he glanced up, it was Brittany giving him a sympathetic look.

"Quinn's never been a very happy sick person. She gets kind of mean."

"So I've just discovered..."

Santana came storming by and whisked her girlfriend away by the arm without giving Sam so much as a glance.

She still hadn't forgiven him for that brownie disaster.

Quinn made it through her first few classes by sheer determination, which was a hell of a lot considering she had to spend an entire period convincing Rachel she wasn't sick, but by the time Glee rolled around she couldn't keep it together anymore. She felt, and probably looked, like death. The second she dragged herself into the choir room she barely managed to make her way over to Rachel before she collapsed in the chair next to her and put her head in the girl's lap.

Rachel combed her fingers through Quinn's hair and gazed down at her with a sympathetic look, but her vibe really said "I told you so."

"You need to go to the nurse, Quinn."

"No," she said stubbornly. "I just need a minute."

"Oh, Quinn," Tina said when she walked in and saw her lying there. "Are you coming down with something? The flu's been going around."

"I don't have the flu!"
"No, you just look ten times whiter than your usual pasty self," Santana snorted.

"You're kind of like one of those thingies we put gross stuff in to look at under a microscope in Chem class," Brittany said.

"A petri dish," Santana supplied for her.

"Yeah! A walking petri dish."

"A disease-infested human being that's going to get the rest of us sick. Get out of the room, Fabray!"

"Stop it!" Rachel scolded Santana sternly, still running her fingers through Quinn's hair.

Quinn wasn't listening to them; all she could focus on was the comforting feeling of Rachel's hands in her hair. It felt so good, she wished they were in a bed where Rachel would just do that for hours. Instead she had to settle for the uncomfortable chairs.

Sam walked in with a reproving expression when he saw Quinn in Rachel's lap. He sighed and knelt down in front of her.

"It's gotten worse?"

Quinn just squeezed her eyes shut and refused to answer.

"She absolutely refuses to admit she's sick," Rachel said and no one missed the pointedness of her tone.

"Quinn..."

"I'll be fine!" she tried again, but her resolve was wavering.

The rest of the Glee club was coming in now, all of them witness to Operation: Make Sick Quinn Go Home.

"Damn, Quinn," Puck said. "You look like hell. What'd you catch?"

"You're no good to anyone like this," Sam chided her. "Just go home and get into bed."

"Before you bring the whole school down with you!" Santana added.

"Quinn," Rachel leaned down to whisper in her ear, "please stop trying to deny it. I'm really worried about you. You have a fever and you're shaking." She rubbed Quinn's arm reassuringly. "Let me take you to the nurse."

"Do what she says," Sam added.

"Don't order me around," she said weakly.

He rolled his eyes and Rachel sighed exasperatedly.

"Okay, okay." She really didn't have the strength to fight them anymore and at this point, she didn't want to. She wanted her bed and to be able to sleep through this thing until she felt better, like a bear in hibernation. "I give. Just take me to the nurse's office."

Sam helped her stand, supporting her weight. Without hesitation, he gave her over to Rachel as soon as she was steady, putting Quinn's arm round the other girl's shoulder. Rachel took her waist and the
two of them walked out slowly.

Sam was barely back in his seat before Finn was muttering angrily under his breath.

"Unbelievable!"

Sam tried to ignore it at first, but Finn kept on grumbling. So he finally had to turn around.

"All right, Hudson," he said tiredly. "What's your problem now?"

Finn sat right up in his seat. "Same problem as always, dude. The way you treat Quinn!"

Sam scoffed. "What do you care?"

"I care 'cause she's so sick she can barely stand, but you can't even bother to walk her to the nurse's office? Rachel has to do it?"

"You know, it really says something about you that the only time you ever care about either one of those girls is when they're not dating you. When are you going to let this go? You're seriously acting like a jackass."

"Says the guy who can't be bothered to help his sick girlfriend!"

Fuming, Sam turned around to fire back, but Santana beat him to it.

"Oh, for God's sake, shut up already, Finnoyance. Quinn wanted Berry to take her because that crazy bearded she-dwarf would browbeat the nurse into letting her stay and keep Q company, unlike Sam who would get his ass kicked out. Then she'd be sick and alone."

Finn stared at her in confusion.

"Don't go shoving your freakishly large potato head into things that don't concern you and especially when it makes you the biggest damn hypocrite." She settled back in her chair, folding her arms across her chest.

"Wha- This has nothing to do with you, Santana!"

"Look, everyone knows you've got the award for the world's douchiest boyfriend in the bag so excuse me if I don't appreciate you starting in on guppy mouth here just because he's a better guy than you will ever be."

Sam threw her an appreciative nod and Mr. Schuester walked in just then to start the lesson. It took all of sixty seconds before Finn exploded completely and stormed out without a word. Santana couldn't have looked more pleased with herself.

After futilely attempting to call the boy back, Mr. Schuester came in again and looked around the room.

"What just happened with Finn?"

The Latina shrugged. "Truth blows, Mr. Schue."

Quinn sighed when the now-warm cloth disappeared and a pleasantly cooler one replaced it. She felt the body pressing against her side while familiar fingers caressed her cheek.
"Find out this week's assignment?"

"Yes," Rachel replied softly. "Mr. Schue was inspired by Sam's use of the classic hit by the Jackson Five a few weeks ago and asked us all to come up with songs from the ’50s and update them to reach a modern audience. The catch is, we can't do any mashups. They're remixes, essentially. We can change the instruments, the lyrics, the beat, but have to remain true to the feeling and intention of the song. It's actually a wonderfully creative exercise to help the group think about songwriting for Nationals. Particularly since everyone, including myself, has a tragic case of writer's block…"

"Sounds fun," she mumbled, blinking as she tried to focus in on the brunette hovering above her. It made her dizzy though and she had to stop before her stomach made good on its threat and emptied itself.

Rachel sighed and gently brushed Quinn's hair out of her eyes. "Why don't you let me take you home, baby?"

"T-they called my mom," she said uncomfortably. "She'll be here soon."

"Oh, okay." She took her clammy hand and held it in her lap. "I'll just wait with you then."

"Actually…" Quinn croaked, not able to look her in the eye, "I'll be fine; you don't need to wait. It's…it's better if she doesn't see you."

Rachel tried not to let it show just how much that hurt. But Quinn knew anyway.

It hurt just having to say it; she couldn't imagine what it would be like to have to hear it.

Unfortunately, it was always better than the alternative.

Always.

"All right," Rachel said thickly, releasing her hand, and standing up awkwardly. "I should just go now, I guess. F-feel better, Quinn."

"I'll-I'll call you," she tried lamely, but Rachel was already gone.

Quinn turned on her side to face the wall as the tears slipped silently down her cheeks.

She cursed her life for being so cruel.

There was a soft knock at the door that roused Quinn from her restless slumber. She blinked several times before she was able to clearly see the blonde boy standing by her bed with Tupperware in his hands.

"I let myself in," Sam said with a smile and held up the container. "Mom's homemade chicken noodle soup. She told me to tell you she hopes you get better soon."

"I hope so too," she croaked and turned onto her back. "Say thanks for me."

"Do you want me to heat some up for you?"

Quinn shook her head, so he just set it down on top of her dresser.

"Shouldn't you be in school?"
It was dark in her room, but she could still see strong sunlight pouring out from the corners of her curtains.

"Snuck out during lunch. I wanted to check up on you, make sure you haven't ended up in the hospital or anything."

Quinn scoffed. "Are you taking lessons in melodrama from Rachel?"

"What else is a guy to think when you won't answer your phone?" he said pointedly.

"I'm sick, you idiot," she tossed back groggily. "I don't exactly feel up for a casual chat on my cell when all I want to do is die in peace."

"Looks like I'm not the only one taking lessons in melodrama..."

Quinn sighed. "Thank you for coming over. It's sweet."

"It's been two days. Have you seen a doctor?"

"Yeah," she said tiredly and shifted onto her side again as Sam sat down on the edge of the bed. "It's the flu after all. I'll be out for the rest of the week."

"Is phone-phobia one of the symptoms of the flu?"

"Are you really that insulted that I haven't called you?"

He gave her a look. "Not me."

Quinn shut her eyes tightly. She knew what he was talking about. "I try; I swear I do. But every time I go to make the call, I don't see the point. It's just me telling her that I'm still sick and that she's not allowed to do anything. Isn't that worse somehow?"

"What do you think she's going to do? Try to come up with a cure? Hold a town-wide vigil for you? Call in a team of doctors from around the world to treat you? She just wants to talk to you, see how you're feeling."

"No," Quinn croaked. "That's not what she wants. I know her. Rachel wants to do what you just did so easily. Stop by, let yourself in, bring me chicken soup, try – pointlessly – to cheer me out of my misery. It's what I would want to do in her place. She'd even tell me I don't look as bad as I think I do."

"Uh, hate to burst that balloon, but you do look like total crap. She'd be lying."

Quinn glowered at him. "Worst fake-boyfriend ever."

"One that tells the truth. I should get credit for that."

"You don't."

He gazed at her for a minute before lowering his head. "Quinn, if your Mom's at work, why not just let her come over for a few minutes?"

"NO!" she said so vehemently, she startled him.

It was too much for her and kicked off a violent coughing fit. Sam reached for the water on her bedside table and helped her sip some as it subsided. She fell back onto the pillows weakly.
"I'll never let her into this house. *Never*. I don't care what it takes."

Sam shook his head. "She wants to be here for you, help take care of you. It's her right to play nursemaid when you're sick and you know it."

"Until I'm out of here, we'll both just have to make do," she said bitterly.

"Are you *sure* about this? Maybe you're overreacting-"

The look on her face made him stop mid-sentence and he closed his mouth.

"Sam, thank you for coming over and for the soup, but I just...I'd really just like to go back to sleep now."

He sighed sympathetically and patted her leg. "Okay. I'm out." He stood and grabbed the Tupperware container. "I'll put this in the fridge. Try to eat some later, hm? You know my Mom's a badass cook. It'd be a crime to let this go to waste."

Quinn only mumbled her acknowledgment and her eyes closed as she drifted off again.

He started to leave, but hesitated when he reached the doorway. Struggling internally for a moment, he finally gave in and went back to Quinn's bedside, this time kneeling down in front of her face. He poked her nose lightly and her eyes flew open in surprise.

"Call Rachel," he ordered her sternly. "Next to my Mom's chicken soup, she's the best thing to help you feel better and you know it. Don't make it worse than it has to be just because you're angry at the way things are right now. So *call her.*"

Quinn swallowed thickly, tears welling in her eyes, and she finally nodded. Sam kissed her forehead and left, closing the door behind him.

It took a minute or two of fumbling around 'til she found her phone.

"Hey, Rach ... I'm a little better today, yeah ... um, I'm sorry I didn't call ...",
imagined and it actually did manage to take her mind off some of the misery she was in. It gave her something to enjoy.

"The ‘50s assignment turned out fairly well for the most part! Tina, Sam, and...wait for it...Puck actually managed to come up with some great renditions. Trust me, it was shock all around on that one, but I do have to give him credit for it."

"So we've forgiven him then?"

"Oh, not for another decade at least, but that doesn't mean I can't acknowledge him when he's done something well."

"You always were the bigger person."

"I'm going to assume that was unintentional irony."

Quinn smiled into the phone. "Believe whatever you want, baby."

She could practically feel Rachel rolling her eyes on the other line.

"There was a problem, however, with Brittany's performance."

"What kind of problem?"

"Brittany, that was...ahem...that was definitely something, a-and I'm not saying it wasn't good, but that's not what the assignment called for."

"What do you mean? You said pick something from 50's stuff. What's wrong with 'Candy Shop'?"

"Well, when I said choose a song from the '50s, I meant the 1950s," Mr. Schuester said exasperatedly. "Not from 50 Cent!"

"Well, you really should have been clearer about that. How are we supposed to know the difference? Like, what if you said to do a song about change?"

She laughed so hard, it kicked off another coughing fit, which worried Rachel so much that she fussed over Quinn's health for another thirty minutes, but it was worth it.

Finally, the doctor gave her the go-ahead and Quinn literally skipped out the door. It'd been a week of being cooped up alone in her room with nothing but her mother and Sam's occasional visits. She missed Rachel so much, it was killing her. She knew it was going to be torture having to see her in school and not be able to run into her arms the way she so desperately needed to.

Quinn underestimated her girlfriend though. Rachel texted her minutes before she was about to walk into the school with a very simple order to meet her in the auditorium. The blonde bypassed anyone and everyone who tried to talk to her in the halls with "Good to have you back" and "Glad you’re feeling better" sentiments. She burst into the auditorium and flew down the aisle, heading straight backstage where Rachel was waiting.

Quinn got to do exactly what she wanted to after all and she ran straight into Rachel's arms.

Eager to make up for lost time and desperate to get out and be active again after her solitary confinement, Quinn agreed to go shopping with Santana after school on one condition: Rachel had to join them.
Santana whined and complained and argued all day about having to "drag the diva hobbit" along with them, but she eventually had to give in because she wasn't going alone and Brittany had motocross practice. So it was either go with Quinn and Rachel or she'd have to resort to Prancy Smurf, his gel-obsessed boyfriend, and Wheezy. She ended up going with what she deemed the lesser evil.

Rachel was somewhat wary about what a shopping trip with Santana Lopez would entail, but after a handful of bitter insults on the drive over and a fierce tongue lashing from Quinn for Santana to be on her best behavior or she'd be abandoned in the mall, things calmed down. And once they got there, things were surprisingly okay...more than okay even. After about an hour, Rachel realized she was actually having fun shopping with Santana Lopez! Any cutting barbs thrown her way weren't so much an attack, but were almost as if the girl were joking with her.

"Oh, Santana! That dress would look perfectly stunning on you." Rachel pointed to a skin-tight, rich cerulean blue in one of the store windows.

Santana purposefully ignored her until Quinn yanked her arm and forced her to look. She assessed the dress with a frown then shrugged, heading into the store.

"I'm gonna freaking rock that."

Rachel beamed up at Quinn happily, as they followed after the Latina. Quinn only shook her head in bemusement.

After getting over the initial shock of being able to get along civilly with Santana Lopez, perhaps even more than civilly, Rachel became giddy. She practically skipped through the mall, dragging Quinn and Santana along with her as they went through each store.

"We definitely need to update your wardrobe to something resembling sanity, Berry." Santana held up an animal print skirt. "Nothing wrong with a little sex in your clothes and since your sexiness level is in the negatives, every bit counts at this point."

"Don't even try," Quinn responded lazily, "you know she's sexy. Brittany told me you think she's hot."

"She did what?" Santana shrieked.

"You think I'm hot?" Rachel gasped.

"NO, I DON'T!"

"And I happen to like her clothes," Quinn added offhandedly as she focused on browsing through the rack.

"Aw, thank you, honey!" The brunette poked her in the ribs. "But you did unfairly coerce me into getting rid of anything argyle in my closet."

"That was just me doing mankind a favor."

Rachel made a face at her.

Santana snorted. "Of course you 'like' her clothes. You wouldn't dare bite the hand that's getting you off."

Quinn spun around furiously, hissing, "Say it a little louder, why don't you?"
Santana sighed and held her hands up in apology. She turned back to Rachel with the skirt. "Well?"

"I'm vegan, Santana. I'm against animal cruelty."

"It's not real! It's not even close to resembling something faux!"

"I just wouldn't feel comfortable wearing any form of animal skin, real or replicated."

"Oh, Jesus, way to make it sound as disgusting as possible."

"That's what it is," Rachel chirped. "Besides, I don't need to change my clothes since even you find me attractive enough in them." She smirked mischievously at her before bouncing off to look around.

"I hate her," Santana growled.

"So you keep telling me. Now, what about this?" Quinn held up a white skirt.

She waved it away. "How about you buy yourself a pair of jeans for the first time in five years instead?"

"Jeans?" She frowned as she put the skirt back.

"You're not that different from Berry in the wardrobe department, Q. You need to branch out from the bag-lady-trolling-the-thrift-shops look you got going. I was okay with the sundresses, but you're going off the deep end with the old people clothes and those ugly as sin wedges. Next mall trip, Britt-Britt is coming with us. She'll find some wicked awesome stuff for you. She wasn't picked Trendiest Girl in America for nothing."

"Aw, look at you," Quinn cooed teasingly. "So proud of your girlfriend."

Santana ignored her.

Rachel came back over with a wide grin. "Hey, guys! What do you say we go to Claire's after this?"

Then something caught her eye. "Oooh! That sweater is adorable!" She was off like a shot again.

The Latina looked to Quinn with a fierce glare. "I really hate her."

"We're still going to Claire's."

"Riiight. Because nothing quite says 'whipped' like Quinn Fabray these days."

She raised one perfectly sculpted eyebrow at her. "Pot? Meet kettle."

Later, they had finally dragged Rachel out of Claire's and were in the dressing rooms of a department store with an armful of clothes for all three. Santana threatened death if Rachel and Quinn dared to try anything in there. Rachel's cheeks flamed in embarrassment, mostly because she'd been thinking of doing exactly that, but Quinn shut Santana down in a flash by tossing back how many times she had to deal with the Latina's antics with Brittany in dressing rooms. Glowering, Santana just slammed the stall door shut and muttered that she'd better not hear anything; otherwise she'll be scarred for life.

Still embarrassed, Rachel let Quinn tug her into another stall, further down the row from Santana, and only hesitated for a second when Quinn backed her up against the wall.

"I CAN HEAR YOU!" Santana's voice boomed through the changing rooms.
"DO YOU WANT TO PAGE CARL?" Quinn shot back.

There was no reply and Quinn smirked victoriously before ducking back to kiss Rachel again, but she held her off.

"Carl?"

She chuckled. "One of the mall cops. He has a specific sort of history with Santana and Brittany here... Not to mention he's one of Santana's cousins. Reallyyyy awkward."

Rachel laughed and wrapped her arms around Quinn. She didn't even remember if they actually tried on any clothes except in *Victoria's Secret*, which was, without a doubt, the highlight of their shopping excursion. Those spacious dressing rooms really were quite useful.

All three of them were pretty much done for the day, each holding a bag, though Santana had outdone them solidly with three bags of her own. Rachel asked her how she was able to afford to spend that much money on clothes, let alone anything else.

"Doctor for a Daddy here," she replied with a roll of her eyes.

"Then-then..." Rachel's brow furrowed in confusion, "why do you live in the Heights?"

Quinn was too late to intervene and sighed when Santana got that look she knew so well. If she were a cat, she'd be hissing with all the fur on her back standing straight up. Rachel was just going to have to brave the storm she brought on herself.

"Does it matter where I live?"

"No, of course not. Only that you continue to assert-"

"Mi abuela lives in Lima-Heights Adjacent, along with the rest of mi famila," she snapped defensively. "It's my blood; it's where I was born. Just 'cause Dad got himself out of there, doesn't mean I've forgotten my roots. Money changes nothing."

"I understand," Rachel said with a gentle smile. "Believe me, Santana, I do. Family is what matters. The people you love, they make you who you are. There's nothing else more important in the world than that."

Santana hesitated at first, but seemed assuaged by this and backed off.

"Yeah. That's right."

Rachel nodded and pointed out the food court.

"How about we eat?"

That led to an easy change of subject since all of them were so hungry.

What Quinn knew and Rachel didn't (yet), was that there was an ongoing war in the Lopez family. Since Santana's father was able to get an education and make something of himself, the first of his family to go to college, let alone medical school, it created a huge divide. When he married Santana's mother, that was the breaking point. Maribel was a successful lawyer from a wealthy family that came with a lot of expectations. It was an explosion of worlds even though they shared the same ethnic roots. A lot of the family members on Santana's father's side thought that he became too full of himself, too obsessed with money and status, that he looked down on the rest of them for still
struggling to make ends meet. That wasn't true at all; Quinn actually liked and respected Carlos Lopez. He was a good man and so down to earth. He loved his daughter and wanted to be able to give her everything he never had.

Unfortunately, the rest of the Lopez family didn't see it that way and a lot of them cut him out of their lives. Really, they resented him for being successful because it made them feel ashamed for not being able to do the same. There was bad blood and fierce family feuds. Santana always hated it. She hated that her family forced her to choose sides. Who was she loyal to? Who was she, a spoiled doctor's daughter or an independent Latin woman who wasn't ashamed of her heritage? That's why she always insisted on keeping the Lima-Heights attitude. She lived there as a child, and with her abuela still there, Santana always felt a duty to be more connected to Lima-Heights and that side of her family simply so that she wouldn't lose them, so that they wouldn't see her the way they saw her father.

She never wanted what happened to him to happen to her. Losing her family? It scared her to death.

Yet for Quinn? She'd lost her family a long time ago, if she ever had a family at all. She didn't have the bond Rachel had with her fathers, the loyalty Santana had to her family members. There was love there though and always would be from her, for her mother, even her father. A part of her, deep down, would always love them because they were her parents and that would never change. But it also didn't change how much she loathed them and all they stood for, all they had done to her. Quinn knew that as easily as her father had been able to turn out his pregnant sixteen-year-old daughter, she would just as easily be able to leave them behind.

It wasn't always that way, but last year changed her. Her daughter changed her. She finally started to see the world for what it was and not what the Fabray blinders made her see.

And she found Rachel.

There was no going back.

One more year.

Santana and Rachel's bickering brought her out of her thoughts.

"I'm starving! You already agreed to eat here; you can't take it back now!"

"But this food is so unhealthy. Wouldn't you rather get something on the way home?"

"No! Because I'm hungry now."

"And here everyone jokes you never eat. Will I find you in the bathroom upchucking later?"

"Okay, fine!" Santana barked, waving her hands in the air, along with her shopping bags. "It's true! It's all true! I had to do it for the Cheerios, but seeing as how I'm not on the squad anymore, I'll eat whatever the hell I want. And I want this!"

Rachel faltered at Santana's blunt admission; she obviously wasn't expecting that kind of reaction.

Quinn chose then to slip in gently. "Let's just get a snack here and then we'll have a real dinner together after we drop Santana off back home, okay?"

The brunette nodded with a sweet smile and already Quinn had forgotten about Santana's need to eat. Instead, she was thinking about how much she wanted to be alone with Rachel again. Maybe they could pick up some food and have a picnic somewhere. The weather was warm enough by now
for that. She could take Rachel to the park and...

"Oh, Quinnie! I didn't know you would be here."

And her world fell apart.

Rachel heard the woman's voice from behind them and saw Quinn go white as a sheet. She looked to Rachel with the most fragmented expression. She knew then that something was about to go terribly, terribly wrong.

Santana immediately yanked Rachel closer to her, whispering harshly in her ear, "Whatever she says in the next few minutes, she doesn't mean it."

She didn't have a chance to respond before Santana stepped back with a grimace. "Look, Treasure Trail, how many times do I have to tell you that you're not allowed within ten feet of us? Walk away before I call that security guard over and have you arrested for public lewdness."

"I-I beg your pardon?"

"You look like a kiddie hooker and as a practicing Catholic that's offensive against priests so…" She waved her off impatiently.

"Santana Lopez! You will mind your manners," Judy said briskly.

The Latina put on a perfect 'reprimanded' face and backed down sheepishly. "Sorry, Mrs. Fabray."

Judy Fabray locked eyes on Rachel and looked like she just tasted something bitter. She was standing a few feet away from them with another woman whom Rachel didn't know.

"Quinnie…" she said suspiciously, looking among the three of them. "What exactly is going on here?"

She looked different than Rachel remembered when she saw her at Regionals last year. Of course, that was a woman who'd just separated from her husband and was prostrating herself before her daughter in an effort to get her to come home. Then, she was a woman asking for forgiveness.

She wasn't that woman now.

Quinn opened her mouth for a moment, trying to figure out what to say, while Santana was glaring at Rachel, subtly urging her with a nod of her head to leave, but Rachel refused. She finally had the chance to introduce herself to Quinn's mother and she was going to take it. Maybe she could convince Quinn somehow that she'd been worried for nothing. She sidestepped Santana and extended her hand to Judy.

"Hello, Mrs. Fabray! My name is Rachel Berry. I go to school with Quinn and Santana. It's wonderful to meet you."

Judy pretended like she never saw it, instead she just switched her purse to the other shoulder uncomfortably. Rachel blinked in surprise but didn't let the smile leave her face. That horrible feeling in her stomach sunk even lower; it took everything she had to remain strong. She swallowed thickly and let her arm drop.

"Well, I-"

Suddenly, the casual disdain disappeared as Judy's eyes focused in sharply at something at Rachel's
side. Then Quinn was in between them, her hand clasped Rachel's wrist and she yanked her back roughly.

"Listen, sweetie, I know I said I'd let you tag along with us for a little while so you could learn how more civilized people behave, but your time's up. Why don't you run along now?"

Rachel winced in pain at the tight grip Quinn had. She had grabbed her right over the diamond bracelet and it was digging deep into her skin. Any tighter and Quinn might draw blood.

She frowned. "Uh, I didn't, I mean, I don't under-"

"Just make sure you tell Miss Pillsbury about today so we can all get the credit for her after school program," Santana hissed, staring daggers at Rachel as she raised her eyebrows, trying to get her on board with the cover-up plan that had already seemed to have been formulated between the two.

But Rachel wasn't going down without a fight.

Quinn may be worried about how her mother would react to them being together, but surely even a woman like Judy Fabray couldn't be so intolerant as to reject Rachel as a person. She just had to find a way to make Judy like her; then Quinn would see it wasn't so bad after all. It would make things just a little bit easier for them. They needed that.

The way things were going, they needed it more than ever.

Rachel was trying so hard every day to keep up with Quinn, to keep up the facade, to manage the lies, to manage the pain. But when Quinn got sick, all these things that she was desperately trying to juggle were starting to fall. She'd tried to pretend that the way Quinn hid her from Judy like she was a horrible, dirty secret, didn't hurt. She'd tried to let go of the fact that Quinn didn't speak to her for two days after that. She even tried to convince herself that it was just because she was ill, but even Rachel couldn't lie that well to herself. Honestly, she didn't know how much longer she could keep all of this up.

Atlas held up the world; Rachel couldn't even bear the weight of her own life.

What did that say about her? What did that say about her life?

They needed this.

So Rachel ignored Quinn's grip and pressed forward.

"I've seen you at some of the Glee club competitions," she said to the older woman with a bright smile. "Quinn's a fantastic performer! You must be very proud."

Quinn looked deathly pale.

"She's my daughter," Judy replied with a sniff. "Of course I'm proud."

Rachel felt herself being pulled even further away before she could protest. Quinn put herself solidly in between Rachel and her mother, before finally releasing her with a shove.

"Are you about finished? We told you, we're done for today. It's time for you to leave. As in now."

"Quinn…" Rachel gasped and her hand went to her wrist to rub away the ache there.

If only she could do the same to her heart.
It wasn't what Quinn said, it was how she said it: the coolness, the lack of emotion, the way she pushed her off, the utter foreignness in her tone.

No, it wasn't foreign.

Rachel had heard it before time and time again in what felt like another lifetime. She couldn't see the girl she loved at all. In this moment, it felt like that other girl had never even existed at all. She'd made it all up in her head. None of that ever happened. This was her life, this had always been her life. She was just starting to wake up to it again. If only she hadn't fallen asleep at all.

The hurt she could have saved herself.

Rachel looked at Santana who only had a smug expression on her face, arms crossed. Quinn was unrecognizable. Judy Fabray and a nameless woman peered down at Rachel like she was a homeless beggar trying to take their money.

She was the homeless beggar, a stranger, a loser, an outcast, a bottom-feeder. Santana and Quinn didn't have to be in their cheerleader uniforms to catapult Rachel back to a year ago when they stood in front of her in the hall, hands on their hips, so superior. Making Rachel feel as though she wasn't worthy of even breathing the same air as they did.

"Sweetie..." she remembered Quinn say, dripping with honey, but feeling as cold as ice.

And here it was again. That Quinn again that she had told herself, over and over, was gone, but she should have known. Quinn hid it well, slipping up here and there, but she'd always brushed it off because she didn't want to see it. She didn't want to admit it. How could you admit that the person you so desperately loved with every part of you, was a bad person, a liar, a phony, angry, manipulative, careless, spiteful, and cruel.

It was a lie. All of it was a lie, all this time, and she fell for it. She so pathetically, stupidly fell for it. Quinn used her, just like Quinn used everyone. Why did she ever allow herself for even one moment to think that she would be different, that somehow she, Rachel Berry, could be the exception to the rule and that this girl could have ever loved her.

Her Daddy was right. People don't change, certainly not people like Quinn Fabray.

She should have listened.

With nothing else to do, Rachel simply walked away knowing with every trudging step that she'd just had her heart broken.

In a way that never healed.

"What was that all about?" Judy turned to Quinn accusingly when Rachel was out of earshot. "Why were you with that...girl?"

"It's not like that, Mrs. Fabray," Santana reassured with a shake of her head. "Berry's a freak, but we have a volunteer program at school where we help the less fortunate. Our guidance counselor, Miss Pillsbury, assigned her to us. We didn't have a choice. Believe me..."

Santana always was the smoothest liar.
Second to Quinn, of course.

"I see..." she said nervously, looking to the woman next to her and then took Quinn by the arm, gently leading her aside and whispered, "Quinn, sweetheart, you really shouldn't even be seen with her. How it looks! Donna will be telling everyone about this tomorrow at the Spring Luncheon. I mean, just by association-

"There's no association, Mom," Quinn said more convincingly than she thought possible of her at the moment.

All she could see was Rachel's face when she turned to walk away.

This was never supposed to happen. She was supposed to keep Rachel safe. She had promised herself that she would never let Rachel be hurt this way or any way. She was going to be better. She was going to be different.

Now she just wanted to die.

Quinn took a shaky breath. "It's just a thing for school, I had no way out of it. It's just something extra to help my transcripts for college. You know how good these things look. You can tell that to the old biddies at the luncheon if they find themselves feeling faint at the idea of me having to be around her..."

Judy wasn't the least bit amused. "All right then, but she's not bothering you is she? Because if she is, I could certainly speak to someone at the school-"

"She's just another loser, Mom," Quinn said fiercely, "barely even registers on the radar. Nothing I can't handle. Santana and I are already working on getting someone else assigned to us."

"If you're sure, then I'm glad you have it all worked out, darling." She took a step back and rejoined her friend with her usual forced, pearly-white smile. "Now, Donna and I are headed to Bloomingdale's if you girls wanted to join...?"

They both shook their heads politely.

"We were just going to get something to eat and then head home," Quinn said.

She felt like she was having a heart attack. Her chest hurt. Her body was numb. Her heart was constricting so painfully, she wanted to cry. But she couldn't. She was too afraid.

*Just get her out of here. Get her out!*

Her whole body was screaming it.

"But thanks anyway, Mrs. Fabray," Santana added calmly.

"Okay, see you at home later, sweetie."

Judy kissed Quinn on the cheek and squeezed her arm in such a pointed way, it made her blood run cold. She knew what it meant. Yet, the woman said nothing more. Judy merely waved goodbye to Santana and walked off with Donna.

Quinn took one look at Santana before spinning on her heel and running off in the direction Rachel left in. Santana followed, swearing in Spanish the whole way.

*Please, God. Please. If you have any mercy left to spare for me, please don't let me lose her.*
She had been so stupid, so selfish. All this time, she just wanted Rachel to love her, but how could she if she knew the truth? So Quinn hid all that she could, foolishly thinking what was buried would always stay buried.

It all had to come out now. She had no choice. Rachel would know everything and then she'd be gone. For a second, Quinn almost didn't want to find her, just to be able to put off the inevitable for just that much longer. To have just a few more minutes where she didn't have to face the bone-crushing reality that she had lost the most important person in her life.

But it was only for a second, because she had to find her. Maybe there was some small part inside of her that still held on to the belief that maybe...just maybe Rachel wouldn't stop loving her once she knew, that maybe Quinn was wrong.

After searching everywhere they could think of, it was Santana who suggested that maybe Rachel had just taken off since she was the one who drove. They headed to the parking lot to see if the car was still there and found Rachel sitting on a bench outside the building, staring off at nothing in particular.

Quinn's chest seized at the sight and she ran up to her, breathing hard.

"Rachel!" she cried. "I didn't mean it! I'm so sorry! I'll explain everything, I swear, I'll tell you-"

The brunette stood up immediately at Quinn's arrival and, without warning, slapped her viciously across the cheek.

Stunned, Quinn could only stand there, trembling and trying to remember to breathe. They held each other's gaze for a long moment, but it wasn't Rachel's loving eyes she was staring into. These eyes belonged to someone whom she didn't recognize, but despised her nonetheless.

Then the stranger walked away. Quinn moved to go after her; she could find her Rachel again! She had to! It wasn't gone; all wasn't lost. They couldn't have gotten this far only to lose everything.

This was the part where she was supposed to be proven wrong...

But that wasn't happening.

She felt herself crumbling under the realization and Santana grabbed her arm, holding her back with a shake of her head.

Quinn knew she was right. She watched helplessly as Rachel made her way across the parking lot, got into her car, and drove away. When she couldn't see the car anymore, she turned back to Santana.

She didn't even realize what was happening, but found herself collapsed on the concrete being supported by Santana as her body was wracked with sobs.

She couldn't breathe. Her eyes burned. Her head ached. Her chest hurt.

She felt like she was dying. Was this death?

Santana kept one arm around Quinn's waist while digging out her phone from her bra.

"Hey, Britt-Britt. Pick me and Q up from the mall? … We lost our ride. … Yeah, I know it's happened to you too. How soon can you get here? … Q's not doing so good. … She's not sick, she's sad. … Yeah, you could totes cheer her up better than me. So hurry."
She ended the call, dropped the phone on the ground, and wrapped both arms around Quinn again.

"Hey, Quinn, babe..." she said quietly, "I know this doesn't mean much right now, but you're going to be okay. Know that. You're going to be okay."

Quinn just cried harder.
Of the Secrets and Lies

Chapter Notes

I wrote the second half of this chapter in April of 2011. I never changed a thing about it. When Lea Michele mentioned on twitter that she was recording 'Cry' (over a year later) - I had a complete fit. I wrote the entire scene where Rachel sings that song for this fic MONTHS before they even THOUGHT about having Lea cover it. Believe me or don't believe me, but I wrote that section long, long before anyone thought of using it for Glee. When I watched the scene for the first time, I was blown away by how similar it was to what I wrote. Freaky, really. Anyway - thanks for reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Rachel ignored her fathers when she walked in. They were speaking rapidly and pulling at her, but it was all white noise; she pulled away. Somehow she managed to shake them off and locked herself in her room, lying down on her bed. After a while the banging on her door stopped.

She didn't care.

She rolled over and when her head hit the other pillow, a familiar scent invaded her senses and she flung the offending object to the farthest corner of the room.

Still, the same light, flowery scent lingered.

In a fit of madness, Rachel jumped off her bed and started ripping away all the blankets, the pillows, the sheets, anything that could have her clinging to it.

When her bed was purged, she lay down again on just the mattress pad and pulled her knees up to her chest before falling into a fitful slumber.

She didn't cry.

Quinn called Rachel for hours, leaving message after message on her voicemail. She begged, pleaded, implored the girl just to hear her out. To give her one chance to explain. Again and again she told her how much she loved her, how sorry she was, how she never wanted this to happen, how she would do anything to fix it. It didn't matter that Rachel's phone was off. Quinn still called all through the night. And just when she was sure that Rachel's voicemail box would be full, she left one more message, short, simple, and different from all the others.

"I want, more than anything in my life, for you to be happy, Rachel Berry. If you let me tell you everything and decide that it doesn't make a difference, o-or that it makes it worse, I'll understand. I'll leave you alone. I wanted to be the one to make you happy, but that was selfish of me. I should have known I couldn't be that for you...even if you are that for me. Just give me the chance to tell you the whole story and then I'll go away. If nothing else, you deserve to know the whole truth; you always have. I thought I was doing the right thing by keeping it from you, but I was lying to myself. I was being selfish and I'm sorry. It was wrong and even though I want it so badly, I don't deserve
forgiveness from you. I never did.”

The skies were beginning to lighten with the new day when Quinn pressed the 'end' button on her cell phone and dropped it onto her bed. She showered and dressed for school, leaving the house before her mother even woke. The parking lot was completely empty when she drove up and the doors were still locked. Quinn sat on the concrete steps in front of McKinley High and watched the sun rise as she waited.

Rachel's alarm clock woke her at the usual time, and she rose sluggishly, taking extra time to even reach over and turn it off.

She showered and dressed, going through the practiced routine without a thought in her head. The pain was too much to take; her body shut down. She was numb to everything.

When she picked up her phone, she saw how many missed calls and messages she had. Nearly all of them were from Quinn, with an odd couple from Santana and one unwitting text from Sam.

Rachel deleted them all with one swift click.

She didn't care.

Quinn looked for her everywhere, but it was like Rachel had managed to make herself invisible. No one had seen her. When Sam came down the hall; Quinn jumped into the nearest classroom to avoid him.

She couldn't handle that right now.

She just had to find Rachel.

But when she finally did, nothing happened.

Rachel was at her locker in between periods when Quinn spotted her. She had dark circles under her eyes. Her dress was wrinkled, and when she closed the metal door, it was so soft, so quiet, as if she didn't even care if it closed at all. This was still the stranger, the one who had walked away from her at the mall.

Quinn didn't know what to expect when she finally saw Rachel, but she didn't expect this. At the very least, she thought she would be seeing Rachel Berry. She never thought she would still be seeing this girl...this other person. How could she have done this? How could she cause the girl she loved so much pain? For all her promises to herself and to Rachel, she'd broken every one.

That heart wrenching knowledge almost stopped her. Almost.

But she needed to make this right, somehow, someway. Otherwise it would truly be the worst mistake of her life if she let this go. It couldn't end this way. She wasn't even thinking about getting Rachel back; that was such a lost cause in her mind, she couldn't fathom its possibility. It wasn't about that. It wasn't about what she wanted or what she needed. It was about Rachel.

She had to fix this for Rachel.
So, Quinn walked up to her, her whole body shaking, and stopped when she was just behind her.

“Rachel, I-”

But the girl just walked away. She never turned around, never made eye contact, never acknowledged that Quinn had even spoken. It was as if she didn't exist at all.

That wasn't Rachel.

Quinn couldn't breathe from the pain that rushed through her entire body as she watched Rachel disappear in the crowd. Strong arms found her and walked her through the halls as though she were blind. She didn't even think enough to look at who was leading her, but she saw a blonde ponytail flip out of the corner of her eye when she reached her class; and the arms went away.

She didn't hear a single thing in that class or the next, but with each passing moment, every tick of the clocks above the door, Quinn was clutching to driftwood to keep her afloat. The driftwood grew larger as time passed and then it took form in a plan. With strength, determination, and absolute stubbornness, she clung to it for dear life, letting it infuse her once again and raise her up from the first blow today.

It wasn't over by a long shot.

She knew when and where Rachel's classes were, so Quinn ran out of her own and made it to the opposite side of the building just in time to see the brunette walking down the hall.

She looked to Santana and Brittany who were just behind Rachel and they nodded. Both girls had gotten Quinn's text.

Just before the bell rang, they strode up beside the brunette, one on either side, and entwined their arms with hers. Quinn could see Rachel's shock, which quickly turned to anger, but the girls were too quick. She couldn't hear what they were saying, but Rachel was arguing with them just as Santana and Brittany made a swift turn and all three disappeared into the bathroom.

Quinn ran to the door, rushed inside, and held it open just long enough for her friends to slip out without a word. Rachel had been yelling, but the second Quinn appeared, she went silent.

The same chair was still there as it had been the last time they found themselves here like this. Quinn wasted no time and dragged it over to shove it under the doorknob again.

Rachel had to listen to her now.

When Quinn turned back to face her, all the words flew out of her head. The explanation, the apologies, the remonstrance...it was all gone. She couldn't think of a thing that she was supposed to do, let alone say.

Because Rachel wasn't even looking at her. She was leaning against the wall on the other side, vacantly staring at some spot on the floor. Quinn knew she wasn't seeing anything; her eyes were glazed over.

What had she done?

Without warning, she began to cry. She hadn't wanted to, planned to, or even thought she could, but
she did. She wept without a word and Rachel didn't even give the slightest sign that she even noticed.

“I ruined us.”

“Yes, you did,” she replied dully.

“I wish I could take it back, start it all again. I never meant-”

“No, you never meant for any of it. I know. I was there too. You never mean for anything to happen, Quinn. But somehow they just keep happening, don't they?”

“I have to tell you why-”

“I don't care!” she cut her off harshly, looking at Quinn for the first time with gray, red-rimmed eyes. “Do you understand that? I - don't - care. You made your choice a long time ago. I was just too stupid, too desperate, too in love with you, to see it.” She shook her head. “No, I'm wrong, I did see it. I just pretended not to. I wanted you that much; I wanted to believe in us. I was a fool and now it's done.”

“W-wait!” Quinn stuttered, holding her hands up. “I-I blew it, okay? I know that. I'm not trying to get you back, Rachel. I don't deserve to have you back, but-”

“Spare me the self-pity, Quinn,” she spat. “I've heard enough of yours for a lifetime. This was never going to work; we both knew that from the start. There never should have been a start. You need your life to be a certain way and I was naïve enough to hope that would change with time, but it didn't and it never will. You're Quinn Fabray. You have other people's standards and expectations to meet. You have your family that you need to play a role for; you have a life for the world to see and I have no part in it. In fact, I'm nowhere to be seen!”

She scoffed bitterly.

“You told me after our first date that I would want more someday and you were right. That day is here and you can't give me what I want. You don't want to give it to me. You were content with me being your little secret and the second I pushed for more, you proved to me exactly what I couldn't admit to myself for the longest time. I will never have more. Because to you I'm not worth it.”

“Rachel! No!” she cried imploringly and stepped forward, stopping when Rachel moved back. “That's not true! You KNOW that's not true!”

She shook her head. “I should have listened to you when you warned me back then. Maybe this is all my fault after all...”

“You told me after our first date that I would want more someday and you were right. That day is here and you can't give me what I want. You don't want to give it to me. You were content with me being your little secret and the second I pushed for more, you proved to me exactly what I couldn't admit to myself for the longest time. I will never have more. Because to you I'm not worth it.”

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“Please,” Quinn curled her hands into fists at her side so that she could keep herself from trying to embrace Rachel like her whole body was begging her to do. “Please listen to me, just listen! You don't understand-”

“If you tell me I 'don't understand' one more time, I swear to God, Quinn, I will slap you again.”

The blonde closed her mouth. Tears stained her cheeks, but they had stopped falling.

It wasn't going to work.

Rachel was never going to hear her.
Not now, not ever again.

She was too late. She'd waited too long. And she lost everything.

Isn't that what they say about holding on to things too tightly? It'll slip through your fingers?

Well, Rachel hadn't slipped through, she cracked through.

Would either one of them be the same again after this? Quinn already knew the answer for her.

No.

An icy, bitter cold wound its way through her chest and spread through the rest of her body. What else was there to do?

“Looks like kidnapping me didn't do the trick, Quinn. Too bad, I know that was always your fallback. If I didn't go along willingly, you'd make it happen somehow.”

Quinn squeezed her eyes shut as the words tore through her like knives piercing her body, each with a fatal blow.

She had never known Rachel to be so simply... cruel before.

Had she turned her into that as well? Was that her fault too?

“Am I allowed to leave yet?” she sniped. “I'm at your command, Quinn Fabray. I know how our world works, you say 'jump', I ask 'how high?'.”

“Rachel,” she gasped brokenly as fresh tears poured anew. “Stop it! Don't do this! I love you. It's never been about that, I just needed to keep you sa-”

“Am I allowed to leave yet?” she cut her off coldly.

Not knowing what else to do, Quinn spun around in a fit of frustration and ripped the chair away, tossing against the wall with a clatter. Then she stepped back against the stalls and covered her eyes with her hand as Rachel breezed past her. The door closed with a click, but Quinn had never heard anything so deafening before.

Rachel didn't go to class for the rest of the day, nor did she go to Glee. Instead she went home and locked herself in her room again. The pounding on her door lasted longer this time, but it went away. It always did.

Honestly, she didn't remember much of what happened between them earlier in the bathroom. She remembered Quinn coming in, the way she looked, and then she could see the rest only through this glaring haze that hurt to try to look through. She'd managed to keep up such a front with her then, but inside she'd been shaking so violently, she thought she'd be sick.

Quinn's voice in her ears just hurt. The sound of that sweet, lovely, wonderful voice that had the capacity to also be as cold and vicious as anything she'd ever known, just simply hurt.

So she'd steeled herself against it.

Quinn's act of kidnapping hadn't surprised her, though Santana and Brittany being involved had
thrown her a bit. When Quinn came in, breathless...red-eyed...pleading...desperate. Something in her just snapped. Rachel couldn't take it anymore. It was as if she had shut down everything but her body just to keep functioning.

She didn't have any more of her heart left for Quinn to hurt.

Rachel hadn't wanted to believe her when Quinn explained her family situation those few months back. She hadn't wanted to believe that parents could be so cruel as to disown their child just for being herself. She hadn't wanted to believe it and it took her a while to realize that she didn't believe it.

At least, not to the extent that Quinn made it out to be.

Her own fathers faced problems within their family when coming to terms with their sexual orientation and then even more when they decided to spend their lives with each other, a Jewish man and a black man, life-partners, (though now they were married after a whirlwind trip to Canada a few years ago). Rachel knew more than she should have ever had to know about bigotry, hatred, ignorance, and the cruelty people were capable of, yet for some reason she could not bring herself to believe in full that Quinn's parents, the people who created her and brought this beautiful, extraordinary person into this world, could possibly be as hateful and blind as Quinn said they were.

Quinn was just scared and, of course, Rachel didn't harbor any fanciful notions that the Fabrays would welcome their daughter with open arms when she told them she was gay. Yes, they might disown Quinn, just like Leroy's parents had. But there was still a part of her that thought Quinn was letting her fears get in the way of being able to see things more clearly. So she couldn't come out to her parents yet, to her mother, but to be so terrified of even letting it be known that she was friends with Rachel?

She wasn't expecting to be thrown forth and introduced as the love of Quinn's life, but to be so horrifically ashamed of her that Quinn couldn't even bear to have her mother know they hung out together?

That was what Rachel couldn't wrap her head around. All this time it'd just been building up: the belief that Quinn was making it out to be worse than reality. Was it bad? Yes. Was it that bad? Rachel couldn't fathom it and sometime in between then and now, she'd convinced herself that Quinn just needed a push to see that she didn't have as much to fear as she thought she did.

Even now, she still believed that.

It had to end. Enough was enough.

---

Quinn didn't know why she had such a terrible feeling of dread in the pit of her stomach when she approached her locker the next morning. The night had been bad enough; nightmares and sleeplessness haunted her. What was a locker going to do to her?

But when she opened the door, she had to hold on to the metal just to keep her legs from giving out from under her.

On top of her things, neatly lay a velvet box.

She knew what would be inside.
Quinn picked up the box and barely made it into the nearest janitor's closet before she shut the door behind her and fell against it in tears.

Rachel had given back the diamond bracelet.

It wasn't a malicious act on her part. At least, she didn't mean for it to be.

Or maybe a small part of her did.

Rachel found the glittering piece of jewelry on her floor when she was making up her bed again with different, clean sheets. They were the spare sheets meant for the guest room, but they fit her bed and they were safe. When she tucked in one corner, she spotted it lying half under the frame. Not giving it a second thought, she rummaged through her drawers to find the empty box and slipped it back in. It was strange, she didn't even remember taking it off or how it could have gotten there. It didn't matter anyway.

When she opened Quinn's locker the next morning, laying it on top of the blonde's neatly organized things; she forced herself not to see any of the contents. She forced herself not to see the pictures of Glee club, the books, the headband, the gold star, the Cheerios logo, Sam and Quinn's prom photo, the green ribbon hanging loosely on the door, and definitely not the half of a coupon from Breadstix placed on the inner wall with a magnet.

She didn't see any of it so she closed the door and walked away without looking back.

It was the only thing to do.

The rest of the day was a blur she didn't remember and the night was empty.

Sam wanted to drive her home.

After Quinn stopped avoiding him and relayed all that had happened, he leaned in to hug her, but she pulled away before he had the chance. At first, he was confused, but when he saw the look in her eyes, he must have understood, because he stepped away and averted his gaze so she wouldn't see how much it had hurt him.

Everything had changed.

She couldn't bear the thought of him touching her. He was one of her best friends and she wanted to run from the simplest comfort of a hug.

Just being around him now felt like she was betraying Rachel. It was insane how backwards it all was, but somehow it made sense too. At least, somewhere inside of her it did.

So she turned down his offer for a ride home, even though she probably looked like she needed it. Maybe she did really need it. But she couldn't take it from him.

Just looking at him made her think of Rachel.

Everything made her think of Rachel.
She didn't go to Glee.

Quinn wasn't the least bit hungry, but her mother insisted they sit together for dinner that night, so there she was, pushing food around her plate with her fork listlessly while Judy prattled on about God knew what.

"...at the mall a few days ago."

Quinn caught the end of the sentence and froze. She hadn't been listening up until then.

Was her mother going to do this? Were they really going there?

"I'm sorry, what did you say?"

"I said, that was a strange little run-in we had a few days ago at the mall."

Quinn's heart began to pound.

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, with that Jewish girl there," Judy said flippantly.

She sighed exaggeratedly, pretending to be as bored as she could. "I don't know why you're making such a big deal about it. I told you, it was for school and she's a nuisance, that's all."

Her mother didn't seem to be listening.

"And, curiously, I happened to notice a fine piece of jewelry on her wrist."

Quinn's stomach felt like it had turned inside out. She knew her mother had seen it.

She'd been too slow.

"Mom, I don't know what you're going on about and since it has to do with Berry, I really couldn't care less. It's a waste of time talking about her."

Still Judy ignored her.

"It's remarkable how much it reminded me of that diamond bracelet I gave to you a few years ago, strikingly similar and yet a girl like that, with her means, can afford such a thing?"

Quinn rolled her eyes. "It was obviously a fake. Where are you going with this?"

"Oh, no. It was quite real. I have an eye for that, as you well know. It just made me think a bit. I can't remember the last time I saw you wear yours, Quinnie."

"It doesn't fit me anymore," she replied quickly.

"Oh. Is that all?" She took a sip of her wine. "Well, we should have it re-sized then. Why don't you bring it down for me and I'll take it to the jeweler's tomorrow."

Quinn narrowed her eyes at her. She knew this dance.

"It's not necessary."
"It was a very expensive gift, dear."

"One that I never wanted, Mother."

"Still, we shouldn't let it go to waste. Bring it down."

There was no mistaking the challenge in Judy's eyes.

Quinn dropped her fork on the plate with a clatter and shoved her chair back from the table.

"I don't know what you're getting at here, but you're acting like a crazy person."

She walked out and prayed that her mom hadn't seen how her hands were trembling.

In her room, she took out her backpack and found the velvet box. Her hands were shaking so badly; she dropped the box twice before finally getting it open. She couldn't bear to look at it so she just enclosed it in her fist tightly, enough that it hurt, and made her way back downstairs with staunch determination.

Her mother was sitting at the head of the table with her wine glass, exactly where she had left her.

"Here." Quinn dropped the bracelet with a clatter on the wooden dining room table in front of the woman. "Happy now?"

Judy looked at the diamonds for a moment before turning up to her daughter.

"You're playing a dangerous game, Quinny."

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean."

"You know exactly what I mean."

Quinn stared at her for a long moment before turning away in disgust and headed for the door.

"Just where do you think you're going?"

"Out," she said tersely.

"Where?"

She didn't bother to reply as she grabbed her jacket off the hook and keys off the table before walking out the door.

Judy would never say it and Quinn would never tell her.

That was the Fabray way, always had been, always would be.

"Hey, Quinn," a sleepy Brittany in her pajamas answered the door.

Quinn shoved her hands in her jacket pockets awkwardly, her head down. "Sorry I woke you."

"S'ok," she rubbed her eyes with a yawn, "I just have an early motocross practice tomorrow."

"I-is it all right if I crash with you tonight?"
Her pathetic desperation must have been written all over her face because Brittany gave her a sad smile before taking her arm and pulling her inside with the same strong embrace that had led her to class the day before when she couldn't find the will to do it herself.

They went straight up to the taller blonde's room and Brittany got right back into her bed, snuggling into a pillow.

"Jammies where they always are." She waved absentmindedly.

Quinn knew. This used to be a weekly thing for the three of them. She wondered why the weekend sleep-overs had stopped. It was probably around the same time Brittany and Santana started up. They'd always been closer to each other than they were to Quinn and that final step cemented the difference in their relationships.

She quickly changed into the borrowed pajamas and crawled into bed beside her old friend. Sometime during the night, when her pillow was soaked with tears, Brittany rolled over and pulled Quinn into her arms.

Nightmares plagued her and she tossed and turned, but her friend held tight. Quinn woke several times crying or screaming, but Brittany was always there with her arms around her in a steady, near-crushing embrace. She smelled sweet, like candy, she always did. So with that comforting familiarity, the safety of one of her oldest friends, Quinn was able to slowly drop off again.

She woke early the next morning, feeling bruised and broken, but warm. Brittany was wrapped around her and she was tucked beneath the other girl's chin. Just having her there helped ease the sting of her nightmare as yet another one faded. It was then that she woke up enough to notice that there was something different. On the other side of the bed, there was a head of dark hair peeking out.

Santana was pressed up against Brittany's back, sound asleep. She certainly hadn't been there when Quinn fell asleep, so when had she snuck in? And how did she manage not to wake her?

"It's too early, Q," the Latina mumbled. "Stop staring and go back to sleep."

Brittany muttered something unintelligible. She was still asleep.

But before Quinn could do anything, a loud quacking filled the room and Brittany shot up in bed, slapping at her alarm clock to get it to shut up.

"Britts!" Santana groaned. "I beg of you, change that goddamned alarm."

"It works, San," she said tiredly and yawned. "Hey, Quinn, how are you feeling?"

"Pretty much the same," she replied quietly, not wanting to discuss it, and focused on Santana instead. "When did you get here?"

"I texted her last night 'cause I was worried about you. She came over to check on us," Brittany answered.

Quinn looked between her two friends wonderingly.

Why is it that you never know what you have until you lose it all? It was one of the hardest lessons she'd had to face last year, and even though she made it through, the three of them were never the same again. Was it because too much had happened or was it simply because they were the ones who changed?
"I-I, um, thanks, you guys," she mumbled shyly.

"Aw, Q!"

Brittany wrapped her arms around her waist and pulled her over so she was sandwiched in between the two of them. Santana settled on Quinn's shoulder while Brittany rested her head against Quinn's.

She sighed, allowing the warmth of their shared bodies to comfort her as best as it could. "You two used to be my best friends, you know? I haven't always been there for you like I should have and I'm-

"No, Quinn," Santana interrupted her forlornly. "We're the ones who should apologize. We were the Unholy Trinity, but when you needed us, we weren't there. It wasn't supposed to be like that. We made a pact."

She smiled. "You still remember that stupid thing?"

"Of course I remember it," she grumbled. "You wrote out two pages of a declaration we all had to swear by. You even tried to make us memorize it!"

"My brain really hurt for two days before you gave up and let us just read it off the paper," Brittany added. "There were a lot of big words San had to help me with anyway."

"It wasn't stupid," Santana pressed. "We promised to always be friends, to always have each other's back, to be honest with each other, and to never, ever let any one of us get fat. We broke all the rules!"

"I was pregnant! That doesn't count as fat!"

"You were totally huge, Q, but it's okay. You lost it all super quick!"

Quinn groaned exasperatedly.

"The point is, we screwed up. We broke it because we were being selfish idiots-"

"We were ten, Santana," Quinn interrupted softly. "Promises like that are almost impossible to keep."

"It doesn't matter," she muttered forlornly.

"We should have been better friends to you when you got pregnant, Q," Brittany said, kissing her hair. "I'm sorry we weren't."

Quinn shook her head. "Don't apologize. We were all stupid and selfish. We're teenagers. We screw up and we screw up a lot. I don't blame you for last year. I could barely handle it myself."

"You shouldn't have had to handle it yourself," Santana said stubbornly.

"Even if you guys had been there every step of the way, I still would have been alone. It's not the kind of thing you can share. So please? Let's leave the past where it belongs."

"And we get to be best friends again?" Brittany asked. "The Unholy Trinity back together?"

Quinn leaned against the other blonde's forehead with a smile. "If you'll still have me."

"We'll get back to you on that."
"She means 'yes'," Brittany giggled.

"Whatever," Santana grumbled, but tightened her grip around Quinn's waist all the same.

"We all do dumb things when we're young," Quinn murmured. "Some mistakes are dumber than others."

"Like letting Puck knock you up?" Brittany offered.

She groaned inwardly. "Exactly. But we grow up and hopefully we learn from those mistakes."

"Do you think we've grown up this year?"

"A little," she admitted. "But not nearly enough. We still have a lot more growing up to do."

"We'll help each other through it," Brittany said, hugging Quinn tighter.

"Yeah?"

"Definitely," Santana joined in.

"Ah!" Brittany cried all of a sudden. "Practice starts in 30 minutes!"

She leapt out of bed and clothes went flying through the air as she dressed in a flurry. Santana and Quinn were content to stay exactly where they were. Once Brittany was ready she came over to the bed to kiss a half-asleep Santana goodbye and the casual display of affection squeezed painfully at her heart. But then Brittany leaned over and took Quinn's hand, kissing her palm. It was too sweet and too kind to ignore so she tightened her grip in response and Brittany smiled.

"Go back to sleep, you two."

"Don't forget your helmet, baby," Santana mumbled.

Brittany's eyes widened and she rummaged around in her closet before pulling out a purple motorcycle helmet. She put a finger to her lips to urge Quinn to keep quiet and not let Santana know that she had almost forgotten it. Chuckling, Quinn waved goodbye and closed her eyes.

She fell asleep again more easily than she had in days, but the nightmares remained.

Rachel opened the door warily to find Jesse St. James on her porch.

“Uh,” she squinted at the harsh morning sunlight, “it's kind of early for a house call, Jesse. An unannounced house call.”

“I got your voicemail last night,” he said. “I wanted to come over right then, but it was late. I figured you'd be awake by now anyway.”

“Thank you,” she nodded appreciatively, “but you didn't have to-”

“I'm your friend now, remember? So, yes, I had to and I wanted to. Let me come in.”

“I'm-I'm not really up for talking to-”

Jesse pushed the door back and wrapped his arms around her in a fierce hug.
“You're not alone, Rachel,” he murmured into her hair.

She could feel herself crumbling, just like she had been working so tirelessly to avoid, but it couldn't be helped. Every minute that passed, with every hour, with every day, she found herself getting closer and closer to the edge with nothing to hold her back. And, now, with this boy holding her, there was nothing left, and everything had broken. She clutched him to her, burying her face in his chest, fisting her hands in his shirt, and sobbed.

She was with Rachel in the parking lot, dancing under the night sky in their prom dresses. Rachel was curled under her cheek, whispering her love again and again, each time in a different way and Quinn returned it just the same. Then they stopped and Rachel pulled away. Quinn was confused.

“What's wrong?”

Rachel reached up and lifted the plastic tiara off Quinn's head, the one for Prom Queen.

“You said you destroyed it.”

“I-I did!” Quinn stammered. “I don't know how it got there.”

Rachel looked up at her in tears. “Why did you lie to me?”

Angry shouts broke in from the field next to them, it was a bunch of boys fighting, but Quinn couldn't see them in the darkness.

“It wasn't me, Rachel. It's not me.”

“Isn't it?”

They weren't in the parking lot anymore. It was broad daylight now and Quinn was on the football field at McKinley, in her Cheerios uniform once again.

Santana left the other Cheerios that were gathered in a group and ran over to her. “You ready, Q?”

“For what?”

“For the game! We have to be on tonight or Coach is gonna kill us in tomorrow's practice.”

“I don't want to play the game.” Quinn shook her head.

Santana frowned at her. “Who said you had a choice?”

“QUINN!”

She spun around, searching the field, the lot, the stands, for any sign of her.

“Where is she?” she asked desperately.

“Where's who?”

“Berry! Where's Berry?”

“What the hell are you talking about? Who's Berry? Did you drink too much at the party last night
or is this Puckerman's aftermath?"

"QUINN!"

"Don't you hear her? She's calling for me!"

"Hey," Sam jogged up to them in his football uniform and pulled off his helmet. "What's going on?"

"She's lost a berry," Santana shrugged.

"Maybe that's for the best," he shrugged. "You don't want a berry, they get crushed too easily."

"But I...I could have protected her. I love her."

"But you didn't tell her," Brittany said from behind them.

"Why are we still talking about berries?" Santana snapped irately, throwing her hands in the air.

"Because Quinn wants one," Brittany replied.

"I can get you some," Sam offered. "It's no big."

"No, no," she shook her head, "You don't understand, I only want one. But she doesn't want me."

"Ugh." Santana rolled her eyes at something happening behind the bleachers. "They're still fighting."

Quinn heard tires screeching and boys shouting as a brawl raged on.

"Shouldn't someone stop them?"

"Too late for that," Santana said.

"Sam," she turned to him, "can't you try to stop them? What if someone gets hurt?"

"I wish I could, Quinn," he kissed her on the cheek and put his helmet back on, "but I can't stop that; no one can."

Sam ran off and she looked back for Santana, but she was gone too; so was Brittany. The football field was deserted and Quinn was alone.

"It's better this way." She held out her hand that had red stains on it from some kind of fruit. "I wouldn't have been able to protect you."

"Did you ever want to?" Rachel walked towards her. "Or were you just protecting yourself?"

Rachel had red stains on her too. They were everywhere.

"I didn't want to lose you either. Is that...is that so bad?" she whispered. "Was I a bad person to want that?"

"You're a selfish bitch, Quinn," the brunette answered easily. "Manipulative, cruel, vengeful, and selfish. You always have been. Accept what you are. We'll all be better off for it."

"Rachel..." she whimpered, "I don't want to be that way. I don't want to be like them. Couldn't I be different?"
Hard, cold brown eyes stared back at her.

“Who said you had a choice?”

Quinn woke up breathing hard and it took her a good couple of minutes to realize she was staring at Brittany's ceiling.

Santana had her arms around her and Quinn looked down at her with wide, frantic eyes.

The Latina shook her head calmly and wiped away the few tears that had fallen on Quinn's cheeks. “It was just a dream.”

“You heard me?” She swallowed thickly.

“Yeah, I got some of it.”

Santana faltered for a moment and Quinn saw sadness flicker through her eyes before she covered it up again.

“You always did sleep-talk. It's why I would try to stuff a sock in your mouth during sleep-overs, but Brittany was worried you'd suffocate. So she suggested one of Tubb's dog bones instead.

Santana sighed and shook her gently in a reproving yet reassuring way. “Don't believe it, Quinn, not any of it. It's not true.”

The blonde stared back at her with dull eyes. “You sure about that?”

Before Santana could reply, Quinn pulled away and got out of the bed, heading into Brittany's shower without another word.

“You ready?”

“No.”

“Do you really want to do this?”

Quinn turned on her with a glare and Santana held her hands up.

“I just meant...well, you said you can't get back together with her. Not with all of this still going on. So...why are you doing this to yourself?”

They'd been doing this dance for a couple days now. Rachel was ignoring Quinn's existence, which made her feel like she was dying a new slow, painful death each and every day. She couldn't bear going to Glee anymore. Mr. Schuester had approached her after one of her classes, chastising her for missing so much when they were on the home stretch for Nationals. He told her if she wasn't committed 100% to the Glee club, then she wouldn't be allowed to go with them to New York at all. It wasn't fair to the other kids who were there every day, working hard, while she couldn't bother to show. Quinn just apologized and walked away, leaving the teacher completely baffled.

Brittany insisted that Quinn should try to get Rachel back, that they loved each other, that they could work it out; Rachel would forgive Quinn if Quinn tried hard enough. It worked for her and Santana anyway.
Santana thought that Quinn should leave Rachel alone until they both were out of Lima. There was just no point to it; they were only torturing each other. She knew how much it was destroying Quinn to stay away from Rachel, not to fight for her, so she wasn’t optimistic that Quinn could do it. But she insisted that the year apart would be better for them in the long run. Santana couldn’t fool her though. Quinn knew that the Latina was thinking about whether she would be able to do that with Brittany if the situation was reversed. She knew full well that she couldn’t, but Santana was trying to be helpful anyway. Quinn was grateful for that.

Sam had gotten himself sucked into it as well, but he skirted around the whole issue rather than address it head on the way Brittany and Santana did. He simply said that Quinn needed to do the right thing. He never said what he thought that was though.

He didn’t have to. Quinn knew.

“Because she needs to know the truth. Even if she doesn’t want to be with me, I-I need her to know that I never lied about loving her. I don’t matter, Santana. It’s not about me.”

“Hey!” She grabbed Quinn’s arm and pulled them off to the side in the hallway. “I get what you’re saying, but stop with the 'I don't matter' stuff. It's crap and you know it. You want to be with her, Q; that's not wrong and you're not a bad person. So stop talking about yourself like you are!”

Quinn stared at her so long that Santana grew uncomfortable, shifting on her feet before she finally huffed and started walking again.

“Whatever. I don't care either way. Do what you want.”

“You think I can actually get her back?” she asked wonderingly. “After everything? You saw what she was like...what she's been like...”

“I think you want her back despite all the 'being noble' stuff you've been spewing and that you'll do just about anything to make it happen, whether or not you'll admit it.”

Yeah, that was pretty much hitting the nail on the head.

She exhaled loudly, whether out of frustration or a bit of relief, she didn't know.

When did Santana Lopez become so insightful about the mind of Quinn Fabray?

“What if it's not the right thing for us?” she mused aloud. “What if we shouldn't be together? All I ever do is hurt her and I-I don't know that she'll even want me after...”

Quinn swallowed her words and instead just replaced it with something less specific.

“After everything.”

Santana looked at her. “Well, who decides that?”

“Rachel,” she answered automatically, then added, “and me, I guess.”

The Latina shrugged. “So decide.”

Quinn turned away and Santana chuckled.

“Yeah, you've already decided.” She shook her head. “Just...be careful, Quinn. She might not want the same things as you anymore.”
“I know, but it...it doesn't stop me from hoping. A part of me still wants to believe that...it could work.”

*That she could really love me...every part of me.*

“Don't let that hope carry you too far.” Santana linked arms with her. “It's a bitch of a fall.”

Sam joined them, walking along the other side of Quinn.

“Hey, you ready for this?”

Her stomach churned at the reminder of what she was about to do.

“All right, guys!” Mr. Schuester walked in, throwing his bag on top of the piano, completely oblivious to Brad glaring at him. “I want an update. How's everyone doing on their songs?”

He got a bunch of muted, shameful mumbles in reply.

No one had really made any headway.

Rachel was sitting in the front row on the end, while Quinn sat with Santana on the back risers on the other side of the room.

Her heart was beating so fast, she thought it might explode any second now, but she had to keep it together.

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“Come on!” Mr. Schuester said disappointedly. “We're running out of time and we still need to be able to put together the choreography. Has no one been working on this? Rachel?”

He looked to the brunette who just shrugged halfheartedly and crossed her arms. Bewildered by Rachel's strange behavior, he was about to push her on what was wrong when Tina interrupted him.

“We're trying Mr. Schue,” she said. “It's not that easy though.”

“Okay,” he nodded, giving the abnormally reticent Rachel another glance before addressing the entire club again, “so we need to start helping each other. Let's start meeting after school here and we'll all try to write together. You can still work on your own, but 12 heads are better than one. You can feed off each other's ideas and really get a flow going!”

“She's trying Mr. Schue,” she said. “It's not that easy though.”

“Mr. Schue?” Quinn only raised her hand halfway because she was worried people would see how badly she was shaking otherwise.

He looked up at her in surprise. He hadn't seen her there and since Quinn gave no indication that she planned to return to Glee, he was overjoyed to see her, practically bouncing up and down with relief. It meant he had his whole group with him for Nationals.

“It's good to have you back, Quinn. I'm glad you made the right decision.”

She ignored him.

“I was thinking, since we've kind of hit a roadblock for songwriting, maybe I should take my turn
“What are you talking about? Turn for what?”

“I know it's kind of late, but I never got to sing for the assignment you gave us a few weeks ago about expressing our deeper feelings, the ones we have more trouble putting into words.”

“Well, I, uhm, that was weeks ago, Quinn...” he rubbed the back of his neck awkwardly, “we really should focus-”

“Better late than never, right?” she said firmly without bothering to give the impression that she was asking for permission anymore.

Mr. Schuester was reluctant to give up the time because they really needed to work on preparing for Nationals, but since it was Quinn asking to sing, something she almost never did and her glaring absence for the past few days was so strange, he decided to put it on hold for a few minutes. He stepped back to let the blonde have the floor.

Santana gave her a slight nod of encouragement as Quinn stood up and made her way off the risers. Sam was in the middle of the group next to Brittany. He leaned forward a bit anxiously, preparing himself, and Brittany just looked excited.

Quinn couldn't look at her just yet. She picked up a stool from the side of the room and brought it over to the center. When she sat down, she clasped her hands tightly in her lap, and looked back to the band and Brad with a slight nod.

The music played and she took a deep breath, wet her lips, and began to sing softly.

“Come to me now
And lay your hands over me
Even if it's a lie
Say it will be alright
And I shall believe”

Sam nodded at her encouragingly. Brittany was chewing on her thumb nail and Santana was staring at the corner where Rachel sat. Still, Quinn couldn't bring herself to look. It was too frightening. What would she find there? Forgiveness? Love? Anger? Apathy? Even...hate?

“I'm broken in two
And I know you're on to me
That I only come home
When I'm so all alone
But I do believe”

She took a deep breath. She couldn't put it off any longer. Instead of keeping her eyes on that dent in the wall that Puck made when he accidentally slammed a chair too far backward, she turned and focused on Rachel. The girl was sitting there impassively. As it turns out, just like Quinn wasn't looking at her, she wasn't looking at Quinn. Rachel had found her own insignificant mark to focus on.

She wasn't going to let that stop her. If anything, it just made her put even more into what she was singing, willing Rachel with every fiber of her being to hear it...to really hear it.

“That not everything is gonna be the way
You think it ought to be
It seems like every time I try to make it right
It all comes down on me

Please say honestly you won't give up on me
And I shall believe
And I shall believe”

Rachel still wasn't looking at her. Did she even realize that Quinn was singing? Everyone else was looking at her now too, but she couldn't have been more oblivious. Rachel was never that good of a liar. It worried Quinn.

“Open the door
And show me your face tonight
I know it's true
No one heals me like you
And you hold the key

Never again
Would I”

Rachel stood up abruptly and walked out without a word. She never even glanced in Quinn's direction; she just walked out the door. The band played for a few more seconds and then the music faded out awkwardly as they stopped, realizing she wasn't going to continue.

It was deathly silent in the choir room. No one dared to say a word.

Quinn squeezed her eyes shut and used every ounce of willpower in her body to keep the tears at bay. That act alone hurt so much she was trembling. Her head screamed in protest; her brain pounded against her skull. She ached for release, but holding it was something she had to do, not matter what her body said.

What did she expect? She knew this could happen. She knew that Rachel would likely reject her...again. In fact, she swore to herself when she made the decision to sing that she was going to accept the worst. This wasn't about getting Rachel back, this was about getting Rachel to hear her.

But she didn't even succeed in that.

What did she expect? Of course, Rachel was going to walk out on her. Of course, she wasn't going to listen. Of course, she didn't want her anymore.

So why was Quinn still so taken aback? Why did it feel like a fifty-ton truck just suddenly plowed into her from the side?

Because some stupid, ridiculous, aching, heartbroken part of her thought she'd be wrong. For all that she told herself that it was better for Rachel that they weren't together right now, she still wanted her. She still needed her.

God, she needed Rachel!

No amount of logic and sensibility could take that undeniable, unwavering, powerful feeling away. It overrode everything else.

That's why she had to sit there with her eyes shut, digging her nails into her palms so hard that she might have drawn blood by now, and keep her composure in front of the Glee club. If she broke
down now...

Well, she just couldn't afford that.

But because Quinn closed her eyes, she never saw Jesse get out of his chair right after Rachel left and follow after her.

---

If she didn't really want to be found, she would have chosen somewhere else to go, but it was too tempting. This place held so many memories, of victory, of passion, of pain, of love, of defeat. This was her stage. This was where she belonged. This was her spotlight. One day she would have a bigger stage, a bigger spotlight, and the thunderous applause from a roaring audience that was hoarse from screaming her name.

But this stage, right now, in the McKinley High auditorium, belonged only to Rachel Berry.

So where else would she go?

Jesse made his way up the stairs without a word. She heard him coming long before she actually looked up. The light click of the heels on his boots as he walked towards her gave him away.

“That didn't go very well.”

Rachel shook her head with a scoff. “Did she really think she could just sing a song and everything would be okay again?”

He shrugged. “Isn't that usually all it takes with you?”

She glared up at him and he actually had the sense to apologize.

“It was good you didn't let her finish anyway. Listening to that girl try to sing makes me want to jump through a closed window. Her intonation is horrific. She has no concept of breath control, and she's always shar-”

“Don't,” Rachel said glumly. “I realize you're trying to help, but it's...it's not. I don't want to hear things like that. And you do not get to speak badly about her.”

He nodded in understanding. “Okay, that's fair. So tell me, what can I do to help then?”

Rachel turned away from the empty seats of the auditorium and stepped closer to him with a sigh.

“You can be here for me.”

---

When Quinn finally managed to open her eyes again, certain she had gotten herself under control enough so that she was not going to cry in front of all these people, she saw the mirrored looks of sadness on Santana's, Brittany's, and Sam's faces.

It was compassion. It was pity. It was defeat.

Something deep inside her bristled at the thought, roared against it, and strength bubbled to the surface one last time. This wasn't going to happen. She was not going to allow this to happen!
Quinn Fabray didn't accept defeat.

She jumped off the stool and ran out of the room after Rachel, not caring how it looked or what anyone in that room thought.

She knew exactly where Rachel would be. Every intention she had of “being noble,” as Santana had put it, went out the door. She was in love with Rachel; she wanted Rachel. She wanted Rachel for the rest of her life. If there was even the slightest chance that she could be loved in return...and forgiven for all that she had done...then she had to fight. She would fight until her last breath because Rachel was worth it.

Because just looking at another day without her made life seem too hard to bear.

Because thinking of what a year without her would be made her feel like she could never breathe again.

Because imagining what her life would be like without Rachel was seeing a lifetime of misery.

Without the happiness she felt every time Rachel walked into a room, the way she melted inside when Rachel smiled at her, without being able to touch her, hold her, kiss her, or make love to her.

There would never be anything else in her life that would compare to that. There would never be anyone else. She may only be seventeen, but she just knew. She knew.

Quinn strode through the hallways intent on one thing and one thing only. She came up to the doors of the auditorium and was about to throw them open when she saw that Rachel wasn't alone. Stopping herself, she didn't open the doors and instead stepped closer to see through the square glass pane.

Jesse was talking to her, moving closer with every word and Rachel wasn't looking at him, but Quinn could see their body language, she knew exactly what was about to happen. And then it did.

Jesse kissed her.

Tears fell, but it was anger that coursed through Quinn's body, not sadness, not desolation. Not yet, just anger.

That was HER girlfriend. Rachel belonged to HER. He had no right to kiss her, no right to be even half as close to her as he was right now. Whatever had happened between Quinn and Rachel didn't matter and she didn't think about it. All she knew was that Jesse was kissing HER Rachel and he would pay for it.

It was the part of her that was so determined, so utterly resolved that they were meant to be together, that drove Quinn as she flung open the door and stormed down the aisle, ready to call out Jesse St. James once and for all. She was going to rip him off her girlfriend and finally give him the smack-down he'd deserved for two years.

But then Rachel changed everything.

The brunette hadn't moved since Jesse's lips touched hers. She had just stood there, frozen, with her hands balled into fists at her side. Just as Quinn was about to call out, Rachel began to kiss Jesse back. Her hands that had remained at her side, opened. Quinn halted in mid-step, feeling her stomach
bottom out as she watched Rachel reach up to take his face. The palms she knew so intimately, the hands that comforted her, the fingers that she knew every inch of, were caressing another.

And so she shattered.

It was over. Rachel was truly finished with her once and for all.

Spinning on her heel, she ran out the way she came and didn't dare look back.

The halls were a blur; she didn't know where she was going. All she knew was that she needed to be away from there. Far, far away. But she couldn't think; she couldn't think enough to even remember the way out of this place. It was a maze and she was the rat. And she just ran.

Someone caught her by the waist and she was lifted off her feet for a moment as the person hauled her to a stop. She turned around and it was Sam looking down at her. Sam with his sweet blue eyes, soft blonde hair, and adorable mouth that could make the worst impressions and say the kindest words and the dumbest words and could make the second biggest smile she had ever seen.

He wanted to comfort her; she could see that. He was asking her what to do, what she needed, but they both knew it wasn't his comfort she wanted. The world was spinning so fast and in the wrong direction, slipping from her grasp before Quinn could even get a chance to grab something to hold onto. And now here was her chance. Without another thought in her head, other that just something to make this all stop, something to change this agony, Quinn yanked him down and kissed Sam roughly, forcing her tongue into his mouth.

He was still for a moment, though she didn't notice, and then, after who knew how long it had been, he shoved her away.

Gasping for air, she nearly fell with how hard he pushed. Shocked, Quinn stared up at him and she had never seen Sam so angry before, not even when he found out she was cheating on him with Rachel.

They were locked in that moment, speechless, angry, and heartbroken. It was then that she began to realize the gravity of what she had just done.

“Oh, God...Sam...I-I-I'm...”

“Fuck you!” he spat. “Just...fuck you, Quinn!”

He backed away from her, shaking his head, before storming off. Quinn watched him go with dry, bloodshot eyes. She would have cried had there been any tears left, but she was drained of that just as she was drained of everything else.

As she watched his retreating form, she knew she was seeing the second best thing in her life walk away just like the first.

"No," Rachel dropped her hands to his shoulders and pushed him away. "No, Jesse, I'm sorry, but I-I can't do this."
"What are you talking about?" He came towards her again. "You can't tell me you don't feel it between us, that spark we always had. You want this, Rachel. You want me and you know it."

"Not anymore." Tears glistened in her eyes and she pulled away. "I swear to God, I wish I did still have those feelings for you. It would make all of this so much easier, but I don't. There's nothing between us anymore, not in that way."

"That's a lie."

"You said you would be my friend!" she said in bewilderment. "That you were okay with that. What's changed?"

"Nothing's changed! I've just been waiting for you, Rachel, waiting for you to wake up and see Quinn for who she really is, to see how she treats you. You're an afterthought to her, Rachel. She's just been playing around with you. I saw that plain as day, but you were so wrapped up in yourself that I knew there was no getting through to you. So I decided to use the friend card and wait for you to discover it on your own. And now you have!" He tried to take her into his arms, but she moved back in horror.

"So it was all just another lie? Another ploy to manipulate my feelings, yet again?" Her voice cracked. "Is that all I am to you? Just a game?"

"It's not that big of a deal." He shook his head. "You can't be so naïve as to think Sam hasn't been doing exactly the same thing? Waiting in the wings until Quinn got bored with you and he had his chance again?"

"You're wrong!" she said heatedly. "Sam isn't like that! Everything he does is to support Quinn! You are nothing like him."

He sighed and clucked his tongue, like he was reprimanding a child. "You're being foolish, Rachel. Quinn doesn't want you, but I do. So just forget about her and-"

"Get out."

"What?" He stared at her in disbelief.

She folded her arms across her chest, fierce and unwavering with her eyes ablaze. "You've shown your true colors, Jesse. It's over. Leave."

"Rachel, we belong together and you know it." He insisted stubbornly. "We were made for each other! Look at how well matched we are! Our talent, our drive, our cutthroat ambition; you can't tell me that we're not the perfect power couple! We'll take the entertainment world by a storm! Just you and me. I told you once, I came back to win a National championship and to make all your dreams come true; it's why I'm here. For you. You're a star, Rachel, and together we can do anything!"

"You're incredible," she scoffed. "I have never met a more skilled, heartless, soulless liar in my entire life."

"Oh, is that right?" He raised an eyebrow in challenge then replied coolly, "Weren't you just fucking one of those?"

Her vision went red as her body burned from the inside out as she lost all control. Hurt became pain and pain became anger which Jesse had just managed to coalesce into pure rage.

Her mind and body were no longer her own as the storm inside her unleashed in a fury.
"GET OUT!" she screamed and shoved him hard. When he only stumbled a little, she shoved him again and again until it actually started to move him back. "GET OUT AND DON'T EVER COME BACK. I NEVER WANT TO SEE YOUR FACE AGAIN!"

He brushed off his shirt as though it were nothing at all and leisurely made his way down the stairs off the stage. When he was in the aisle, he stopped to look back up at her.

"You're going to regret this. You really think anyone else is going to want you? I was doing you a favor; I was going to let you ride on my coattails to fame. You just threw all that away, Miss Berry. But hey, maybe the ape will take you back if you start putting out for him. Probably your last chance."

"If there's one thing in life that I will never have a need of," she replied icily, "it's a favor from you, Jesse St. James. And don't forget, you were the one who came crawling back here on your hands and knees for me. But you'll never have me. I'm the prize you will never win and I think that's going to stay with you for a very, very long time."

He narrowed his eyes at her angrily before finally turning around and walked out.

When he was out of the auditorium at last, Rachel collapsed boneless on the piano bench and burst into tears.

Sam stalked through the halls angrily until he got to his locker. He ripped it open with a crash, probably denting the one next to him, but he didn’t care.

How dare she mess with him like that?

How DARE she!

After all he had done for her, every lie he told, every ache in his heart crushed down and set aside just so he could be what she needed – support, solidarity, protection…a friend. Then she pulled that? Knowing full well…

HOW FUCKING DARE SHE!

He tore his things out before slamming the metal door closed with another crash and made his way down the hall, intent on hitting up the nearest liquor store before crashing one of the Trinity parties tonight. Actually, it wasn’t even crashing anymore. They all knew him. Turns out he was pretty popular there too. Sam Evans didn’t need to be invited anywhere; he just showed. Sam Evans didn’t need to chase girls; girls came to him. And Quinn had practically thrown him there. Everything he could have hoped for when he moved to Lima, what his fresh start could be; turns out that Quinn gave it to him. He hated her for it.

He didn’t want those girls. He didn’t want to be the “stud” that made his way around the room like Puck did. He didn’t even like the attention as much as he thought he would.

It was because of Quinn.

She changed all that.

She made him realize he wanted different things. She made him realize he wanted…
Well, he still wanted to be popular, liked and *powerful*, but not this way. There was emptiness in this.

When he had first started dating Quinn, when he had so stupidly believed she felt the same things he felt, when they were carving out a new claim at the top of McKinley’s social ladder…it felt right.

Now he was there at Trinity, alone. And it was so wrong.

Had it only felt right because he was there at the top with Quinn?

He had almost reached the end of the hall before the voice managed to puncture his thoughts. He’d almost missed it. He almost wished he had.

But once he heard it, there was no stopping.

Doubling back, Sam slowly pushed open the doors to enter the dark auditorium, slipping inside soundlessly. The lights were off everywhere except for a few on the stage.

There she stood.

There was something very, very wrong with this picture. She was standing center stage as always. Hands held in front of her…but there was no spotlight.

That wasn’t like Rachel at all! She knew the lighting board better than the AV geeks who were trained to use it! She knew exactly how to get her spotlight and never gave up a chance to stand in it, no matter what. And there she was…lights surrounding her, on the floor in the back, but they weren’t ON her. In fact, he couldn’t really even see her all that well. He saw a shadow.

But he didn’t need to see the face to know what was there.

He didn’t need a bright light shining down for him to know that there were tears flooding her cheeks, to know the pain in her eyes, the devastation.

Because he could hear it.

“If anyone asks,  
I’ll tell them we both just moved on.

When people all stare,  
I’ll pretend that I don’t hear them talk.

Whenever I see you,  
I’ll swallow my pride and bite my tongue,  
Pretend I'm okay with it all,  
Act like there's nothing wrong.”

He was surprised that he recognized the song. Usually when Rachel sang, it was some musical/Broadway thing that he didn’t have the slightest clue about and Kurt would always gush, but it never mattered because she made everything sound incredible. Some of the other Glee members would complain about having to hear another show tune, but he didn’t care. It may not be his style, but when she sang, it was *beautiful*…each and every time. Stupid things like genre and currency didn’t matter because Rachel Berry was singing…and you listened.

Yet, he knew this one and fleetingly wondered why she chose this instead of some dramatic, epic piece out of a supposedly famous musical he’d never heard of.
Then again…it was Rachel Berry singing…so it didn’t matter.

“Is it over yet?
Can I open my eyes?
Is this as hard as it gets?
Is this what it feels like to really cry,
Cry.”

He moved closer, not even realizing that he had flattened himself against the wall to remain unseen. He hardly wanted to breathe, fearing it would disturb her.

The song built higher and higher - there was no microphone, just Rachel, all of Rachel’s voice, her power, her strength, her broken heart. He felt like he was walking through an air of molasses with how difficult it was to reach her when that voice - God, that voice that echoed throughout the empty auditorium and threatened to break through the walls - made him want to slide to the floor and stay there until the world became okay again.

He watched with an ever-tightening ache in his chest. Whenever Rachel sang, it always looked like it came so easily to her, effortless as breathing, even when sad, crying, or angry - it was all flawless. But this was different. She struggled through every note as if she might not have the strength for the next one, but then she did. Though tears had streamed down her cheeks throughout the song, they’d been silent. Now he could hear sobs breaking through.

“I'm talking in circles,
I'm lying, they know it,
Why won't this just all go away?”

She stopped all of a sudden and he could hear her panting. It just about knocked him off his feet. Rachel never lost her breath, never missed a beat, never wavered on a single note, but here she was, desperately grappling towards the finish. She had to finish! She wouldn’t be Rachel Berry if she didn’t finish.

He almost ran towards her just then, to beg her to keep singing, just to finish her song, just so that she could be as strong as he knew she was.

Thankfully, he didn’t have to.

Rachel’s voice sounded out again quietly, through choked sobs at first, but then whatever it is she had lost for a moment, she found again.

“Is it over yet?
Can I open my eyes?”

Then her voice echoed through the room again with a thundering clarity, he had to grip the arm of one of the seats just to keep standing.

“Is this as hard as it gets?
Is this what it feels like to really cry?
Cry.”

She trailed off the last note, lingering for as long as she could. It was then that Sam found himself standing in front of her, looking up at where she stood center stage while he was on the floor. There were no new tears now, just stained cheeks and harsh breaths in the eerie silence of a dark stage in a dark auditorium. He wanted to speak, to say something, something to let her know he was there
because she didn’t seem to notice him as her eyes stared out into something unseen in those empty seats.

Suddenly, bright lights flooded the room, blinding them both, and broke the spell.

“You two, get out of here!” the janitor said gruffly from backstage with a shake of his head. “It’s after school hours. This ain’t the place for your hot and heavy. If youse ain’t outta here by the time I make my second round, I’ll be making phone calls home.”

With that, he walked out, leaving them alone again.

Rachel looked down at Sam with wide eyes. She had no idea he had been there all this time. She’d never seen him.

“Sam…” she said shakily. “H-how long…”

“You were beautiful, Rach.”

Somehow, that threw her more than anything, and she didn’t know how to respond in the slightest. The next thing Sam knew, she was weeping again and he had jumped onto the stage to take her in his arms.

“Why did I let her do it? Why?”

“You love her.”

“I think…I think she broke me.”

“She broke me too,” he said gruffly.

“It hurts so much…I can’t breathe…I can’t…I can’t…I feel like dying. I think a part of me already has.”

“Rachel…” He sighed, not wanting to do this, but he didn’t have a choice.

He was the good guy. He did the right thing. Fuck. Couldn’t he just be the asshole sometimes? Couldn’t he do the wrong thing? Be the bad, selfish guy, and get what he wanted for once? No, because he was Sam Evans and it didn’t matter if he was popular or if girls were all over him or if guys worshiped him…he was Sam Evans…the motherfucking good guy.

“What?”

She looked up at him with watery eyes. He never hated anything more than seeing that kind of pain in her. Rachel never deserved to feel that. Not with the kind of heart she had, the goodness inside of her, the talent, the strength. Rachel Berry deserved a life of endless happiness. How could so many people be so blind?

“She kissed me.”

“Who?”

“Quinn. She kissed me just a little while ago. For real. Like…like she hasn’t done since…well, probably since she was with you, I guess.”

Rachel tore herself out of his arms, as he expected, and so he just let them drop uselessly to his side. Her gaze narrowed and turned cold.
“She…she…” The tears welled up again, but she held them back with a clenched jaw. “Why would you tell me that? Of all times…of all… I thought we were friends! And you choose now to tell me…”

She turned on him with the fiercest ire he had ever felt directed towards him in his life.

“You disgust me! F-for you to come in and gloat…” She choked back a sob. “Well, congratulations. I hope you’ll both be very happy together. You finally got what you wanted all along, didn’t you, Sam? She went running back to you, like the coward she is. Of course she did! She’ll never be anything but. I should have know-”

“SHUT UP!” he roared, stunning her into silence. “Don’t you ever…” he hissed angrily, “I mean, ever…call her a coward again, Rachel. I mean it. Quinn may be many things, but that is not one of them, not even close, and for you to think… GOD! I’m trying to tell you something here and as per freaking usual, you’re not listening!”

“So talk then if it’s so important!”

“She kissed me to prove something! To prove that she didn’t want you o-or need you! Maybe even to prove she wasn’t gay! She used me, she's been using me, and it failed…big time. Yeah, I’m pissed as all get out right now, but you have less to be angry with her about than I do.”

“Excuse me?” she spat venomously. “You don’t have the slightest clue what you’re talking about!”

“You’re the one who doesn’t know what you’re talking about! Jesus, Rachel! You think this is easy for me? That I want to subject myself to this torture? I love her and she cheated on me! She loves someone else. Yet, I still have to walk the halls every day holding her hand and pretending to be her boyfriend. FUCK! You think I WANT that? To know that she wishes she was holding your hand? It’s gotten easier, but dammit it’s still hard. I’m not doing this for me, Rachel. If it were anyone else I would run far and fast, hook up with every girl who would have me just to put Quinn behind me. But she needed me. Do you understand? I love her and she needed me. That’s why I did this; that’s why I’m doing this now.”

“You mean…all this time…you didn’t think…you could get her back?”

He stared at her in disbelief.

“Get her back? I never had her! What is the matter with you? It’s staring you right in the face! Quinn has always been yours. She will always be yours. Nothing that I or anyone else can do will change that. She loves you.”

“If she really loved me, she wouldn’t have treated me the way she did. She wouldn’t keep me a secret. You didn’t hear the things she said to me in front of her mother-”

“I don’t have to. Look…you know that night, when she called me after Jacob posted the blog? I’ve never heard Quinn sound so scared before. Quinn doesn’t get scared; Quinn gets angry. So this was…I knew how bad it had to be. That’s why I agreed to this thing. She needed me to help her and I wasn’t going to let her down.”

Rachel shook her head profusely. “She was just worried she was going to ruin her reputation-”

“Are you that stupid?” he cried and clenched his fists in frustration. “The hell, Rachel? It had nothing to do with that!”

She recoiled shamefully and Sam regretted being so harsh with her, but he couldn’t take this
anymore. Quinn waited too long to tell her, so now it was up to him. Of course, he didn’t exactly feel charitable towards the blonde at the moment, but he decided it wasn’t Quinn he was doing it for. Rachel was his friend. This is what friends did. They helped each other. They supported each other. They told the truth.

“W-well, I know she’s also concerned about how her family will react… Her mother was less than welcoming, but still—”

His eyes clamped on her and she felt like those blue irises were diamonds piercing through her. He was telling her something. He was desperately trying to tell her.

He could see the realization washing over her, a sickly horror. It was sinking in now.

“Sam…” she said with a trembling voice, “is she worried that her parents will physically h-hurt her if they find out?”

“I dunno, maybe.” He nodded with a shrug. “She doesn't talk about it; I don't know everything that goes on with that family. But I think it's just one worry among many.”

Rachel looked as though she had been hit with a 2 by 4.

“I didn’t…I never thought… I mean, she never said anything about…about… Why wouldn’t she tell me? I always thought if that were the case she would have…” she trailed off helplessly before turning on him with renewed vigor. “What else? What else is there? Tell me!”

“You.”

“Me? What about me? Why would she be worried ab-”

“Open your eyes, Rachel! You think this has been all about her issues? She’s trying to protect you! You AND your family! She’s keeping you safe too. Her parents…” he shook his head, “they’ve got an in with the most dangerous people in the country: religious zealots. The insanely conservative, ultra Christian bigots, homophobes, and just plain jerks! And then the Fabrays find out their daughter’s gay?”

He scrubbed his face harshly.

“What happens to Quinn will be nothing compared to what happens to you if they find out you’re the girl that ‘turned’ her. This is Lima, Ohio! Kurt never gets it as bad as he could because his Dad is on his side. Plus, the Hummels aren’t exactly socialites or whatever; they’re not big targets. But the Fabrays…everyone knows the Fabrays. Are you getting it now?”

The look on her face told him she was.

“Her Dad’s an ass, you know, but it’s worse than that. He’s got a history. I met him for the first time a few days after that fight with Karofsky. My eye was still healing, so he asked how I got the shiner. Quinn jumped in before I had a chance and spun some story about how I was defending her honor. I didn’t think much of it ’cause I thought she was just trying to make me look good, but then he started in on some stories about the fights he’d gotten into when he was my age. He really got into one about a ‘faggot’ kid in his grade, bragged that they dragged him into a field and beat him with baseball bats and a tire chain.”

All the color drained from Rachel’s face. She looked like she was about to be sick.

“When I looked at Quinn, it was like she wasn’t even there, like she wasn’t even hearing it. Do you
see what I’m trying to explain here? It’s not just her own life she’s worried about, Rachel; she doesn’t want to get you hurt either. When her Mom heard about that blog post, she basically told Quinn she was getting what she deserved for hanging around with someone like you. That she should have known better. Just for being seen with you. Maybe Quinn was more worried about herself in the beginning. She was scared about what it meant for her life, to lose her home again, her family. They’re awful people, but they’re still her family. Outside of you, me, Glee club…they’re all she has. But as time went on, it became so much more about trying to keep you safe than worrying about what her family would do to her. She even told me, ‘They disowned me once; I survived it then and I can survive it again.’ But she can’t come clean without having you getting caught in the crossfire.”

Rachel was shaking.

“Quinn’s not telling you this, Rach, ‘cause she wants to shield you from it all. She doesn’t want you to be worried. At least, I think that’s why. I’m telling you because I think you deserve to understand why this is so important to her, that it’s not because of some kind of shame, not anymore anyway; it’s because she’s in a really bad way. This is her only out.”

“I didn’t…I didn’t know.”

“She’s just trying to protect you.”

“Sam…d-did her father mention where he went to school?”

He frowned, wondering why she would ask him something like that, of all things…

“Uh, yeah. It was like some town not far from here, few hours, I guess? I don’t remember the name.”

She nodded blankly. There was a vacant look in her eyes that told him she was some place very far away right now.

“Thank you for telling me about this.”

“Rachel?”

She just gathered her things and ran out, ignoring his calls behind her.

He ran his fingers through his hair in bewilderment.

“What just happened?”

Rachel ran into her house, slamming the door behind her carelessly, and shouted for her father while she raced around, looking in each room for him.

“DADDY! DADDY! WHERE ARE YOU?”

He came running down the stairs in a panic, terrified that there was something wrong, and the moment he locked eyes with Rachel, they both stopped.

“It was Russell Fabray,” she said breathlessly. “It was Russell Fabray who hurt you. He was one of the boys who dragged you out to that field and beat you when you were seventeen. He put you in the hospital. He’s the reason why you have those scars, why you have that limp. That’s why you hate Quinn. That’s why you haven’t wanted her here.”
He stared at her.

“Daddy…” her voice cracked, “how could you not tell me?”

Chapter End Notes

"I Shall Believe" by Sheryl Crow

"Cry" by Kelly Clarkson
Forgiveness

Her mother tried to get her to eat dinner with her, but Quinn flat out refused. She didn't even bother to come up with a pretense like not feeling well. Instead she simply locked her door and ignored her mother's calls, threats, severe groundings, until the woman gave up and left her alone.

Quinn had barely been able to make the drive home. More than once she had to swerve to avoid a telephone pole. She should have asked Santana or Brittany for a ride, but she didn't want to be around them or anyone else. She just wanted to be alone, like she deserved.

She was lying down on her bed, staring at the ceiling, and wondered just how long she could stay here before someone broke down the door and pulled her out. People always found a way to do that to her. She just hoped the world would end before it came to that.

Her world already had.

“So Quinn finally told you?”

“No,” Rachel stammered over her words, realizing that she actually had no idea. “I’m not sure she… I don’t know. You should have told me!”

“It didn’t really matter who it was until you brought his daughter into our home,” he replied harshly.

“Quinn is not her father,” she shot back heatedly.

“You say that, but you don’t know…”

“I love her, Daddy,” she said firmly. “I’m in love with her and we’re together.”

“Together?” he echoed with wide eyes, looking as though he might hit the floor any second now.

“Yes. We were…” she corrected herself, “we are, in a romantic relationship, a markedly serious one.”

Hiram stared at her. “I need to sit down.”

There was a long moment of silence that hung between them. The older man leaned forward with his elbows on his knees and covered his face with his hands. Rachel just stood there, like a statue. She couldn’t even fathom sitting right now with all the adrenaline coursing through her veins.

He exhaled harshly, breaking the silence.

“You’re dating her?”

“Yes.”

“I thought…well, Rachel, I had no idea that you were interested in… You’ve never expressed those kinds of feelings for girls before.”

“I didn’t know, really, and I don’t know if it’s all girls, I just know it’s ONE girl.”

“That one girl being Quinn Fabray…?” He shuddered and took a deep breath. “Why didn’t you tell us?”
“She made me promise. She’s terrified, Daddy. And now I really know why.”

“Good God,” he rubbed his eyes harshly. “That poor child…I…I didn’t know. I thought she was just-”

“I wish you would have listened to me,” Rachel fought back the tears in her throat, “I wish you would have told me.”

He looked up at her helplessly. “I wish you would have told me too, baby girl.”

She threw herself onto her knees, into his arms, and they hugged each other tightly.

“Looks like we had that ‘no-secrets’ rule for a reason,” he said quietly against her hair.

“And we both broke it.”

“Never again?”

“Never again,” she agreed and they broke apart.

Rachel wiped away a few stray tears, sniffling, and sat next to him on the couch.

“Honey, can you call Quinn? Ask her to come over?”

She looked at him in surprise. “Now?”

“Right now. As soon as she can. I need to speak with her.”

Rachel nodded vigorously.

Quinn parked in front of the Berry house, turning the car off with trembling fingers.

It wasn't until the fourth call that she finally looked at the phone, but even then it had only been to turn it off. The sight of Rachel’s name had been enough to make her heart want to leap out of her chest.

Did she want to pick it up? Could she bear to hear it? Yet, why would Rachel be calling her? She’d made it clear that she wanted nothing more to do with Quinn. What if something was wrong? What if she was hurt? What if she needed her? That outweighed any possibility of pain on her part so she lifted it up to ear and said in barely a whisper, “Rachel?”

She didn’t take a single breath the entire time she was on the phone, all 26 seconds of it.

“I love you,” was the first thing she heard on the other side and she could have sworn she was dreaming right then because it was too wonderful. Real life wasn’t that wonderful. Still, tears came to her eyes and she choked back a sob as she collapsed onto the side of her bed. “I love you so much, Quinn. Can you come over? I need you to come over.”

“Right now?”

“Yes, now, but before you do, I have to tell-”

She hadn’t let her finish and hung up as she ran out the bedroom door. She yelled to her mother that
she was going out and never heard a reply, if there even was one, because she had already grabbed the keys off the hook and was sprinting towards her car. It never even occurred to her that she was barefoot.

Rachel still loved her. Rachel wanted to see her.

That was all that mattered, all she could think of, all that filled her mind and her heart as she pressed down on the gas and raced through sleepy streets of Lima. Hope was screaming at her from the outside, but she didn’t want to let it in. What if it wasn’t what she thought? Yet, hope came anyway, as if she had any strength to stop it. Just when she thought she’d run out of it entirely, hope simply managed to renew itself time and again.

Hope was a sick masochist.

It wasn’t until she saw the two cars in the driveway that she started to panic. Her Dads were home? Both of them? But Rachel said to come over now... Quinn had assumed that meant her parents were out. What was she going to do now? What did it mean? Did Rachel want her to sneak in? She could do that. Just think for a minute... What would be the best way?

She was still trying to decide between a hopefully unlocked backdoor or shimmy the drainpipe and climb across the ledge to Rachel’s bedroom window when there was a knock on the car window.

“AHHHH!” she screamed and covered her mouth.

Rachel stood outside looking sheepish. Quinn took several deep breaths to calm her frantically racing heart before opening the door. She didn’t even have it open halfway before Rachel flung it wide and yanked her out of the car for a bruising kiss. Quinn whimpered at first, shocked into submission by all that was happening, but then when she realized that Rachel was kissing her... really kissing her, she groaned and nearly lifted the girl off her feet as she kissed her back with everything she had.

“Sorry about that,” Rachel breathed. “I didn’t mean to scare you. I saw you pull up and I wanted to talk before we went inside because you hung up on me before—”

“What’s going on?” She eyed the house nervously before looking back at the brunette. “I mean, w-what made you... I mean, I thought you... You haven’t talked to me, you didn’t take my calls, and now all of a sudden... Y-you just walked out today! A-and I saw... I don’t understand. You’ve forgiven me?”

“Mostly,” Rachel admitted. “There’s still a lot we need to talk about before...before we can put this behind us, but yes, I forgive you.”

Quinn felt dizzy.

“You need to know I talked to Sam.”

“Okay?”

“We had a rather...enlightening discussion. He filled me in on some things you haven’t been altogether forthcoming about.”

“Oh...” Quinn said nervously, folding her arms and she leaned against the car for support. “I see. So what exactly were you ‘filled in’ on?”

“Things that I should have heard from you, not him.”
“Rachel, please,” she said in a strained voice. “What did Sam tell you?”

As the brunette relayed what happened between her and Sam, what had led to Rachel’s final discovery of the truth, Quinn went white as a sheet. When Rachel said that she had gone to Hiram about it, that he knew everything now, even about them, Quinn looked like she was going to pass out.

“Quinn, breathe!” Rachel exclaimed, squeezing her shoulders.

When she gulped for air, the blonde realized she had actually been holding her breath for quite a while.

“It’s all right; everything’s all right.” Rachel wrapped her arms around Quinn’s torso and hugged her.

Quinn took such comfort in that embrace and squeezed her back fiercely. She didn’t know what else to do right now.

“You could have told me,” she murmured.

“I was scared.”

“I would have understood.”

“I was going to tell you after that thing with my Mom,” she said thickly, “but it was too late. You…I thought you hated me.”

“It’s never too late. Besides,” Rachel tilted her head with a smile, “How many times do I have to tell you, Quinn? I don’t hate you. I never could.”

She breathed in shakily, relief was starting to edge its way in now.

Rachel chewed on her bottom lip nervously. “Daddy wants to talk to you.”

The relief vanished in a blink of an eye.

“Oh, no! Rachel, I can’t do that! I can’t. I can’t face him. I can’t-”

“He asked me to call you! It was one of the first things he said. He’s not angry. He’s…he feels guilty.”

“*He* feels guilty? For what?”

Rachel looked at her like she had grown another head. “For what? Quinn! For treating you the way he did, for being so awful about us!”

“I deserved it.”

She scoffed. “You can’t honestly believe that.”

“It’s true, Rachel. Your Daddy has nothing to apologize for. I deserved all of it. He was right to treat me the way he did. A-and I’ve been lying to you, so he should hate me even more now. You both should hate me.”

“Stop talking about yourself like this!” she cried, her eyes wide in disbelief. “Baby, what did you think I was going to do? Blame you for what your father did? Hate you for how despicable and cruel your family is? Yes, I hate them, Quinn, especially your father for what he did, but I only love you
more.”

“What?” she choked out.

This was not happening.

“I’m sorry I didn’t see it before. Even though you did try your best to keep it from me, I feel like I still should have seen it, I should have understood, but I just…”

“Please,” Quinn said quietly, “please don’t even think of trying to put this on yourself. I did this. It’s my fault.”

“But I understand it now,” Rachel continued, looking at her intently. “When I found out the truth, everything just clicked into place. I get it. I get why you did all those things: Sam, the way you were with me around your mother, the hiding, all of it! After everything you’ve been through, what you’ve had to deal with growing up, living in that kind of a house, with people like that as your family, the ones who are supposed to give you nothing but love and support… For you to be this amazing, caring, wonderful person that you are is an incredible achievement. You’re extraordinary, Quinn Fabray. I couldn’t be prouder to love you.”

Speechless, the blonde could only stare at her. Rachel seemed to understand this so she leaned in and kissed her again, absent of any other gesture that would mean as much. Quinn grabbed on to her like Rachel was the only thing keeping her standing…and that was likely the truth. She curled one arm around the smaller girl’s waist, the other around her shoulders, and she pulled Rachel into her so there wasn’t a single inch of space between them.

So long…so long she’d been hiding this secret. Terrified of losing her, terrified that she’d find out what a truly awful person she was beneath it all, terrified of losing the only person she’d ever really loved.

Now it was out and Rachel was still there.

This was a dream. It had to be.

“I really have to go talk to your Daddy?”

“It’s a good thing.”

“You’re right,” she agreed with a heavy exhale. “I can’t run forever.”

“…Even though you wanted to.” Rachel had meant for it to be teasing, but it came out sounding much more serious.

“Yeah, I did…still kind of do.”

“Running away only works for so long.”

“Have you ever tried it? I don’t think I’ve ever seen Rachel Berry run from anything, even when she should. Like slushies?”

“So I prefer to stand my ground,” she sniffed and straightened her shoulders, “but I’m special, so you can’t compare yourself to me. It wouldn’t be a fair competition.”

That put a smile on Quinn’s face. Rachel was joking with her. After the hell that had been this past week, here she was just grinning and teasing her like it was nothing at all.
“I can’t believe this is happening right now. Just a half hour ago I thought you…I thought I’d lost you for good and now we’re standing here. You’re kissing me, and I’m about to go face your fathers.”

“You make it sound like you’re walking to your doom.”

“Isn’t that what it is?”

“No. Not this time.”

“You promise?”

Rachel cupped her face and kissed her lovingly. “Promise.”

“Okay…” she nodded, putting her hands over Rachel's where they caressed her cheeks, “I can do this…I think.”

“It’ll be better when this is all over, Quinn. You’ll feel better. All of us will.”

“I hope you’re right.”

Rachel slipped her hand in Quinn’s and they walked up to the house together, the blonde’s grip getting tighter and tighter with each step. Just as they reached the front stoop, Quinn pulled her back all of a sudden.

“Just…just tell me something?”

“Anything.”

“After I talk with your Daddy…and your Dad I guess, where…where are we going to be? You know everything now. Do you still want…”

Rachel turned and leaned into her, standing on her tip toes to meet Quinn eye-to-eye. “The fact that you feel like you still have to ask me that question breaks my heart.”

She watched her for a moment and her voice cracked, “I don’t deserve you.”

“It’s true,” the brunette shrugged unapologetically, “I’m too good for anyone; at least that’s what my fathers tell me. But you’re the closest anyone could ever get.”

“Rachel?”

“Yes?” she chirped brightly.

“Has anyone ever told you that you’re kind of full of yourself?”

“All the time. But I prefer to think of it as confidence and self assertion.”

Quinn felt herself melt inside at that brilliant smile. Just how much she loved this girl...

“You are kind of special, Rachel Berry.”

“I know!”

As Quinn laughed, Rachel led her up the steps and into the house.

“Baby…why aren’t you wearing shoes?”
Hiram sat her down in the Berrys' den and asked her if she wanted to hear his story.

She didn't.

Oh, God. She really didn't.

She wanted to keep on pretending like it never happened, like she never knew anything about it, like it had never touched her life. But it had. And she couldn't even bring herself to look this man in the eye.

So Quinn said yes.

Hiram asked Rachel to leave the room and it took a great deal of convincing from both men to get her to agree to leave. Quinn didn't want her to leave. She didn't want to face this alone, but that's exactly why she had to. So it was Quinn's nod of reassurance that eventually got Rachel to go.

He closed the doors behind them and seated himself on the couch opposite where Quinn was, drawn up in herself as tightly as she could be, stiff as a board.

This isn't going to be a pleasant story to hear, Quinn.”

I'm aware,” she managed to choke out in reply.

"But I think it's important that we're on the same page here, since some grievous mistakes have been made these past months, but know that I'm not going to hold back.”

"I wouldn't expect you to.”

"All right.” He nodded. “We were in the same school, the same grade, even had some classes together in high school. Russell Fabray was the King of Mount Eaton High School. All the girls fought over him. All the guys wanted to be him. And I was just another loser, a nerd, an outcast.”

Quinn squeezed her eyes shut and braced herself for what she knew was to come.

Dad, I can't do this,” Rachel said as she paced back and forth. “I can't leave her in there alone with Daddy like this! She's...she's so scared. I have to be there for her!”

She suddenly bolted for the door, but Leroy was faster and caught her by the shoulders, steering her back around into the kitchen.

"Listen to me, honey,” he said firmly. “I know how badly you want to protect Quinn right now, but this is your Daddy we're talking about. After what you've told us tonight, you know better than anyone that Quinn is very well protected in that room. This is something they need to work out for themselves. It's not for us to intervene.”

"But what if.”

"Don't worry,” Leroy teased with a wink, “your Daddy's not going to steal your girl away.”

Rachel watched him carefully for a moment. “You're very calm about this.”

"Should I not be? Was this the screaming and yelling part? Damn. I'm always mixing them up!”

"Dad.”
"Daughter."

"You are WAY too calm about all this."

Rachel drummed her fingernails on the counter top as Leroy started pulling out some snacks and drinks from the fridge.

"You knew, didn't you?"

"Perhaps I did," he replied casually without looking up.

Overcome, Rachel flung her arms around his middle and crushed him to her as tightly as she could.

"I love you, Dad. I'm so sorry."

Leroy bent down slightly and wrapped his arms around her in return, resting his cheek against the top of her head.

"I love you too, sweetheart."

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"I was beaten within an inch of my life. Ruptured my spleen. Turned my body into pulp. They had torn my stomach open with the tire chain, ripped a gash so deep, my blood soaked the dirt into mud. Some of it spattered on one of the boys' shoes and he spat on me for it. As if I had done it on purpose."

Quinn's stomach rolled, but she never took her eyes off the man sitting in front of her.

"I was just supposed to get milk for my mother that evening, that's all. But when I left the house, I had no idea that I would find myself in the worst nightmare, the kind that was real. The strangeness of it all, that running such a simple errand could lead to me lying there on the ground, in the most pain that I have ever experienced in my life. Just because some guys thought they were better than me, that I was less than human to them, that I deserved to be punished for what I was. I managed to look up at Russell, with one eye that I could still see a little out of because the other had completely swollen shut by then, and I just said, 'Please'. I didn't have the strength to do or say anything else. Just that one word."

He held his hands up, staring at nothing in particular.

"'Don't hurt me anymore', I wanted to say. 'Don't kill me', I wanted to beg, but 'Please' was all that came out. And Russell just laughed. He said, 'This is only the beginning for you Jew fag. Hell's gonna fuck you just the way you like, right up the ass.' Then he brought his boot down and broke my leg in three places. I passed out."

Quinn didn't cry. She didn't have any tears left in her. Not being able to cry just meant it hurt all the more. Hiram looked at her again.

"The next thing I remember is waking up in the hospital to my mother sobbing. My father was on the night shift so he couldn't be there. My brother had shown up only to take my mother; he left right after and refused to visit. He knew why I had been attacked. I haven't spoken to my brother in almost twenty years now."

He wiped his hand over his mouth.

"I would have died that night, bled to death in that field, if one of the other boys hadn't gotten scared
and called 911. He didn't do it out of regret or some attack of conscience. He did it because if I died, they might get in trouble. They knew they'd get away with beating me no matter what I said afterward, but if I died, that might make things harder. So rather than chance it...

He wrung his hands together so tightly, they turned white under his grip.

“I spent three weeks in the hospital. The police were informed of the attack, but nothing was done. Had I attempted to pursue it further, it would have, without a doubt, gotten me killed for sure. It was a different time, Quinn. You think the world is hard today? You've no idea how far we've come, yet still how far we have to go. I still wear the marks of that attack to this day, scars on my back and stomach. I also can never quite walk straight, as I'm sure you've noticed. My leg healed but was never the same. As soon as I was well enough, I went back to school.”

“Like nothing ever happened?” Quinn asked incredulously.

He nodded. “Like nothing ever happened.”

“No one asked...?”

“Of course not. Why would they ask when they already knew the answer? I spent a few more months in school with those boys, including Russell, before we all went our separate ways. I went to college, I moved closer to the city, and I made a new life for myself. A better life. I thought that would be the end of my torment. Years went by. I met a wonderful man and we had a beautiful baby girl together. Then one day that same little girl came home from her very first day in first grade and gushed all about her new friend, Quinn Fabray.”

She looked up with a start and Hiram raised an eyebrow knowingly.

“That was how I found out Russell had moved here with his family and that his baby girl was the same age and in the same class as mine. It was just barely two years after we had moved here ourselves. I wanted to put Rachel into private school that very second, even though we couldn't afford it. I would have found a way. However, Leroy somehow convinced me that Rachel would be able to fend for herself. The years went on and I watched history repeat itself, my daughter crying her eyes out day after day because of someone called Fabray.”

He sighed.

“Again, I pushed the idea of private school, but by then she would have none of it. It's character building, Daddy. Isn't that what you always say when people treat you and Dad badly?' I tried to tell her that it was different, but even at that age she knew better. So I couldn't do much more than stand by and watch on helplessly. Every time she'd cry out all her tears, she'd still say the same thing. 'Character building, Daddy. Besides, it's just good practice for the inevitable rejection and harsh realities one faces as a connoisseur of the Broadway stage.' She was nine years old.”

Quinn could envision it so perfectly. It was Rachel to the core.

“Then after all those years of pain, both hers and mine, you walked in the door. I looked in your eyes, Quinn, and all I could see was the seventeen-year-old boy who brutalized me. My husband said I was blinded by my experience with your father, and it's true. I was horrifyingly, unforgivably blinded. I will never be able to truly express to you how sorry I am for my actions and not being able move past my pain to see you for who you really are which is not just another version of Russell Fabray.”

“If there's anything I've learned from Rachel,” Quinn said quietly, “it's that forgiveness is always
possible even when it's not deserved.”

“It’s a good lesson. I'm sorry to say I haven't practiced enough of what I preach.”

“My father...what he did to you...” she swallowed thickly, “I'm sorry, Mr. Berry. I can't...you don't know how....”

“Don’t ever blame yourself for what happened back then. How can you? It wasn't you, Quinn. It's my own damn fault for not recognizing that sooner.”

“I still feel guilty for it somehow. I mean, I wasn't there. I wasn't holding a bat, but I still... I hurt Rachel and that hurt you. So wasn't I continuing what my Dad started?” She lifted a trembling hand to her mouth and stared at the closed door. “I don't... Sometimes I think I'm just like him and I...” her voice cracked, “I think if I found out it was true, I'd kill myself.”

“Oh, Quinn,” Hiram sighed. “Don't think that for a second. Don't you dare believe it. You couldn't be more different. The way I see it, Russell is an angry person - ignorant, misguided, and just wrong inside. His malice was born of hatred, yours...well, am I wrong to say that yours was out of fear? Self loathing?”

She shook her head.

“Do you love my daughter?”

“Yes.”

"Since things changed for you two, the nature of your relationship, I mean, have you mistreated her?"

“Yes,” she admitted hoarsely, “B-but I didn't mean to. Just things got scary sometimes and I didn't know how to handle it. And I would hurt her feelings. I try so hard not to let that happen, but I just screw up...”

“I see,” he said carefully, nodding slightly to himself as he took it in.

“I'd do anything for her.”

He watched her for a moment before speaking again. “Your parents are divorced now, am I right?”

She nodded.

“You don't live with him anymore?”

“No, with my Mom.”

“Do you feel safer for that?”

“Safer than if he were still there, yeah, but not..."

“I understand.”

“No. I-I didn't mean it like that. Mr. Berry, my Dad's never...he doesn't hit me or anything. I wasn’t even spanked as a child.”

“And yet...”
Quinn shifted uncomfortably.

“There are different forms of abuse, Quinn. Just because he didn't knock you around on a daily basis doesn't mean he didn't do harm to you.”

“He did hit me once...” she said in barely a whisper. “H-he slapped me. It's the only time he ever laid a hand on me. He didn't even do that when I told him I was pregnant.”

“What happened?”

Quinn chuckled ruefully and sat back against the couch, crossing her arms and looked everywhere but him as she stayed silent for a long moment. Then she sighed.

“It was after my first day of school, first grade. I went home so excited to tell my parents about everything I did, everything that happened, everyone I met.”

She looked back to Hiram with red-rimmed eyes.

"I told them about MY new best friend, Rachel Berry. Before I could blink, he smacked me so hard, it knocked me off my feet. I cried terribly, but he didn't care. I don't even think he noticed. He just said these awful...awful things about her and how I was never to go near her again because people like me didn't associate with her 'perverted' kind. I was...I was Daddy's little girl,” she said bitterly, chewing on the inside of her cheek, “so I believed him. I believed every word. I stopped crying and promised never to go near her again and that I was very, very sorry, and wouldn't he forgive me? So he calmed down, took my hand, gave me some ice cream, and we never spoke about it again. The next day...I told Rachel to stay away from me, called her names, made her cry. I don't... She's forgiven me, Mr. Berry, but I still can't forgive myself, not completely anyway.”

Hiram suddenly stood up and got down on his knees stiffly before Quinn. Taken aback, she could only stare and stammer in dismay. Hiram took her hands and squeezed them gently.

“You don't trust me right now, and that's all right. I've given you no reason to, but my hope for us, Quinn, is that I can make amends for my mistakes with you. The first being that even if you feel like you can't trust me right now, know that you can. I'm here for anything you need. Whether it be someone to talk to, a safe haven - and that's what this house is for you now, okay? Safe. Or even if you just want someone to dial a number and pay for takeout.”

Quinn laughed uneasily and then it broke into a sob. She took her hands away from Hiram, burying her face in them.

“You won't tell my Mom?”

He took a deep breath of regret, hanging his head. “I give you my word, however little that may mean to you at the moment. Besides, it's not something that should come from me. You'll tell her someday, when you're ready.”

“When I'm safe...” she murmured.

“Rachel has had difficulty understanding that, hasn't she?”

“It's not her fault. I didn't want her to know. She'd only worry more about me.”

And?”

“...And if she knew the truth about my family, what they are, like you do, s-she might not love me
amore. She'd see them in me, like you saw my father.”

“Then I guess you don't know her well enough yet to know that that's not how my daughter's mind works. Yes, she would worry more about you; she'd probably convince Leroy and me to let you live with us, just to get you out of there. But she will always see you for you and never for what others have to do with it. Only you. She's smarter than I am, obviously. Don't ever tell her I said that. I'm her father - I have to know better - even when I don't.”

“My lips are sealed.” She managed a small smile.

"There's something else I would like to ask you, Quinn. There's no right or wrong answer to this, only the truth. I think we both owe each other all the honesty we can give right now, don't you think?”

Quinn nodded.

“Were you aware of your father's actions against me?”

“No.” She shook her head. “Not at first. I mean...I've heard him tell the story. He tells it all the time. But he never used your name. I-I suspected a little, but I never knew for sure. Then one night I heard you arguing with your husband. The stuff you said about me, about my Dad... I just didn't want to believe it was you, that you were the boy from my Daddy's story. I prayed for it to be anyone but you.”

She drew in a deep breath.

“Then...um...then the night you told me I wasn't welcome here anymore - I saw you walk up the driveway, you were limping, and that's when I knew. I've heard the story; I know exactly how he broke your leg. I've heard it more times than I ever want to think about.”

Quinn met his eyes for the first time that night.

“You walked up and I knew it was you.”

Hiram sighed and covered his face with his hands.

“Please” she had begged him. And he sent her away...crashing into a tree.

When the man lifted his head again, there were tears in his eyes.

“Secrets...” he trailed off hoarsely. “How they can hurt.”

“Secrets can protect you,” she countered stubbornly.

“And they can destroy you.”

“It’s the risk you take.”

Hiram looked at her solemnly for a long time. “Was it worth the risk?”

“Yes,” she replied without a trace of hesitation. “Rachel could end up hating me for making us hide, but she would still be safe. My parents...this town...I’ll do anything to keep them from knowing about her. I won’t ever let them hurt her. I won’t let anyone...even if she hates me for it.”

“You keep saying hate, Quinn...but as far as I can see, there’s only love in my baby girl's eyes.”
She took a shaky breath. “But I risked it. I’m still risking it.”

He nodded. “I think we should call them back in now so we can all discuss this properly.”

“Discuss what exactly?”

“Well, Quinn, you’re dating my daughter. Don’t think you get to escape the usual rituals of that rite.”

She would have been worried, but the teasing gleam in Hiram’s eye had her slumping back against the couch in relief.

Rachel came running it at once and went to Quinn’s side. She must have seen the remnants of her tears because she cupped her cheek gently and turned on her Daddy with a fierce glare.

“What did y-!”

Quinn covered her hand with her own and brought them down to stay linked between them on the couch.

“It’s okay, Rachel. I think…” she looked to Hiram, “I think things are okay now.”

He nodded in agreement as Leroy sat down next to him on the couch opposite the girls.

“Quinn, are you sure you’re-”

“Better than ever, I promise.”

Rachel seemed slightly assuaged by this and turned to Hiram questioningly. “Daddy?”

“Now that we have that out of the way, you’re going to start from the beginning and explain to us how this all came about. This is called ‘starting over’, ladies. For all of us.”

Quinn and Rachel exchanged identical nervous glances.

“From the beginning?” Quinn asked warily.

Both men nodded.

“Okay...” Quinn started with a sigh. “In third grade, I fell off the monkey bars...”
And so they told them, leaving out the more explicit details and they definitely had to do with some fudging when it came to Quinn's initial pursuit. The men were both worried and surprised when Sam came into it. Leroy even asked if there was something he was trying to hide as well. Both Rachel and Quinn laughed. Poor Sam, would people always jump to assume he was gay? They didn't like the idea of the boy being involved and used as a pawn in this, but Quinn promised to have him come over and meet them sometime so they could see for themselves and discuss it with Sam.

When they reached the end, which meant they retold the events up until what had them all sitting in this room right then, Hiram only had one more thing to say.

“Are you two sexually active?”

Quinn blushed harder than she thought she'd ever done before in her life.

“Oh my God...” she groaned.

“No, Daddy,” Rachel chirped without a moment's hesitancy. “Quinn and I have yet to reach that level of physical intimacy in our relationship.”

On the outside, Quinn gave nothing away as she watched the relieved looks on the men's faces. Inside, however, she was in shock. Rachel had just bold-faced lied to her parents. That wasn't a Rachel Berry thing to do. The Rachel Berry way would have been to admit everything, right down to embarrassingly intimate details that her fathers would have to interrupt and tell her to stop. Instead, she lied.

The two men left under the guise of making tea and getting some snacks, but really it was a chance to give them all some breathing space and a chance for the husbands to talk about all that they'd heard. As soon as they were out of the room, Quinn gaped at Rachel in open astonishment.

“You didn't tell them-”

“I'm honest, but I'm not stupid, Quinn! I want sleepovers without sneaking around. You think that's going to happen if I told them we're intimate?”
“No?”

“Exactly! So close your mouth and don't say a word about it because there is no way they're going to interfere with our sex life.”

Quinn grabbed her and kissed her deeply, giggling against her mouth. “I love you so much.”

Rachel laughed softly, running her fingers through long, blonde locks. “How are you feeling about all this?”

“Like I wanna sleep for days.”

“Then our discussion about newly-revealed information can wait?”

“If you don't mind? I'm just...”

“Talked out for tonight?”

“So very.”

“But we will discuss it?”

“Everything,” she promised.

“Good. Now I'm going to convince my fathers to let my girlfriend sleep over. As we are not sexually active and there's no reason why we shouldn't be allowed.”

“Right!” Quinn nodded, barely managing to keep a straight face. But when Rachel moved to walk out, panic overwhelmed her, and she grabbed her wrist tightly.

“Wait,” was all she could say. “Just…wait.”
She just couldn’t bear the thought of not having Rachel's presence there; she just needed it for a little longer. Couldn’t she just give her another minute? Another minute to realize what was happening? Another minute to know...to feel...to believe?

Rachel knelt back down on the couch, hovering over her and, with the pad of her thumb, wiped away the tears Quinn didn’t even realize she’d shed.

“No more of that,” the brunette whispered.

“I...I’m not sure I believe this is all happening. It’s not how I thought it would be.”

“It’s happening.” Rachel smiled. “And it’s a lot better than you thought it would be, isn’t it?”

“I never imagined...”

“You don’t have to. It’s happened. It’s still happening.”

“Rachel, do you really forgive me?”

“There’s nothing to for-”

“Please!” she begged. “You can’t do that. You have to tell me.”

“Yes, I forgive you, Quinn.” She kissed her softly. “But if you love me, you need to do something for me.”

“Tell me.”

“Forgive yourself.”
Quinn pulled her down into a searing kiss, which Rachel eventually pried herself away from with countless reassurances that she would be back as soon as possible and they wouldn’t have to leave each other’s side for the rest of the night.

*How about the rest of our lives?*

When Quinn was alone in the room at last, she sighed and collapsed face first onto the couch.

What a night.

What a life.

Forgive herself? For Rachel…she would try.

They were finally in bed together again, after what felt like years of being apart. They had talked a little bit more with the Berry men before they got to leave to get some sleep. It took only a moderate amount of convincing on Rachel's part to get them to agree to let Quinn sleep over. It was probably more out of shell-shock than anything else that made them give in so easily.

It'd been quite a whirlwind few hours. They likely didn't have the strength to say no at that point anyway.

Rachel curled up against her shoulder and Quinn could have cried.

She never thought she'd be here again.

But it wasn't over yet. If she was going to come clean, she was going to come clean about everything tonight.

“I have to tell you something.”
“More?”

“I kissed Sam.”

“That isn’t news to me.”

“N-no, I mean…I really kissed him…like I haven’t done since I told him about you. It was after you walked out on me in Glee club. I ran after you and, um, I-I saw you with Jesse in the auditorium. I was so…”

Rachel lifted her head with wide eyes. “Oh! Quinn, you have to believe me, it was nothing. I don’t have any feelings for him. And h-he was just using me after all,” she admitted shamefully. “He always planned to try to get back together with me. Jesse never had any intention of just being my friend.”

Quinn swallowed thickly, trying to let herself hear Rachel. To accept what she was saying.

“I’m sorry he did that to you,” she whispered.

Rachel scoffed. “Fool me once…”

“You wanted to give him a second chance.”

“Everyone deserves one. At least, that’s what I thought. But it doesn't matter anymore, he's gone now. I told him to never come back. It was such a stupid mistake. I felt nothing when I kissed him again. I wanted to feel something. I hoped maybe it would ease the pain I felt about what happened between you and me, but whatever was there or that I believed was there for me and Jesse...it was gone. All I could think of was you.”

She bit back her relief at hearing that as much as humanly possible. She didn't want Rachel to pick up on it so blatantly, not when she was guilty of the same thing. She had no right to be relieved.
“It's his fault that he screwed it up. You have nothing to be ashamed of. You wouldn't be you if you didn't try to believe that he'd changed. Don't give up on people just because you run into a few jerks along the way. You're right to believe that everyone deserves a second chance. It takes a strong person to stand by that and you are, hands down, the strongest person I know.”

Rachel traced her finger lightly down Quinn's cheek and smiled softly. “Thank you.”

“Um,” Quinn cleared her throat uncomfortably and turned back to the ceiling, “I still just want to explain that what happened with Sam-”

“I know.”

“You know?”

“He told me.”

“Oh.”

“And I understand why you did it. It's okay. We're wiping the slate clean tonight, Quinn. But thank you for being honest with me.”

“Are you upset?”

“Devastated would be a better way to describe it…” she sighed.

“Oh, Rach, please, it didn’t-”

“I’d rather just forget about it, okay? Forget it ever happened. Desperate people do…”

“…desperate things,” Quinn finished for her. “That’s exactly it.”
“So...like I said...a clean slate?”

Quinn nodded. “I don’t want there to be any more secrets between us.” She chuckled lightly. “After all this, I don’t think I’ll ever have it in me to keep anything from you again.”

“I like that.”

“It’s a little scary.”

“It’ll get easier.”

They lapsed into silence.

“Quinn?”

“Hm?”

“D-did you like kissing him that way again?”

“No,” she replied flatly. “Not even a little bit. It just...hurt - which is what I think I was trying to do.”

“Are you going to do it again?”

“What? No! Of course not!”

“What I mean is,” she said tremulously, “fake kisses, real kisses, are you...are you still going to do that?”

“No. It’s over. Sam’s free. I’ll have us stage our break up as soon as possible. But...I want us to do something else first.” She curled her finger under Rachel's chin to make sure the girl was looking at
“What’s that?”

“I want to tell the Glee club about us.”

Rachel's eyes went wide and her mouth dropped open. “A-about you and me?” she stammered. “Our relationship?”

“Yeah.”

“But…what if it gets back to your parents?”

“We’ll swear them to secrecy.”

Rachel snorted. “We have some of the biggest gossips in school in that club. It'll never work.”

“Kurt knows better than anyone how important this is, so I’m not worried about him.”

“Mercedes and Tina?”

“They have hearts; I’ll explain the details of my situation, and trust them to protect me.”

“That’s a lot of trust.”

“I have to start sometime. Besides, I’ll have Santana threaten them all just to be sure.”

Rachel rolled her eyes. “That leaves Brittany. She’s well-meaning, Quinn, but anything and everything comes out of that girl’s mouth.”
“Brittany already knows.”

“What?”

“According to Santana, Brittany informed her that I was in love with you back when we were in first grade. She’s been convinced of it ever since.”

“T-t-that’s…”

“I know.”

“You’re really ready for this, Quinn?”

“It’s not the whole thing, Rachel, I know, but at least this way we don’t have to hide it from our friends.”

The brunette's eyes filled with unshed tears. “I love you so much.”

“Yeah? You’re okay with this?”

“What do you think?” she sniffled.

Quinn leaned in and brushed her nose with her own before kissing the tip of it lightly. “I love you too.”

“Does Sam know you two are breaking up?”

Her eyes clouded over for a moment and she swallowed uncomfortably. “Not until I tell him.”

“Do you think he’ll be all right?”
“I honestly don’t know. There are…things I have to settle with him. I’ve been a terrible friend.”

“Then you’ll have to make it up to him.”

“I’m going to try.” She sighed and snuggled in closer to Rachel. “You know...after telling your Dads all that tonight...I’ve realized something.”

“That I was hardly worth all this time, pain, and effort, so now you're trying to figure out a way to break up with me as nicely as possible?”

Quinn merely raised an eyebrow in response until Rachel finally gave in.

“Okay, what did you realize?”

“You're the one who started all this. You kissed me first.”

“What?” she yelped and sat up. "Quinn, admittedly I do not possess a photographic memory, but I recall that day very well. YOU kissed me - then hit me and ran away - but YOU leaned in. I didn't even know... It was all you!”

Quinn was still grinning from ear to ear which made Rachel exasperated.

“What? What on earth could you possibly remember that I don't?”

“You kissed my hand,” Quinn said with the smuggest grin Rachel had ever seen on her. “My hand, my knees, my elbow. Everywhere I was hurt, you kissed me. Then I kissed you. Therefore...you totally started it.”

Rachel squeaked, open mouthed with indignation.

“That doesn't count! I was just trying to be nice! To comfort you like the big crybaby you were.”
“It does count! It so does!”

“Pecking someone on the elbow or the knee or other random body parts does not constitute romance, Quinn! You kissed me on the lips - that's what counts. So YOU started it.”

“Oh, so you're saying when I do this...” she kissed Rachel's throat, “that doesn't mean anything?”

“It's different!” she whined.

“What about here?” Quinn pressed her lips to the sensitive flesh at the inner crook of her arm. “Here?” She kissed both palms with a mischievous grin. “Or even...here?” She shimmied down to the end of the bed to place herself between Rachel's bare legs and laid light kisses to each knee. “Still doesn't count?”

“Mine were finger kisses. There is a vast difference between the two.”

“They're still kisses,” she insisted.

“Why is it so important to you that I started it?”

“Because!” Quinn replied, giddy as a child. “That means you love me.”

“Of course I love you! I tell you that almost every day!”

“It means you loved me back then too. Not just now. It wasn't...” she traced absent patterns over Rachel's knees, “it wasn't j-just me.”

Rachel sighed and plopped her head back onto the pillows, staring at the ceiling. She was acutely aware that Quinn had yet to move from between her legs.

“Rachel Berry loves me... Rachel Berry loves me...” the blonde sang gleefully.
“My first love...”

“Your only love,” she corrected.

“My only love,” Rachel agreed with a smile down at the radiant blonde. She sighed again. “My first kiss, my first lover...my only lover.”

Quinn smiled brilliantly at her, hazel eyes shining in a way Rachel so rarely got to see. How badly she wanted to see Quinn like this always...so carefree...

The idea that Rachel made the first move had the blonde so excited that Rachel couldn't bring herself to protest, however faulty the logic. Quinn was practically rolling around in the bed in a fit of childish glee and Rachel's heart soared at the sight.

“Okay, Quinn. You win. I kissed you first, but we're still counting yours as the real one.”

“Deal.”

“You're infuriating.” She frowned.

“Why?”

“You were the one I never had to chase. You wanted me. You pursued me. You fought for me. Now you've changed all that by saying that I...I was the one who did it.”

“Silly, silly, silly.” Quinn crawled up the length of Rachel's body to stretch out on top of her. “Nothing's changed. All of that is the same as it was two minutes ago. I was the crazy passive aggressive, usually just plain aggressive, freak who couldn't get it through my head what I wanted. I chased you, Rachel Berry - within an inch of your life!”

“You caught me.”
“Yeah?”

Rachel bit her lower lip shyly and nodded.

“Forever?”

“Is that what you want?”

“Is that what I can have?”

“See? Infuriating.”

“Tell me.”

“Forever is yours.”

“Good. ’Cause my forever was always going to be yours. Even if I didn't get to have you.” She cocked her head thoughtfully. “Did that even make sense?”

“I'm beginning to wonder if you're under the influence of alcohol or some illegal narcotic...again.”

“I think I'm just happy.”

“Really?”

She nodded with a delightful little hum that made Rachel shiver. That dazzling smile didn't seem to be leaving any time soon. “Relieved...happy...safe. It's all new territory here so I'm guessing really.”

“You'll always be safe with me.”
“No, you'll always be safe with me.”

“Can we just agree to take care of each other?”

Quinn snuggled down warmly into the crook of Rachel's neck. “Two against the world,” she mumbled.

Rachel wrapped her arms around her just to be that much closer. “Three if you count Sam.”

“He can help. He always does. It's just one reason why we love him.”

“We love him?”

“Yes, we do.”

“Okay, we do,” she acquiesced begrudgingly.

“But when it comes down to it?”

“Just you and me?” Rachel tried hopefully.

She nodded. “You and me.”

“Quinn?”

“Hm?”

“I locked the door just after we came in…”
She raised an eyebrow. “After your fathers sternly told us there would be an open-door policy when I stay over?

You’re turning into more and more of a rebel every day, Rachel Berry.”

“Oh, stop it. It’s a silly rule. Now, I-I know you said you were tired, but-”

“You can’t be quiet,” she interrupted flatly.

“Can too!”

“Have you met you?”

“I can do anything I set my mind to! I have exercised extraordinary lengths of willpower as part of my Broadway training for many years now.”

Quinn giggled. “Guess you'll have to prove it.”

“I will!”

Quinn lifted her head just in time for Rachel's mouth to crash into hers.

Ultimately, she failed the test, which Quinn was all too happy to remind her of later. Thank God she'd only been teasing about Rachel having to be quiet. If that room wasn't soundproofed...it would have been a whole different story.
Quinn knocked on the door but there was no answer. She sighed and steeled herself for what was to come. Mr. Evans had let her in the house without even thinking about it.

“You know where it is,” he had said with a wink and Quinn could barely manage the tiniest of smiles.

Of course, Sam's parents never suspected a thing about their relationship. He never told them, never said anything to make them suspicious. To the Evanses, she was simply Sam's lovely high school girlfriend who would help babysit, came over for dinner every once in a while, and was at church with them every Sunday. It was just another reminder of how she'd uprooted this boy's life. Sam loved his family above all else and she made him lie to them... for a love that would never be his.

The doorknob felt like ice.

Sam was, of course, in his room despite the lack of response. He was on a chair by his window with his guitar, but he wasn't playing it. The instrument hung loosely in his hands. Quinn wondered if that thing was Sam's version of a childhood stuffed animal or a safety blanket. He carried it wherever he went, played it all the time. It was his most treasured possession.

“We're breaking up?” he asked and it startled Quinn.

She didn't even realize how long she'd been standing there, quietly, lost in her head as he kept his gaze focused out the window.

“Yeah,” she replied thickly. “I think we're overdue, don't you?”

“Something like that.”
She sat down on the edge of his bed and he moved his head a little at the creaking sound, but never turned back to face her.

“I could say it, but it won't mean anything at this point.”

She could say she was sorry.

But how many times had he heard that word pass her lips? Too many.

It was worthless now.

“You're one of my best friends in the world. I would never have been able to make it through this year without you there to help me, to bail me out each and every time I ever asked you to.” She shook her head incredulously. “Sometimes you even managed to do it without me having to ask. I'll never be able to repay you for that. For any of it.”

He said nothing.

“What happened yesterday was so...so wrong. I can't even begin to...” She bit her lip in frustration and started over. “What I've done to you, how I've treated you, and not just yesterday, is one of my biggest regrets. I did use you, we both know that, but I never wanted to hurt you. Truly. If nothing else, I need you to understand that.”

“I understand that,” he said flatly. “I always did. You never wanted to hurt me, Quinn. You never thought about me enough for it to even occur to you.”

It stung and it wasn't true, but he wasn't entirely wrong either.

“I see it better now than I did before,” she replied carefully. “Um, a lot's happened to me in the last twenty-four hours and it's given me a better perspective, made me realize what I've been doing wrong, what I've been doing wrong for a very long time. I-I was so wrapped up in my own...”

“...pain...that I was blind. It's doesn't make it okay, but it's an explanation. What happened in the hallway was me at my breaking point. I don't expect you to forgive me for that or for all the rest; I certainly don't have the right to even hope for it, but I do. You know I do. How could I not?”

She inched closer to him from where she was on the bed. It was unnerving having to speak to the back of Sam's head for so long. She didn't even think she'd seen it as clearly as she had today. Actually, he kind of had a large head. It had to be to fit that mouth of his...

She had to smile at that thought, even though everything else felt like it was breaking...because it was.

“I need you in my life. Not to protect me, not to be a shield, not to hide me away from the rest of the world, but to have you as my friend. And I want so badly to be given a second chance not just so that I can have you there for me, but so that I can be there for you. You deserved a better friend, Sam, and I want to be that. I know I can be that.”

He was still quiet.

Quinn felt the last throes of desperation begin to bubble up, but she had to keep herself contained. She knew it would come to this, that Sam wouldn't be able to forgive her, but it still didn't change how much it hurt when it happened.

“I...we...came out to Rachel's fathers.” She sighed. “They know the truth about us now and I think they're okay with it. I mean, we left it on decent terms. I'm not sure what will happen exactly with them now, but...” She stopped herself. “I wanted to thank you for what you said to her yesterday. It's because of you that the truth finally made its way through. Um, I never told you this part, but that story my Dad gave you about the boy in the field?”

Sam turned around at last, looking at her hard, but still looking at her.

She took a deep breath. “That boy was Hiram Berry.”

His brow furrowed in confusion for a moment; then his mouth dropped open.
“HOLY SHIT!”

Quinn actually jumped back a bit on the bed, he was so loud. He put his guitar down and jumped to his feet, pacing as he stammered and stuttered without ever really saying anything coherent.

“All this time?” He halted and spun around on her with wide eyes. “You knew all these years that...?”

“No,” she shook her head at once, “I wondered. I-I guessed at it, but I didn't really know until a few months ago.”

“Damn it, Quinn...just...damn.”

“Yeah.”

 Damn was right.

“I want to tell the Glee club about Rachel and me.”

Flabbergasted, he stared at her in shock. It took a few beats before he wet his lips and asked, “You sure about that?”

Quinn could feel her resolve strengthen even more at just being questioned. She had no doubts about this. Not now. Not anymore.

“I am.”

“If it gets out...?”

“I'll handle whatever comes our way. I won't let Rachel get hurt.”
He frowned. “What about you?”

“I can take care of myself.” She tilted her head at him with a rueful smile. “I know I’ve been asking you to shoulder that burden, but it’s time I took it back. I was afraid before, and I’m still afraid, but I can do this.”

“I won’t ever let them hurt you, Quinn. I don’t care what crap is happening right now, but I’ll never let them...”

She stood up and had to resist the powerful urge to fling her arms around him and sink into his warm, safe, embrace.

This boy...

This wonderful boy...

“You don’t need to worry about that,” she said, putting on a brave smile. “It’s going to be okay. They’ll keep it to themselves. No one else will find out and then next year I’ll be finally free of all this.”

“They’re total blabbermouths! The Glee club can’t possibly keep this to themselves!”

Quinn laughed. For as often as they were at odds, Rachel and Sam were just as often on exactly the same page. It was the oddest thing.

“I have faith in them.”

“That’s a lot of faith.”

“It’s what we were taught, isn’t it? All about faith. It’s time I put it to use the right way.”

Sam nodded after a long moment and crossed his arms protectively.
“So...” he said tersely, “what did you have in mind for our public break up?”

Quinn nodded with the slightest hint of a smile. He hadn't forgiven her and they weren't okay; but he was still her friend, still cared about her, still loved her.

It gave her hope.

He was still Sam.

“Well, considering the circumstances, you definitely get to dump me.”

He snorted. “Yeah, that was a given.”

This time they both smiled.

“You can still change your mind.”

“No, I can't.”

“Quinn...”

“I mean it; I'm not changing my mind. This is happening and it's happening today.”

“I would understand if-”
“This isn’t just for you, Rachel,” she said softly, trying to make her understand. “This is for me too. It's for us.” She squared her shoulders and nodded firmly. “Let's go.”

They were the last ones in; the rest of the group was waiting for the girls impatiently since this was an impromptu meeting in the choir room after school when they were actually supposed to be in the auditorium rehearsing. They'd have to get this over with quickly before Mr. Schuester came looking for his missing Glee club.

“Finally!” Mercedes said when they walked in. “What's going on? Your text was freaky cryptic.”

“And strangely ominous,” Tina added.

Rachel made sure both doors to the choir room were closed and locked before she joined Quinn in the middle of the room. Sam was sitting behind them on the piano bench drumming his fingers on the closed cover, anything to distract him from what was going on. He seemed lost in his own world.

Finn, however, was impatient.

“Can you just tell us what you called us all here for already?” He snapped. “Mr. Schue's gonna be pissed when he realizes we're all super late to rehearsal.”

“Sit down and shut up, Frankenteen! She can't tell you anything if you're babbling away.”

“Are you pregnant again?” Brittany asked.

Santana leaned over to whisper in her ear. The blonde's eyes lit up with recognition and she shrugged sheepishly, mouthing a “sorry” to Quinn.

“There’s something Rachel and I need to tell you, but before I do, I need each and every one of you to swear never to let it leave this room. We're all friends here and I'm taking the chance that you can prove to me how much of a friend you really are. No one else can know about this. No one.”

“Uh, is anyone else getting a little freaked out here?” Artie asked.
“JUST SWEAR IT!” Santana snapped at them all.

There were several frightened nods and a jumble of words as everyone promised.

Quinn took a deep breath and reached for Rachel's hand that was waiting for her.

“Quinn and I are together,” Rachel chirped, grinning from ear to ear. “She's my girlfriend. We've been officially dating for the last seven months.”

It was so quiet in the room, there may as well have been crickets.

But it wasn't a stunned silence. It was just...silence. There was virtually no reaction at all from the room. They simply stared at Quinn and Rachel as if waiting for something more.

“Uh, did no one hear that?” Quinn asked. “Rachel said we're dating, as in a couple, as in romantically involved.”

“Yeah, we heard you the first time,” Kurt said. “What's your point?”

Rachel and Quinn's jaws just about hit the floor.

“T-the point?” Quinn stammered in disbelief.

“We already know about you guys,” Mercedes explained, waving her hand as if for them to continue the story. “Kurt and I figured it out the day Quinn locked you both in the bathroom. Plus, when you sang that duet, you were a dead give-away.”

Kurt nodded in agreement.

“Mike and I saw you a couple months ago making out in the auditorium,” Tina added. “We were going to practice a new routine, but it turned out to be, um, otherwise occupied.” She blushed.
“Lauren and me were chasing some froshies away a few weeks ago when we saw you with your hand up my Jewish princess’ skirt behind the school,” Puck shrugged. “Seriously, I’ve been meaning to thank you for that contribution to the Puckasaurus’ spank bank. That one’s a lifer. I owe you.”

Lauren punched the side of his thigh and he yelped in pain.

“Deadthigh, jackass.”

“I know what it is!” he grunted in reply, holding his leg.

“Well, it was pretty obvious when you sang to her a few days ago and Rachel walked out,” Artie chimed in. “I had my suspicions after Jacob Ben Israel's blog post, but that was pretty much the clincher.”

“Brittany knew about it ten years ago and technically so did I ‘cause she told me,” Santana shrugged, joining in just for the hell of it.

Quinn and Rachel stared back at all of them in horror.

“And you aren't...” the blonde choked out, “surprised by the fact that I'm...?”

“You've been seriously gay for Berry for years.” Mercedes shrugged. “You're not exactly _subtle_, Quinn.”

She had the decency to blush while Rachel just grinned cheekily.

“Honestly, it was only a matter of time before this one,” Kurt gestured to Rachel, “caught on and then the question was really whether or not she would return your affections, however psychologically disturbed up they may have been expressed...looks like she did.”

“So glad you refused to make that bet with me!” Mercedes turned to him. “I would have been a crazy sore loser right now.”
“You were making bets on us?” Rachel squeaked.

“She wanted to,” Kurt emphasized. “She knew Quinn was into it, but we didn't have confirmation on you. I said you would feel the same, but Mercedes said you would shoot Quinn down in fiery flames of humiliation.”

“Sorry, girl.” Mercedes winced.

“I was just as surprised as you were, really.” Quinn shrugged. “Still surprised actually.”

Rachel bit her bottom lip happily and Quinn knew she was resisting the urge to kiss her. As nice as that would have been, it just wasn't the right time and she didn't even know if she was ready for that kind of PDA. Though something told her she really wasn't going to have a problem with it in the future...

“So, there's still a missing piece of the puzzle I'd like to have filled in,” Kurt interrupted their little moment. “What were you two doing with Sam that whole time? I'm apt to believe the threesome rumor was not exactly true. Unless-”

“I was her beard,” Sam interrupted flatly from behind them. “Quinn couldn't let anyone find out about it so she asked me to help.”

“You knew about them the whole time?” Mercedes asked disbelievingly, pointing to the two girls.

Sam stared at the floor and Quinn's stomach lurched. Rachel's grip on her hand tightened.

“Yep, knew the whole time,” he lied.

Finn had been oddly silent throughout all this, his gaze fixated on something just behind the girls while his mouth was kind of hanging half open in a weird, drool-like way.

“Finn...” Rachel tried carefully, “are you all right?”
“All right?” He blinked up at them dumbly like he was snapping out of a trance. “Did you really just ask me if I was all right?”

“Yes?” she answered perplexedly. “You look like you might be having a stroke which prompted my inquiry...”

“I probably am having a stroke,” he muttered. “You're dating Quinn? Like...dating for real dating?”

Instead of uttering a snappish come back, Quinn curbed the impulse of her tongue and just nodded.

“Yeah. It's for real.”

“Y-you like girls? You're gay?”

“I am,” Quinn nodded. “Rachel is...”

“I refuse to define my sexuality in such limited terms,” she finished for her.

“So you're bi,” Tina offered.

“I don't think labels are appropriate.”

“Definitely bi,” Kurt agreed and nodded at Tina.

Rachel glowered at them both.

“Wait, so all of you, with the exception of Finn, knew about us already?” Quinn asked in bewilderment.
She got a number of simultaneous nods in reply.

Quinn grew unsteady on her feet. All of this was really starting to hit her now.

_They knew. All this time... They knew._

“ I need to sit down.”

“ And...none of you said anything?” Rachel asked in wonderment.

“ We were waiting for you to tell us,” Kurt replied with a sad smile and wagged his finger. “Took you far too long, Miss Berry.”

“ I'm-”

“ Am I sitting down yet?”

“ Yes, Quinn. Sam got you a chair.”

“ Oh, okay. Thanks, Sam.”

“ No problem.”

“ YOU CAN'T BE GAY!” Finn shouted all of a sudden, making everyone jump. “You dated me! You both dated me!” he said wildly, getting to his feet as his hands flew about in a panic. “Y-you can't be gay and date me! You even told me you were in love with me! Both of you said that!”

Quinn looked like she was going to be sick, but Rachel just winced sympathetically.

“ Hey, dude, I even got one of them pregnant. Chill out,” Puck said. “Apparently, we were test runs. Happy to oblige by the way! Anytime you want a little male action to mix it up, you know who to
call.”

Rachel and Quinn stared up at him exasperatedly and Puck quickly shuffled his chair away so Lauren couldn't hit him again.

“This can't be happening to me,” Finn muttered, running his hands through his hair.

“No, it's not happening to you,” Quinn snarled. “It's happening to us! As hard as it may be to believe, this has absolutely nothing to do with you in the slightest.”

“But—”

“Someone please make him shut up,” Santana said from the back riser, rubbing her temples. “Blubber boobs is giving me a headache.”

“We broke up a while ago, Finn,” Rachel interjected calmly. “and it's been almost two years since you broke up with Quinn. Does it really matter who we're dating now? Whoever we choose to be with at this point, it still doesn't invalidate the time you and I spent together. I cared about you, you know I did, but we didn't belong together. Now, regardless of gender, you had to realize I was going to move on and find someone else eventually.”

“So you moved on to Quinn? My ex?”

Rachel narrowed her eyes at him.

“Sit down before you say something you regret,” Quinn said tersely.

“This is a nightmare!” he cried, shaking his head. “You're not gay, Rachel. She's just...brainwashed you or something!”

“Excuse me?” the brunette snapped.

Quinn was staring at the ceiling, trying to count to ten to keep herself calm.
“You've all seen her with me!” He looked around at the club desperately. “She's not into girls! I mean, we only got to second base and all, but that's just 'cause of her prudish whatever-ness. There's no way Quinn even got as close as I did!”

“FINN!” Rachel gaped at him, horrified.

Quinn had a death grip on the chair, the only thing keeping her still right now. Mike and Tina exchanged knowing looks, wincing, while Lauren snorted loudly. Brittany and Santana started laughing hysterically, which made Finn even more confused.

“You are so looking at this from the wrong angle, man.” Puck shook his head disapprovingly. “They're hooking up with each other! Nothing this hot happens in real life!”

“Besides us!” Brittany chirped and Santana froze, but no one paid them any attention.

“Come on, Rach. Just admit it! You're probably going through one of those phases or whatever. It's not real. It's not possible. W-we were...”

Quinn started to get up and Rachel didn't have to look at her girlfriend to know that she was seconds away from unleashing her wrath on the boy. She put her hand on Quinn's shoulder and urged her to stay down with a pointed look.

“We were what, Finn?” she asked calmly.

“Together! L-like really together! You told me that I was the one, that you loved me. You basically stalked me a-a-and followed me around...”

“Isn't that the same thing?” Brittany whispered to Santana who nodded in reply.

“You were obsessed with me and now you're suddenly into girls? Were you just lying to me the whole time?”
Quinn raised her hand. “I was.”

“Shut up, Quinn!” he snapped angrily. “We get it! You're the smoothest liar in the whole freaking world. Believe me, I know. But Rachel's not like you! She’s not a coldhearted bitch!”

Santana leaned forward, Puck moved to get on his feet; Sam even took a step forward, but it was Rachel who beat them all to the punch.

She stepped right in between Quinn and Finn, staring the tall boy down. “Finn, for the sake of our tenuous truce as well as your friendship with the rest of this club, I'm telling you right now to shut your mouth.”

Everyone leaned back in shock. The dangerous undertone of Rachel's voice was not something anyone had ever heard from her before. Not even Quinn.

Finn stared at her dumbly.

“I was not lying to you. I was wrong about my feelings back then. I didn't interpret them correctly, but what I told you in those moments we shared was the truth because I believed it was at the time. I look back now and see that I was wrong, but I never knowingly lied to you. We had our time together; there were good things and there were bad things, but it was never going to work. Never. I'm with Quinn now, I'm in love with her. When I'm with her, she makes me feel things I never even knew were possible. Things that I never felt when I was with you. I understand your confusion; I can even understand why you would be angry with me for it, but I will not let you speak to me or Quinn this way.”

She folded her arms across her chest.

“I'm not just 'suddenly into girls'; I've had strong feelings for Quinn for a very long time. I just didn't understand them and Quinn was...”

She was at a loss for the right word and looked back at the blonde for help.

“Stupid,” she supplied for her easily with a wave of her hand.
Rachel frowned and turned back to him.

“Afraid. She was afraid. So it took us time to work it out and we're still working it out, but at least we're doing it together. I'm with Quinn because she's Quinn, not because she's a girl. So, please, sit back down and listen to the rest of what we have to say because it's important. Also, I would appreciate it if you would remain silent for the rest of this time because you have a terrible habit of blurring things out without bothering to think how it affects others or what it is you're really saying. I'm going to forgive all the horribly disgusting and offensive things you just said because this was sprung on you and I will accept that it was just a poor reaction on your part. We can discuss this later, alone, if you want, but not now. So sit down.”

He looked at her for a few moments, blinking, before he finally stumbled back a bit and collapsed onto his chair. He glanced back and forth between the two girls in a stupor, like he didn't believe they were real.

“Thank you.” Rachel nodded sincerely and took a deep breath.

When she breathed, it seemed like everyone else did too. They'd all been holding their breath throughout Rachel's menacing yet oddly polite speech to Finn. Rachel Berry could be crazy-scary sometimes, but this time she was just scary-scary, which had everyone in a bit of shock, not just Finn.

Tina was the first to break the silence. “I kind of do have to ask...why was it so necessary for you to keep it a secret?” She shifted tentatively. “None of us wanted to say anything because you obviously were serious about keeping it under wraps, but now?”

“Yeah, I mean, you guys have been lying to us for a majorly long time,” Mike said. “What's the big deal about you two getting together?”

“Other than the sworn enemies turned lesbians overnight thing,” Artie added. “Which is cray cray for my head, but not exactly swearing us to secrecy necessary.”

Rachel turned back to Quinn and nodded for her to go ahead. So she did. Quinn explained her story, leaving the more personal details out, like how Hiram was involved, but she told them enough so that they would be able to grasp the reality of her circumstances.

The whole room went silent again. The girls were just blowing the club's mind today. It was a long
beat before someone finally spoke up.

“Wow, Quinn...” Mercedes said sympathetically. “I'm so sorry.”

“It must be so-” Tina tried but Quinn was shaking her head and stopped them both.

“We're not going to get into it. Okay?”

She looked at each and every one of them so that they would fully understand how much she meant it. This wasn't something they were going to sit around and chat about. This was her life, her family, and she only told them as much as they needed to know. She didn't want this to turn into a pity session for Quinn Fabray. She didn't want to talk about this with them at all actually, but since it had to be done in order to make sure they stayed quiet... She did what she had to do.

“Let me get this right, you're telling us about your thing with Rachel, but we can't talk to anyone else about it?” Artie asked. “How does that even work? If you guys are dating...”

“We're not dating publicly,” Rachel spoke up. “Everyone else is still going to see us just as casual friends by way of the Glee club. We're telling you guys now because...”

“Because you're our friends,” Quinn picked up for her. “And it's been really hard having to keep this from you. It's just...too many lies.”

Mercedes nodded. “Seven months is a damn ass long time to be sneaking around on us.”

“You have no idea,” Rachel muttered and her eyes flickered to hazel ones knowingly.

“I feel like I've been cheated on,” Artie said. “Is that weird?”

“Well, we were lying to you all...” Quinn reasoned. “But it's not like we didn't care.”

“We get it, Fabray.” Lauren said with a surprising amount of kindness. “You were taking care of your own. No one's going to get pissed at you for that.”
Puck nodded along with her firmly. His eyes were hard and his jaw was clenched so tightly, the muscles were visibly, rippling, but he said nothing more. He'd been like that ever since Quinn started talking about her parents.

“I really need you all to understand how important it is that this doesn't get out for other people to hear. It's going to get back to my Mom in a second, my Dad too. That can’t happen.”

“You got it, Quinn.” Mike nodded. “No one's gonna hear a thing from us.”

“You can count on us,” Tina added.

“We got your back,” Mercedes said.

The rest of the group nodded along seriously. Rachel exhaled loudly, smiling. She was relieved. As strange as the whole thing had been, certainly not how they expected it to go, but it all came together in the end. Quinn wasn't as relieved; she was still paler than usual, but at the moment some part of her seemed tentatively satisfied. Rachel could see she hadn't accepted their friends' promises yet, but she knew Quinn was trying to.

“We better get going before Mr. Schue throws a fit,” Tina said.

The rest agreed and they all started getting out of their chairs. Some just nodded at Quinn as they passed her. Finn gave her his kicked puppy look then asked Rachel if they could talk later like she offered and she agreed. A couple grabbed Quinn's shoulder reassuringly, Mercedes and Tina hugged her tightly then took turns embracing Rachel. Santana hugged Quinn while Brittany hugged Rachel before they left as well. Kurt was the last. He stood in front of them quietly for a moment before meeting Rachel's eyes.

“I've had quite some time to think about all this,” he said, glancing at Quinn. “But even with all that time, I can't understand why you didn't come to me.”

She dropped her head guiltily while Quinn looked away.

“I'm your friend, Rachel. You know that. Despite the intensely dramatic competition over solos and
occasional sniping, I consider you one of my best friends.”

“Kurt...” she started sadly, but he wasn't finished.

“You've hidden this from me for so long, something that is obviously incredibly important to you.” Again he looked at Quinn. “But you kept it from me - you lied to me - even when I gave you so many opportunities to confide in me, you just shot me down. The others, I understand, but me, Rachel? You didn't trust me? After all I've been through with my own struggle, you didn't think that I would-”

“It's not Rachel's fault,” Quinn interrupted. “I begged her to keep us a secret, even from you guys. Don't be upset with her; be upset with me.”

“No, he's right.” Rachel shook her head. “I should have told you, Kurt. I should have known better. Yes, Quinn refused to let anyone else know, but I still should have trusted you. I made a mistake. I put my faith in the wrong person.” She looked to Quinn to let her know who she meant and the name Jesse St. James passed between them silently. She turned back to Kurt, her eyes filled with tears. “And I won't do it again. You're one of my best friends too. You have no idea how hard it was for me to keep this from you. I wanted to tell you every day, to just be able to gush about everything or to talk to you about things that you can only tell your friend, b-but I had to-”

Kurt wrapped his arms around her shoulders and Rachel hugged him back fiercely. They murmured apologies and regrets and forgiveness. Quinn felt ashamed as she watched them interacting.

No matter what Rachel said, it really was her fault that she was forced to distance herself from her other friends. It was because of her that Rachel had to lie at all. She was the one who ended up being the divide between Rachel and her friends. No matter how good of a reason there was for it, she still felt guilty for causing it.

“How are you doing, Quinn?” Kurt asked when he finally disentangled himself from a weepy, but happy, Rachel.

“Better than ever, actually. If you can believe it.”

His eyes twinkled knowingly. “As a matter of fact, I can believe it. Terrifying yet freeing, right? Knowing that the bad things might happen, but at least you finally feel like you did something good for yourself, for your own soul.”
Quinn sighed as the regret washed over her. Just like Rachel, she too should have known that Kurt would have been a trustworthy ally.

Fear makes you stupid...really, really stupid.

She stood up and hugged him kindly.

“Yeah, that's exactly it.”

Sam had actually been the first of the group to leave and he did so without a word or even bothering to look at them. Quinn didn't want to say that it stung, but it did.

Yet, she knew Sam wasn't lost to her.

It was just going to be some time before they could all get used to this, before things could heal, fences mended. Looking back on how many she'd mowed down, it seemed like an insurmountable task, but Rachel's grasp on her hand and her loving smile gave her the strength she needed.

For once in her life, she let herself believe that everything really was going to turn out... right.

Rachel was in full on Diva Berry mode. With the competition so close, it was all she could think about and talk about and worry about. Quinn knew that her behavior was because of pent up anxiety about the competition. It wasn't that Rachel was nervous, it was that she was so focused on it, it was building the performance energy inside of her way too soon and she had no way of releasing it until the time came to step out onto that stage. So now it was up to Quinn to get Rachel through so the girl could actually make it to Nationals. What Quinn found was that she needed to keep the lightest hold on her girlfriend just to make sure she didn't spin off into the stratosphere.

It was all she could do, really.
After a long day of school, and two intense Glee rehearsals, they were back at the Berry house and Quinn was sitting on the bed watching Rachel acting like the Tazmanian Devil - only far more verbose.

Rachel was exhausted, an “about to pass out” level of exhaustion, but she wouldn't stop for anything at this point. The diva had been pushing herself and the Glee club relentlessly the past couple weeks. The strenuous pace was finally beginning to take its toll on her. Quinn watched her bouncing around the room with a weary expression.

Rachel was doing a dozen different things at once: listening to the weather report for New York, packing, going over their set list for the umpteenth time, practicing her scales, and even, for some reason, cleaning in the midst of it all. She was furiously reorganizing her already organized desk while talking Quinn through every step of their travel plans, starting with what time they needed to wake up in order to catch their 6am flight, how long it would take to get through security, and even though the seats were assigned they were going to con someone into switching because Rachel refused to sit next to anyone but Quinn on the flight, all the way through hotel arrangements and other activities they might have time for since they would be there for three days. Quinn just remained silent, listening and nodding through it all. It wasn't like Rachel was going to let her get a word in edgewise anyway and she didn't mind. It didn't bother Quinn to be quiet sometimes; she actually preferred it in turns, whereas for Rachel it was a form of torture.

When the brunette finished re-alphabetizing her DVD shelf, she thrust a vacuum into Quinn's hand and said, "Get started!" while whipping herself into a dusting frenzy. Of course, Quinn knew better than to even make a sound that might somehow be interpreted as protest. She simply switched the machine on and went to work vacuuming Rachel's already immaculate carpet. If it helped her girlfriend process, then it helped, and she was happy to do it.

But three hours later, Rachel still showed no signs of slowing down and Quinn was starting to worry about what this level of constant intensity was doing to the brunette's health.

She'd spent the last hour of their time together trying to coax the brunette into going to sleep, but was consistently brushed off.

“I can't sleep, Quinn! That's impossible! I'm still working!” Rachel argued from where she was sitting on her bed, leaning against the headboard as she worked on composing her list of tasks the Glee club needed to finish before they got on a plane for New York.

Fed up with trying to reason with her girlfriend, Quinn took matters into her own hands. Instead of asking again, she turned off the lights, ignored the wild protests, came over to the bed and yanked the pad of paper away from an extremely unwilling Rachel, tossed it onto the nightstand, and then climbed in behind her to hold her there just so she wouldn’t try to turn the lights on again.
“You have to sleep!” she said firmly over Rachel's vehement protesting. “Those dark circles aren’t just a figment of your imagination.”

“There’s so much to do, Quinn!” She was thrashing about, but the blonde managed to immobilize her by wrapping her arms and legs around her securely. “Sleep can wait; I just need to finish-!”

“No, that can wait.” Quinn's voice softened and she touched her lips to Rachel's neck. “You already sound like you might be coming down with a cold and if you keep at it like this, you're just going to make yourself even sicker. Then what? You need to be one hundred percent healthy and at the top of your game. We have Nationals in three days and our star performer cannot be anything less than her absolute best!”

“You know what? You’re absolutely right.” She nodded seriously, beginning to calm down. “I must take extra care with my health in this crucial time. It would be unforgivably irresponsible of me not to.”

“Thank you!” she cried exasperatedly.

Convinced that Rachel was going to stay put, Quinn started to get up, but Rachel held onto her.

“No, stay there,” she insisted.

“But you said you were going to sleep.”

“I want to sleep like this.”

Quinn looked over their position. She had her back against the headboard while Rachel was under the covers and settled comfortably between her legs. Her head was resting against Quinn’s chest as Quinn had her arms wrapped around her middle. It wasn't exactly the most conducive position for sleep.

“Like this?” she echoed in bewilderment.
“Just like this.”

Quinn just sighed, burrowed down further, and tightened her embrace.

“Sing to me.”

“Nu-uh.”

“Please? It will help me fall asleep.”

“I’ll turn on some music.”

“I want to hear you.”

“Why?”

“You have a beautiful voice, Quinn.”

She shifted uncomfortably. “It’s nothing like yours.”

“True. My voice is significantly better with more range and control due to my many years of—”

“And your humility grows with every day,” she cut her off dryly.

“But there’s something in yours that I don’t have, Quinn. Something I can’t even describe. There is strength and richness in mine, but there’s something absolutely *enthraling* in your tremulous alto that I have never personally been able to find.”

She sighed, trying to accept what Rachel was asking. “You really want me to sing to you?”
“Yes.”

There was a long moment of silence, one that stretched on for so long, Rachel was sure she wasn’t going to do it, but then Quinn’s soft, breathy voice came right against her ear.

“I give her all my love
That’s all I do,”

She shivered with pleasure, settling into her girlfriend’s arms, closed her eyes, and let the sweet sounds wash over her, carrying her lightly into sleep.

“And if you saw my love
You’d love her too
I love her.”

Hiram came up from the basement where he was trying to get some paperwork done. Rachel hadn’t come down to say good night like she usually did when he worked late, which worried him a bit. Since they’d started getting their relationship back on track, back to the routine they had before, Rachel would always find him to say good night. Sometimes she even brought him a snack with something to drink.

“For my hard-working, Daddy,” she’d say and beam at him as she put the food down next to him. Then she’d kiss his cheek, say good night, and skip away back upstairs. He’d missed it so much the past months and when Rachel did it again for the first time since their fight, he was so taken aback, he had to wipe away tears when she left. At last, he had his little girl back. She wasn’t so little anymore, but that would never matter.

Tonight, though, he hadn’t heard anything from Rachel and a part of him was worried that something was wrong rather than just believe maybe it slipped her mind tonight. As he headed for the stairs, he stopped on the first step when he heard something. Listening carefully, he knew it was definitely someone singing, but it was so hushed and quiet, he had to really focus to make the words out.

“She gives me everything
And tenderly,”

Music in the Berry household was as integral and ever present as the walls themselves. So he was hardly surprised to hear it faintly floating down the stairs. What he was surprised by, however, was that the voice wasn’t his daughter’s and this was no canned sound..
“The kiss my lover brings
She brings to me
And I love her,”

There was definitely someone up there singing. This voice didn’t have the power of Rachel’s, but there was something so sweet and enchanting about it, he could hardly put his finger on why it drew him so.

“A love like ours
Could never die
As long as I
Have you near me,”

Quietly, he made his way up the stairs, the voice, though ever soft, grew louder as he approached the cracked door of his daughter’s room. He peered in and though it was dark, he could see the shadowy outlines of two people. There was a head of blonde hair above the other.

“Bright are the stars that shine
Dark is the sky”

It was Quinn, he realized with silent amazement and stepped out of sight, but still listened.

“I know this love of mine
Will never die
And I love her.”

Her lilting voice drifted off into a finish and Hiram suddenly felt too heavy to stand. He leaned against the wall next to the doorjamb.

“I love you too,” he heard Rachel murmur thickly through the darkness, “so much.”

“Are you crying?”

She sniffled. “No.”
“Yes, you are.”

“No one has ever sung to me like that before… I’ve never… Y-you…”

“Shh. Just go to sleep.”

“Sing me another.”

“No.”

“Please?”

“Oh…fine.” She huffed. “Wake up in the mornin’ feeling like P. Didd—”

“QUINN!”

Shining peals of laughter filled Hiram’s ears.

“All right, all right, but you have to promise to sleep after this one.”

Rachel yawned loudly. “Promise.”

There was some silence before the sweet voice crested again. It was still soft, crooning as she turned it into something like a lullaby.

“Maybe I'm amazed at the way you love me all the time

Maybe I'm afraid of the way I love you

Maybe I'm amazed at the way you pulled me out of time
And hung me on a line

Maybe I'm amazed at the way I really need you.”

Hiram left as quietly as he came, but Quinn followed him the whole way down.

“Maybe I'm a girl and maybe I'm a lonely girl

Who's in the middle of something

That she doesn't really understand

Maybe I'm a girl and maybe you're the only girl

Who could ever help me

Baby, won't you help me understand?”

After Rachel finally fell asleep, Quinn managed to slip away without waking her. She would have gladly stayed the night, but her Mom wanted them to go to church in the morning and insisted on Quinn being home. She closed the door behind her as carefully as she could and slipped down the stairs with practiced ease.

She was halfway to the front door when Hiram called out to her. She turned around nervously to face him. Yes, they had their sit down and everything was out in the open, but there was still this air of uncertainty between them, something that neither of them seemed to know how to fix. She still felt awkward and uncomfortable around him and it seemed to be the same for him as well.

Hiram opened his mouth to say something as Quinn waited, but nothing came. Instead, she was suddenly enveloped in the man’s arms tightly and didn’t have the slightest clue what to do.

“Will I ever be able to apologize enough?” he asked gruffly, sounding like he was holding back tears.

“Mr. Berry…”

He released Quinn and took a small step back, but never took his eyes off her. “Hiram.”
“H-Hiram, I don’t…you don’t have to keep doing that.” She waved her hands nervously. “In fact, please don’t. I think we’ve both apologized enough.”

“Make her happy, Quinn.”

“I’m trying to.”

He swallowed thickly. “Thank you…for loving her.”

Quinn shook her head vehemently. “Don’t ever thank me for that.”

“Why not?”

“Because I thank God every day for her loving me.”

He sighed and scrutinized her. Quinn knew that look; she received it often enough. It was the one people had when they were trying to figure her out. So far, only one had ever succeeded and she was asleep upstairs.

“You may feel like you don’t have a family that accepts you, Quinn, but you do. You have one right here, three people who love and know you for exactly who you are. Always remember that.”

She nodded, at a loss for what else to do, and turned to leave again. She was two steps away from the door when she spun on her heel and ran back, flinging her arms around him. He held her just as tightly.

They were both going to heal.

Chapter End Notes

"And I Love Her" by The Beatles
"Tik-Tok" by Ke$ha
"Maybe I'm Amazed" by Paul McCartney
Quinn walked up behind her with a smile, still keeping her distance a bit. Rachel was standing on the tips of her toes, her head tilted back, her arms stretched out beside her in a picture perfect example of barely contained excitement.

“I made it,” Quinn heard her whisper.

Her heart fluttered to hear Rachel sound so perfectly happy. She should always sound like that. Stepping up closer, she slipped her arms around her girlfriend's waist and pressed her lips against her ear.

“Yes, you did,” she murmured.

Rachel spun in her arms and kissed her so fiercely, she made Quinn stumble backwards.

There were hundreds, maybe thousands, of people walking around them, cars going by, sky rises with thousands of windows that people could easily look out of and see them in each other's arms like that.

And Quinn was happy.

Let every single one of them see.

She was kissing Rachel and finally...finally...she got to show how proud she was to be with her.

Then again, it was New York, and no one gave a shit.
On the plane, Quinn had gotten her first real experience at PDA with her girlfriend. She hadn't expected or even remotely planned on it, but they'd been in the air for a little while and Rachel was insanely restless, bouncing around like a toddler hopped up on sugar. Her mouth was going a hundred miles an hour, talking about how exciting it all was, how much work they had to do, trying to get the other Glee members near them to listen, but they just put earbuds in to watch movies on their laptops or listen to music, anything to drown out Rachel. It got to a near dangerous point when Rachel leaned over the seat in front to reach Santana and Quinn managed to pull her back before the Latina decided it was time for a brawl. No amount of calm coaxing and words of reassurance had any effect on Rachel in this state so Quinn gave up and knew there was only one thing that would be a sure-fire success.

Out of nothing more than a fiercely ingrained habit, Quinn had scanned the passengers as they boarded earlier for any signs of someone she recognized from Lima. It was highly unlikely because they had to drive four hours out of the way because Coach Sylvester got some deal on the tickets with a shady connection at that airport. It was another reason why the Cheerios always got first class if they ever had to fly to a competition. Even when they were just taking a bus, it was always one of the luxury private buses. Sue Sylvester apparently had dirty friends in high places and a wheelbarrow full of blackmail under her belt. Even so, Quinn still looked for familiar faces as they had settled in and was relieved to find no one. Their trip out of Lima meant not only a chance to win Nationals, but it was a chance to be free of the scrutiny, the suffocation she endured every single day in that oppressive little town. It was ending here and even as she was putting her bag in the overhead compartment and Rachel was fussing around after kicking Puck out of his “assigned” seat to the back to sit with Sam, Finn, and the rest (except for Artie who unfortunately had to sit in the very front by himself), Quinn could feel an unseen weight being lifted off her shoulders.

It was as though nothing could bring her down now. She may not be quite so outwardly giddy as Rachel, but she was happy and sitting there as they were on their way to New York started to make her look forward to this trip even more than before. It was like it was really sinking in now when before it had only been an idea, a wish, a far-off dream. The dream was slowly becoming a reality.

Rachel was still bouncing, her body halfway across the aisle as she chattered away at an increasingly weary Kurt. Quinn just smiled in quiet amusement, lifted the armrest between them, pulled Rachel halfway into her lap, and kissed her.

“Ah!” the boy sighed in relief, putting his head back on the seat. “I knew there had to be something that existed in this world that could manage to shut her up.”

Mercedes glanced at them from the other side of the aisle and sniggered.

“Of all things possible, gotta say I never thought it would be Quinn Fabray's tongue that would
finally silence Rachel Berry. Then again, that would probably shut most people up.”

“Are you crushing on Q now, ’Cedes?” Santana snorted. “Just because Gayberry went for her doesn't mean the rest have to fall in line.”

Mercedes hadn't even realized that Santana was paying attention to them. She seemed pretty intent on listening to her music and moving as little as possible while Brittany was asleep in her lap.

Embarrassed, she shook her head. “I didn't mean it like that! It's just...Quinn is...you know... All the guys get stupid faced over her. Now I guess this means all the girls will be too... She's, like, crazy beautiful and all that.”

“I hated that movie.” Kurt shook his head.

“Are you tripping, albino baby?” Santana glowered at him. “That movie was AWESOME!”

“I'm with her,” Mercedes nodded. “Roller coaster of awesomeness is that movie. Even if Kirsten Dunst looked like she didn't shower the whole time they were filming.”

Kurt just rolled his eyes and pulled down his silk sleep mask to try to get some rest finally. Chang Squared were sitting in front of them and Tina turned around in befuddlement.

“Why did it get so quiet all of a sudden? Did they throw Rachel off the plane already?”

Mercedes just shook her head and jerked her thumb in the couple's direction. Tina's cheeks flared red at the sight and she made a small 'eep' sound before ducking back into her seat. They may have all had time to adjust to the idea of Rachel and Quinn being together, but Tina, Mike, and Lauren had all averted their eyes quickly when they’d caught them. So, up until now, Puck was the only one who had any extended exposure to the visual before.

Mike pulled out one of his earbuds, taking his attention away from the movie long enough to give his girlfriend a worried look.

“You okay?”
“Fine!” she squeaked and hastily grabbed the free earbud to put in so she could watch the movie too. Shrugging, Mike didn’t think much of it and wrapped his arm around her shoulder so they could cuddle comfortably as they watched.

Mercedes took one last look at the, seemingly permanently attached at the mouth, girls and shrugged.

“Whatever makes them happy.”

“And shuts Berry up,” Santana added from the other side.

Nodding seriously, the two shared a knowing look before Mercedes pulled down her own sleep mask and pushed the seat back with Kurt so they could both get a nap. Since the rest of the club ended up so spread out on the plane, they never saw what was going on.

“I know you’re just trying to make me be quiet,” Rachel murmured breathlessly between kisses.

“Nope, only to get you to stop talking,” she replied with a raise of her eyebrows and threaded her fingers through brunette locks. “This is hardly a way to keep you quiet.” She ducked down to kiss Rachel’s throat, locking in on that spot she knew so well, and as if on cue, the other girl moaned.

“Shh,” she pressed her lips against Rachel’s again hurriedly to muffle the sound, and tried not to laugh, “You still have to be quiet!”

“But it’s you,” Rachel said so innocently, with wide, unassuming eyes, it made Quinn’s heart melt.

“Just kiss me,” she managed to get out hoarsely and Rachel’s lips found hers again easily.

There was this far off buzzing in Quinn’s ear that she tried to ignore at first and it was especially easy to do when Rachel’s fingers were dancing above her knee, dangerously close to slipping underneath her dress, but the buzzing was persistent.

Finally, Quinn seemed to recognize a very loud, “AHEM!”
Dazed and not at all pleased to be interrupted, she glared up at where the sound was coming from and saw a middle-aged flight attendant staring down at them, drumming her fingers on the top of the seat with a raised eyebrow.

Anger instantly bubbled up inside of Quinn. There was no way in hell she was going to let this holier-than-thou bitch judge her for just kissing her girlfriend. They weren't being obnoxious; they weren't being loud. There was nothing this woman could say that would justify her trying to get them to stop. This was not Lima; this wasn't even Ohio anymore! Rachel was her girlfriend and if she wanted to kiss her girlfriend on a plane, train, or freaking bicycle, she damn well would and no one would stop her! Especially not this stranger!

“Is there a problem here? Because as far as I know, there is no rule against kissing my girlfriend on an airplane and if you dare to even breathe a judgmental, ignorant, or bigoted word, I swear I will have you fired within the first 30 seconds of landing. Don't think for a second I won't.”

“Quinn!” Rachel gasped, staring at her in open shock.

“What?” she snarled. “Who the hell does she think she is? I'm not going to let her-”

“Honey…” the flight attendant finally spoke up and she didn't look the slightest bit put off by Quinn's ire. In fact, she actually looked amused. “I’ve only been trying to get your attention for the last five minutes because we're about to put away the drink cart,” she gestured down to the trolley Quinn hadn't noticed before, “and I just wanted to see if perhaps you might want something after you're finished with all that busywork you're doing there.”

Raucous laughter came from six of the other teenagers sitting nearby them.

Quinn turned the darkest shade of red Rachel had ever seen. Since she had been rendered hopelessly speechless, Rachel took over without hesitation and slid off her lap, smiling up politely at the woman.

“Thank you so much! I'm sorry about that. We tend to get very distracted, and Quinn can be a bit, um, hot-headed sometimes.”

“Understatement of the year!” Kurt snorted.
Rachel rolled her eyes, still smiling brilliantly at the flight attendant as if nothing out of the ordinary had occurred. “I'll have a lemon-lime seltzer, please, and I think she'll just take a water.”

“How about a bucket of ice water to cool the bish off?” Santana suggested.

“Yeah, you wouldn't happen to have a hose on the plane would you?” Mercedes asked.

Quinn was burrowing herself into a tiny ball against the window, hiding her face with her arms out of sheer mortification.

“Oh, stop it all of you!” Rachel chastised them. “You know Quinn was just doing you a favor by keeping me out of your hair.”

“By getting herself in your pants?” Brittany asked sleepily, having just woken up from the commotion.

“Yeah, that's some favor she's doing us! Really taking one for the team!”

There was another round of hysterical laughter and it was Rachel's turn to look embarrassed.

“Don't give them a second thought, sweetheart,” the flight attendant said kindly and put their drinks down on the pulled out tray in front of their seats. “Just as long as you keep it PG, there's no reason why you can't find your own way to occupy yourself on the flight. If you need anything else, just let me know.” She leaned down to whisper, “However, I can arrange for that bucket of ice water if either of you find it necessary.”

Santana just about choked to death on laughter. Rachel lifted her drink safely before kicking the back of the Latina's seat as hard as she could.

When the woman was gone, she leaned over to Quinn who had managed to make herself look three times smaller, curled up in the seat, her face hidden away. She brushed some of her hair back to tuck behind her ear and kissed the burning red top of it.
“Quinn...” she whispered and nuzzled her shoulder before perching her chin there. “She's gone now, there's nothing to worry about.”

The blonde didn't even so much as move. Rachel actually wondered for a moment if she was still breathing. So she tried a different tack.

“I love you,” she hummed softly against her ear.

Quinn shifted slightly in response, but nothing more.

“I promise I won't let them near us with a hose. Ever.”

“Rachel...” she whined.

Relieved that she finally got her talking again, the brunette wrapped her arms around her and burrowed herself into Quinn as much as she could.

“That was one of the sweetest things you've ever done. I'm so proud of you.”

“I want to die,” Quinn groaned. “That was the most humiliating thing I've ever experienced.”

Rachel scoffed. “You've been through far worse than being called out on too much PDA.”

“But...I just...I thought she was...”

“I know,” the brunette said lovingly with a smile, though Quinn couldn't see it. “You wanted to stand up for us and I... That was so...” She was at a loss for words and, frankly, it was difficult to have a conversation, this kind of a conversation, with a human lump. “Quinn, will you please unwrap yourself and look at me?”

“No.”
“Please.”

“I'm not moving. Ever.”

Rachel sighed. “Then I won't either.”

She laid her head against the back of Quinn's shoulder.

“I'm also never kissing you in public again.”

Rachel's heart squeezed involuntarily at the painful thought before she managed to get her emotions in check. “You don't mean that.”

“I do. I swear. Never again. It's only going to cause trouble. This was just the proof we needed.”

Logic was taking over now, thankfully, and Rachel didn't take the least bit of stock in what Quinn was saying. She knew well enough that this girl couldn't even try to stop kissing her. All Rachel ever had to do was want it. To be honest, Quinn was a bit of a kiss slut. Though she would never say that out loud because the blonde would never speak to her again...kiss her maybe, but definitely not speak to her again.

Rachel turned her face into Quinn's shirt and nipped at her lightly through the material.

“Don't do that,” she hissed.

“Don't do what?”

“That!”

“But it's not kissing.”
“Just leave me alone to wallow in my complete and utter humiliation.”

The brunette shook her head in disbelief, but still couldn't help being amused by Quinn's whining. There had to be a way to break her out of this. She refused to spend the rest of the flight sitting next to Quinn rolled into a ball. Laying her head back down, Rachel cuddled as close as she could to her girlfriend, and they stayed there like that for a little while before her eyes landed on the water bottle...

Quinn screeched and bolted up out of her seat, shaking her head so water was flying everywhere.

“AGH!”

“THE FUCK?”

“NOT ON MY LAPTOP!”

“Is it raining?”

“THAT BETTER BE JUST WATER!”

“RACHEL BERRY!”

Mr. Schuester came running up from the back while two flight attendants came up from the front. All the passengers were staring at the wild eyed and soaking wet blonde with a mixture of annoyance and curiosity.

“What's going on here?” their teacher asked sternly.

“Is everything all right?” one flight attendant asked.

The woman who had given them drinks before was just shaking her head in exasperation.

Quinn glared down at the brunette, her chest heaving with exertion, her hair and top soaked from a now empty bottle of water.
Rachel just looked up at all of them with an innocent shrug.

“We didn't need that bucket after all.”

“But Quinn,” Rachel protested as the blonde steered her back towards the group on the red steps. “I wanted us all to be able to experience a famous, classic Broadway performance and what better way than-”

“First off, you don't ever buy anything from scalpers.”

“I admit, it's not ideal, but plenty of people-”

“Two, what did you think he was going to do with your credit card? Whip out a portable machine in the middle of Times Square?”

“Oh, I...”

“Three, you're lucky I got it away from him before he managed to swipe it through his butt crack.”

“Yes, thank you for that, but I still-”

“Four, Cats stopped running eleven years ago, Rachel.”

The brunette's eyes widened and Quinn raised her eyebrow knowingly.

“I know being here is having something of a euphoric effect on you, so I'll give you a pass for forgetting that, Miss Broadway!”
Rachel buried her face in her hands, sufficiently mortified.

Quinn slipped her arm around her waist and kissed her burning cheek.

“Don’t give it a second thought,” she whispered against her ear. “Look around you. You're here, Rachel.”

She finally dropped her hands and glanced at Quinn sheepishly before resting her head on the blonde's shoulder.

“And you're with me.”

“I promised I would be. Now, let's get back to the others before they somehow end up getting themselves arrested.”

“Oh my God!” Rachel's eyes lit up in a panic and she broke away from Quinn in a run towards the Glee club that was leisurely enjoying their lunch.

The blonde laughed heartily, not changing her stride, and watched in amusement as the diva whirled around the club in a multicolored blur, presumably giving them strict instructions on how to behave.

That “love to drive Rachel crazy” thing Quinn had? Still wasn't going away. Not even remotely. Besides, after that stunt she pulled on the plane, she was just asking for it on this trip.

After running around the city for a while, being goofs and singing to their hearts content, they had finally checked in at the hotel. The girls had settled into their room and it wasn't long before Brittany took the lead and jumped onto the bed to start flinging a pillow at everyone's head. It was but a few seconds before all the rest joined in with the exception of Rachel who had seated herself at the desk to work on their schedule and still unfinished songs.

Quinn was hardly about to let her girlfriend miss out on the fun by stressing herself out. She broke away from the melee to whack her with a pillow from behind. Rachel gasped in shock, spinning around agape that Quinn dared to do such a thing. She didn't have time to get a word of protest out
before the blonde had thrown her into the fray so they all attacked her.

Rachel squealed and screamed and fought back until she managed to grab a weapon from someone then started an all out war. Santana got so into getting the chance to wail on Berry without repercussions from Quinn that she accidentally swung too wide and caught Brittany, sending the blonde flying off the bed onto the floor. Horrified, she dove through the mess of girls to get to Brittany, babbling about how sorry she was and praying she hadn't hurt her, but when she found an hysterically giggling Brittany upside down with her legs against the wall, her hair in disarray, covering her face completely, Santana couldn't help but laugh along with her. She crawled alongside her girlfriend and helped her right herself again, shielding her with her body from the errant swings that came their way in the meantime.

Rachel couldn't believe it. She was in the middle of her first, honest-to-goodness pillow fight. She had never been invited to sleepovers as a child and no one ever accepted her invitations either - even if she did go through the trouble to decorate them by hand with glitter and using the calligraphy techniques she learned in the parent-bonding course she took with her fathers.

Her first sleepover had happened accidentally when Kurt came over to avoid his Dad and Carole while they had a home-cooked dinner date. They talked for hours about music and boys and fiercely debated who was going to win the next solo. They narrowly avoided a full-fledged fight by her fathers' interference and actually ended up going down to Rachel's basement to sing for the two men instead. It got so late that Kurt simply asked if he could stay over, as if it were nothing at all. Rachel was so taken aback by it at first, she was at a loss for words. No one stayed over. She didn't have friends. She didn't have friends who would sing with her and laugh with her and not think the least of spending the night in her house.

At last, she just nodded vigorously, squeezed him until something cracked, and raced off to tell her fathers that the guest room would be occupied by one of her friends for the very first time. They made such a big deal of it, getting the room together, planning for an epic breakfast in the morning, and cooing over Kurt, it would have made most people run for the hills. But Kurt was a diva in his own right and by then had grown somewhat accustomed to the Berry level of insanity. He seemed to enjoy getting in the swing of their over-the-top preparations too. After they watched a movie on Rachel's bed, he stumbled off to the next room to sleep, and Rachel cried tears of happiness.

It was the first time she'd ever experienced something a normal child got to have; her best friend was sleeping over. It was something she would never forget and it was just one reason of many that she knew she would feel guilty for a long time about not letting Kurt in on her secret with Quinn. Of course Kurt had realized their jubilant and over-the-top behavior at having him stay over wasn't just a typical night at the Berry house (though it kind of was); he knew it was the first time she'd ever had anyone stay over and had been kind enough to never say a word.

Later on, Mercedes had joined their sleepovers, and sometimes Tina, but after that night that Quinn
showed up on her doorstep with a very different kind of sleep over in mind, her friendship with the others had slowly lapsed. Rachel couldn't even remember the last sleepover she'd had with one of them. Her nights were either spent with Quinn or missing Quinn. She hadn't even realized how difficult it had all been, how isolated she had become from her friends, until Kurt had confronted her after they outed themselves.

Quinn was right when she said that there were a lot of bridges she had to mend, but what she didn't realize is that even though she was talking about her own actions, the same was true for Rachel. But it was going to be okay because all of their friends knew, Quinn was happier than ever, and Rachel was in the middle of her very first pillow fight. It felt like her life was finally falling into place. Before she'd had all these disjointed pieces that she knew belonged, but couldn't figure out a way to put the puzzle together. The pieces were fitting now, her fathers, her friends, her girlfriend, and even her dreams.

They were in New York! They had reached Nationals! The dream-like feel of it all was especially compounded by peals of laughter as floating feathers filled the air.

Quinn took advantage of the other girls' distraction as they attacked Santana who was defending Brittany to pull a breathless Rachel away from the pillow war. The diva's eyes were shining, her cheeks flushed as she nearly bounced up and down in exuberance.

“Quinn!” she protested, trying to get back to the fray while the blonde held onto her, “I was winning!”

She laughed. “You can't win a pillow fight. No one ever wins.”

“Then I'll be the first!” she insisted wildly.

“Wait, wait,” she wrapped her arms around Rachel's waist and pulled her to the opposite side of the room, “I promise to let you go back and battle your tiny self out 'til the end, but could you just pull it together and listen to me for three seconds?”

“Three seconds, starting now!”

“The dress I asked you to pack? Put it on and meet me downstairs at five.”
That seemed to grab Rachel's attention from her need to go back to hitting people with a pillow.

She looked at Quinn in surprise. “But...we're not allowed out...”

The blonde raised an eyebrow. “I thought you were a rule breaker now, the kicking ass, taking names, keeping the door locked against parental instruction, Rachel Berry?”

She grinned sheepishly. “I suppose I am...where are we going?”

“Not telling.” Quinn kissed her nose. “Now go back to your war; I'm going over to the guys room to get ready. They've only had the room for an hour and a half so the bathroom should still be relatively safe,” she frowned, “...hopefully.”

Rachel wrinkled her nose in confusion. “Why don't you get ready here?”

“We're going on a date. It's more fun this way.” Quinn smiled. “It's going to be our official first night out in New York City!”

If possible, Rachel was even giddier now than she had before in the middle of her pillow fight.

Quinn kissed her sweetly on the lips and then gave her a nudge towards the still screaming girls. She didn't wait for Rachel to go back before starting to get her things together. When she had an armful, she snuck out the door, winking at the brunette before she disappeared. Only then did Rachel launch herself back into the fray with a renewed vigor. She was going to win her war and then go on her first official, incredible date in New York City with Quinn Fabray!

She would have it all, by God!

The boys were all whooping and hollering when Quinn left the bathroom, ready for her date with Rachel.
“I'll take that as a yes?”

“Ever the flawless Fabray!” Kurt sighed in admiration, putting his hand on his chest. “Sheer perfection!”

Puck opened his mouth, but it was as though Quinn could feel it coming, because she whipped around on him with a finger in the air and fearsome glare.

“Don't even THINK about it!”

He scoffed and shook his head, pretending like he didn't know what she was talking about rather than show that he'd been caught red-handed.

“Yush look ahmashin' Quinn!” Mike said from the window seat with his mouth crammed full of chips.

“Hell yes! You're looking fierce tonight, Miss Fabray.”

“Guys?” Quinn eyed them all warningly. “Thanks. But shut up.”

“You look beautiful,” someone said quietly from behind her.

She turned around to see Sam sitting on the floor next to the bed with a book in his hand. He was staring up at her with a sad sort of smile he always seemed to have now. Her heart crept into her throat and she pushed back the tears. The same thing always tore away inside of her.

“Thank you,” she murmured softly before turning away and leaving the room that had suddenly grown too stifling. In the hall, she passed Finn who was coming back with a bucket of ice in his hands. They didn't make eye contact. He pretended like she didn't exist. Quinn didn't care.

Rachel had filled her in on the conversation, the very long, exhausting, conversation she had with Finn the day after they spoke to the Glee club. He had hounded her for nearly two hours about
Quinn. They argued and went back and forth for ages before he finally broke down in tears and admitted that he was still in love with Rachel. He asked her to choose him.

Rachel couldn't do anything more than hug him and say goodbye.

She called Quinn immediately after and they spent the night on the couch at the Berrys' halfheartedly watching movies on Lifetime. Rachel laid in her girlfriend's lap and allowed herself to be soothed by Quinn's hands running through her hair.

“He'll get over it,” she said flippantly.

“Have more sympathy for him, Quinn.”

“Sympathy? For that jerk who-”

Rachel turned up so she could face her. “He's a teenage boy with with a lower-than-average intelligence, but he's not cruel. He's not without a heart.”

“He called me a-!”

“I know,” she said quickly, cutting her off. “I was there, in case you've forgotten, and of course he was a jerk for that, but Quinn...” she sighed, “we are the only two girls in his life that he has ever had actual romantic feelings for. You were his first love!”

Quinn scoffed and shook her head. Rachel sat up at once with a knowing look.

“What?” the blonde sighed when Rachel didn't say anything else.

“You know what.”

“You think I should pity him more because his two ex girlfriend's hooked up and he got the shaft? He treated us like crap, Rachel. So, no, I don't pity him.”
“And you were such a saint?”

Quinn glared at her.

“Was it really all just a lie for you when you were with him? Every word you said, the feelings you exchanged? Even just a laugh you shared?” She traced her finger over the back of Quinn's hand thoughtfully. “You once told me Sam was nothing. Was Finn nothing?”

“That's completely different!” She yanked her hand away, folding her arms across her chest tightly. “You can’t compare them!”

“Look, you were once quite adamant about Sam meaning very little in your life even though he was your actual boyfriend at the time. I'm not saying the relationships were the same, hardly, but you have to admit the way you're acting does strike me as a bit familiar.”

Quinn looked at her in helpless, frustrated confusion. “Why are you doing this?”

She sighed. “Finn cared deeply for us both in his own...misguided, ignorant way. You, his first love, Me, his second serious relationship. Our relationships with him didn't just crash and burn, they evaporated. Quinn, it’s like everything he had with us was a lie, that he never had anyone care about him at all. You can’t tell me that’s not something to sympathize with him for. After seeing what I did today, the way he looked at me, I truly understand why he's been so upset. In his eyes, us being together practically erases the past two years of his life.”

“Rachel...”

“Don’t lie to me and say that everything you did with Finn was just pretend. I know you must have cared for him at some point. You wouldn't have stayed with him as long as you did, tried to convince him that he was the fath.”

“Don't go there,” she said tersely.

“Then tell me the truth.”
“He was just...Finn,” Quinn sighed, shrugging her shoulders. “He wasn't a total creep like most of the guys at school. He was just an idiot and, for some reason, mildly likable. I knew he wanted me. He practically drooled every time I walked by him in the halls, and he was the quarterback of the football team so it was just...what I was supposed to do. The natural order of things? I never hated him though. It wasn't like I couldn't stand being around him. Unlike now....”

“He was a friend,” Rachel supplied for her softly.

“Back then?” Quinn licked her lips and rolled her eyes in defeat. “Yeah. I guess he was. Sort of.”

“Maybe you should find a way to tell him that.”

“I don't owe Finn Hudson anything!”

“No, you don't,” she admitted. “But it is the right thing to do.”

“Rachel...”

She hated this entire conversation. Of all the things they could be doing, all that they could be talking about, it had to be about Finn freaking Hudson? Why couldn't Rachel just leave it alone? But, then she wouldn't be Rachel. Of course, she had to push the issue.

Honestly, whenever Quinn looked back on that time in her life when she was with Finn, she was overwhelmed and sickened by the images of all the times he touched her, kissed her, all those time she forced herself to try to feel what she was supposed to feel. She wasn't supposed to be repulsed or even apathetic during displays of physical affection. She wasn't supposed to be disgusted by the fact that he always smelled faintly of locker room sweat and a wet dog, sometimes poorly masked with Old Spice. She was supposed to go weak in the knees and have her head spin and be able to think of nothing but being with him. That never happened to her, not with Finn, not with any boy.

Of course, back then she never let herself think about a certain brunette.

Of course, she always did.
So she avoided thinking about that time in her life altogether, before that fateful night with Puck, before her world spun on its axis and flung her out into the darkness. It had seemed so perfect on the outside, but truly? It was one of the most painful and confusing times in her life that would then lead into one the darkest periods she would probably ever know. She wished she could erase all the memories. That way they wouldn't haunt her, but here Rachel was...pushing her back, through the hazy barrier of cringe-worthy moments and shame, and into a time she had tried so hard to forget.

Then, strangely, a memory popped into her head. She didn't know why she remembered it all of a sudden. It wasn't anything important really and she hadn't even thought about it since it happened. But, there it was again.

It was the summer before sophomore year. She'd just agreed to be Finn's girlfriend a few weeks before and everything was setting up perfectly for the school year. She would be Captain of the Cheerios, he was going to be the starting quarterback, and it was exactly like it was supposed to be. Except for the fact that she never felt a single butterfly when he put his hand on her back...never felt anything when he kissed her for the first time after their second date except slightly nauseous about the amount of tongue involved. But things like that didn't matter. Status, popularity, power, her parents' approval; that's all she needed to worry about.

But, one night, Finn surprised her by taking her to a drive-in movie theater two towns over. They were playing an older classic, which Finn obviously didn't care about. It was his pathetic attempt to try to make out with her the whole time. He set up the flatbed of his truck with blankets, pillows, and snacks. It was all of two minutes after the movie began that he made his move. His hands started going places Quinn wasn't about to let happen. After being rebuffed several times – several - he finally got the hint and stopped trying.

The blankets he brought weren't enough to pad the ridges on the bottom of the truck so she was really uncomfortable. Quinn remembered complaining about it and Finn immediately leaned over to an older couple next to them and asked if they had any lawn chairs they could borrow. Turns out, they did. She remembered thinking it was nice of him to do that as he set up the chair for her to sit in and then went about putting up his own. He didn't set his right though because the chair collapsed the minute he sat down and he ended up sandwiched in the thing, his long limbs flailing about awkwardly as he tried to get the chair open again.

Quinn had laughed so hard, she had tears. For that, Finn decided it was only fair that she share his pain, and he knocked over the legs of her chair so that she went flying back as well and ended up stuck like he was. They laughed so loudly and made such a racket that security warned them to keep it down. Quinn managed to free herself first and then helped him.

That was when the rain began, a sudden downpour. Shrieking, she didn't want to get soaked, she
was about to jump off the back of the truck when something fell over her head, shielding her from
the rain. Looking up, she realized that Finn had taken off his jacket and draped it over her. He helped
her down, held the door open for her to get in the cab of the truck, and then went back to collect their
things, getting drenched in the process. When he finally got back in himself, soaking wet like he had
jumped into a pool, he took one look at her before shrugging sheepishly, water dripping down his
face, and said, “Well, that was a bust. You want to get some hot chocolate?”

She shielded herself with a shriek when he shook his head like a dog to rid his hair of excess water.

They sat in the Lima Bean for a long time after, just talking next to the electric fire, as Finn was
slowly drying off and Quinn drank her hot chocolate with extra whipped cream. She didn't want
extra whipped cream, but Finn said it was his favorite, and since he'd obviously tried to plan this
night as best he could, Quinn couldn't help but want to give him something. So when he said extra
whipped cream was the only way to have hot chocolate, she just agreed and asked for it. He looked
so pleased with himself for that small gesture alone. It made her think, just for a moment, maybe they
weren't just playing the game, maybe she wasn't such a bad person, a freak of nature - that this could
be normal.

It ended up being a genuinely nice night that she spent with him.

But memories like that, of those fleeting little moments of hope back then, were now overshadowed
by the mistakes Finn had made and continued to make. He tried to make up for them sometimes and
other times he didn't. Two years of this had clouded Quinn's ability to see any of what she used to.
He'd screwed up so many times, been wrong so many times, acted so awful and moronic, that he
couldn't make up for it anymore because he never really changed. It would be different if he did, but
Finn was the same insecure, gangly prepubescent boy that was two heads taller than everyone else in
junior high, always running into things and having temper tantrums, and strutting around like he was
a great guy, but he was always willing to sacrifice others for his own ego.

Had Quinn maybe done something along the same lines, perpetuating an idea to hide the truth? Yes.
But she wasn't the same child that walked in the classroom door to sit next to Rachel Berry in first
grade. She wasn't the scared girl in third grade who kissed Rachel and ran away. She wasn't the girl
who tormented others for the sake of appearances and personal amusement. She wasn't the teenager
who dated a jock for status. She wasn't the 16-year-old who got knocked up by her boyfriend's best
friend in a drunken one night stand to make her feel better about herself. She wasn't even the Captain
of the Cheerios who had turned on her supposed best friend in order to climb back to the top. She
wasn't any of them anymore because she had matured like most people do. She learned from her
mistakes and began to grow up. She became more and more in touch with herself, open to change.
That's how it's supposed to be.

But Finn never did.
Maybe that's why Quinn could never find it in her to pity him or sympathize. He was stuck in a perpetual looped state of “fuck up, apologize, then fuck up again”. Until he broke that cycle somehow, there would be no changing her feelings about him.

But Rachel was still right. For all his faults, Finn Hudson was not the scum of the earth, and no one deserved to be made to feel that alone and unwanted. She understood that better than most.

“He loved me, Quinn, and I broke his heart,” Rachel said. “We both did.”

The blonde stared at her for a long moment. “He really got to you today, didn't he?”

Rachel crawled into her lap and brushed her fingers across Quinn's cheek with a sad smile. “He proved to me that I wasn't entirely wrong about him. There is goodness in him. There is kindness. It's just...not expressed very well. Deep down, he's not a bad person, Quinn. You saw that too; otherwise, quarterback or not, you would never have dated him.”

“He's not exactly the greatest person either,” she muttered. “He's had every chance in the world and he screws it up every time. We're going to ignore that because he's an insecure, stupid teenage boy? No!”

“Sam has so spoiled you,” Rachel teased. “Who can compare with a boy like Sam Evans?”

“Everyone is accountable for their actions,” she replied stubbornly, “just like I am.”

“And everyone deserves forgiveness,” Rachel countered, “just like you.”

“That's different,” she said firmly. “I learned from my mistakes! He is exactly the same bumbling moron he was the day we met him!”

“And maybe he never will change,” she shrugged, “but who he is now, isn't a monster. He could have gone and told everyone straightaway about the two of us, but he didn't. He's angry and devastated, but he still didn't stoop as low as that. There are a lot of people in this world who wouldn't have even hesitated to try to hurt us like that out of revenge. You're right; Finn's not the greatest guy, but he's hardly the worst.”
Quinn closed her eyes tightly. “What do you want me to do? He thinks I 'brainwashed' you, remember?”

“I think I was able to smooth things over today, but he's still...processing it all. Maybe after some time...” she cocked her head with a wince as she thought about it, “maybe after a lot of time...you can find a way to tell him that he did mean something to you. Because for all that you try to deny it, I know he did.”

Quinn nodded slowly, not meeting Rachel's eye. That rainy night at the drive-in was still in her head, memories replaying over and over again.

“All right,” she said quietly. “I'll try.”

“So, is there any jealousy happening here?” she asked brightly, out of seemingly nowhere.

Quinn's head snapped up. “What? What the hell do I have to be jealous about with Finn Hudson?”

Rachel grinned victoriously, wriggling around in Quinn's lap. What it was she won, the blonde was still completely in the dark about.

“You're not jealous of him!” Rachel explained, wrapping her arms around Quinn's neck, and snuggling closer. “All this time, you've always still been a little jealous of Finn, but you're not anymore. You didn't even think of it at all tonight, did you?”

Quinn was flabbergasted.

Jealous of Finn and Rachel? Of course she was always jealous...

So why had the mere thought not even crossed her mind once in these two days of Finn whining and Rachel worrying over him?

The brunette chuckled at the stunned look on Quinn's face and she kissed her nose.
“You trust me that much now. You trust us. It never occurred to you to be worried about Finn and me because you trust that I love you and only you. I believe this is what they call ‘progress’ in the therapeutic world.”

Rachel leaned in and took advantage of Quinn’s still stunned silence by pressing her lips to her girlfriend’s.

When Hiram and Leroy got home from their dinner party, they weren’t very pleased to have to break up their daughter and her girlfriend, half undressed.

“My couch!”

“In our family room?”

Quinn forgot about Finn before the elevator doors even began to close.

Instead, her mind was focused most intently on the girl she was going to find downstairs and the night that she'd tried so hard to plan when they were in Lima, obsessing over it to the point of Santana taking the opportunity to “slap her out of it” and Brittany holding Quinn back from returning it.

Everything had to be perfect tonight.

When they walked in the restaurant, Angus McIndoe’s, Quinn couldn’t help but chuckle at the slightly disappointed look on Rachel’s face. She played along with it though, putting on a worried pout.

“What's wrong?” she asked. “Don't you like it?”

“Oh...” Rachel smiled at her a bit painfully, “no. It's nothing.”
“Rachel,” she frowned, “is it not what you wanted?”

“It's a beautiful restaurant, Quinn, and I'm sure the food will be amazing, but I was hoping for...well, I was sort of hoping we would be able to do something more classically New York tonight.”

It took all Quinn had to keep from laughing. Instead, she just gave their jackets to the coat check girl and followed behind Rachel as the host led them to their table, which she had reserved the day after they won Regionals.

The moment they were left alone with their menus, Quinn leaned over and said, “I know you wanted to go to Sardi's.”

Rachel's head snapped up. “Oh, Quinn! No. I'm fine. This is perfect, really. It looks incredible.”

She was lying through her teeth. A disappointed Rachel was never able to hide her feelings.

“No do something for me?” Quinn smiled at her.

“Anything.”

“Trust me on this one.”

Curious and a bit baffled, she only nodded and turned her attention to the menu. Not ten minutes later, there was a painful grip on Quinn's hand.

“Oh my God, Quinn, wait, don't move, don't even look, but that's...that's...that's Nathan Lane! Nathan Lane is sitting right over there! AH!” Her head swiveled around to the entrance. “Did Matthew Broderick just walk in? T-that's him though! It is! It's Matthew Broderick with Sarah Jessica Parker! And, oh my God, I'm going to pass out. Where's the water? I need water!” She started fanning herself furiously with her napkin and Quinn calmly handed her a glass of water, which she proceeded to gulp down without taking a breath. “Bernadette Peters is sitting in the corner! Wh-what are they doing here? Quinn! Why are all these people here? This isn't possible!”

Quinn tried to breathe through the pain as she gently pried Rachel's fingers off her hand.
“I told you to trust me,” she chuckled, flexing her freed hand. “Sardi’s is mostly just a tourist thing now, Rachel. You want to see the real stars? You want the good food? You want the real New York? Well, this is where it’s at. We can try all of the others that looked good too when we come back next year.”

Rachel was hyperventilating, looking all over the room with wild eyes, shocked that she was so close to these incredibly accomplished and talented people. She was so distracted, Quinn ended up ordering for them. When she asked about their vegan menu, there were so many options, she had no idea what to choose.

In Lima, they either had one or two things or Rachel would have to ask them to change an entire dish. Even just that small difference made Quinn think about how perfect it was going to be living here. This city was made for Rachel. Hopefully, it was going to be made for her too. She just had to find her place.

Rachel was no help even when Quinn tried to attract her attention long enough to consider the staggering number of vegan options. She was still staring blatantly at the celebrities trying to enjoy their meals. So, Quinn smiled at the waiter apologetically and took an educated guess for her girlfriend.

“Are you going to be like this all night?”

“Is she having fish? I thought she was a vegetarian...”

“Rachel!”

The brunette snapped to attention and blushed. “I’m sorry. This is just so...so incredible. Is it always like this?”

“I don’t think so.” She shook her head. “You have to know where to go.”

“And you just happened to know about this place?”

She shrugged with a sly simile. “I decided to pull a Rachel Berry and do my research.”
“You're my favorite girlfriend in the whole wide world.”

“I'm your only girlfriend.”

“Well, things like this are definitely going to help to keep it that way!”

Quinn laughed.

They were in between courses and there was a lull in the conversation, mostly due to Quinn falling silent. The blonde smiled at Rachel nervously, which in turn made Rachel's stomach flutter. If Quinn was nervous, then that meant she was going to do something really important and since Rachel had no idea what it was...her mind was racing a million miles an hour, just like her heart.

But, then, Quinn held out both of her hands, closed into fists.

“Pick one,” she said with a mischievous smirk.

Rachel lit up happily. How she adored this girl. Quinn was a constant surprise, cold and cruel, happy and playful, angry and vicious, silly and loving, smooth, and a complete dork. She kept her guessing every day and Rachel didn't mind at all. There was no thought that pleased her more, except perhaps co-starring in a Broadway production alongside Barbra Streisand, than the idea of spending the rest of her life learning about Quinn Fabray.

With a brilliant smile, Rachel tapped Quinn's left hand. The blonde's eyebrow rose and she turned her palm over to reveal a small “I -heart- NY” key chain.

The brunette shook her head with a disbelieving giggle as she lifted the key chain out of Quinn’s hand. Really? This is what Quinn, the Quinn Fabray, had gotten so nervous about?

“A reminder every day for the next year that we'll be coming back here.”
“I love it,” Rachel said with a grin and swung it back and forth in front of Quinn's nose teasingly.

But it didn't really have the effect she thought. Instead of being as lighthearted and happy as she was moments before, Quinn just looked even more nervous now, and maybe a little frightened too.

“Quinn, what...?”

The other fist had remained tightly closed.

“I...that wasn't the only... I mean, you don't have to take it...” She huffed, frustrated with herself.
“Just pick the other hand.”

Worried about how upset her girlfriend was right then, Rachel kept her eyes on Quinn as she curled her hand around the other fist encouragingly and waited for it to open.

Lying in Quinn's red palm, likely from gripping too hard, was a familiar glittering piece of jewelry.

“I understand if you don't want it anymore. It's...it's changed now, I guess. But it still belongs to you and I thought you should have it back.”

Rachel stared at the bracelet, her eyes stinging with tears.

“You don't have to accept it,” Quinn said quietly. “I really will understand.”

She didn't say a word, her throat had closed up on her, but Rachel slid her fingertips along the outstretched palm and picked up her diamond bracelet, the one she had thrown back in Quinn's face after all, though not literally. She had regretted it every day since.

Laying it across her wrist, she held out her arm to the blonde.

“Put it on for me?”
Quinn didn’t let any emotion show on her face as she clasped it securely, but her trembling fingers said it all. She let her hand linger there for a moment, staring down at the bright diamonds against Rachel's dark complexion. Swallowing thickly, she looked up at her again.

“I missed seeing it there.”

Rachel nodded, her eyes glistening. “I missed it too.”

After they left the restaurant and Quinn managed to keep Rachel from asking for autographs on their way out, she found herself growing even more amused than she had been seeing Rachel's head spinning during their meal (which had been delicious; Quinn managed to pick something perfect for her to eat after all). Steering her very confused and hyper girlfriend in a specific direction, Rachel was on too much of a euphoric high from her celebrity sightings at dinner that she didn't even realize where they were until they were standing outside the Stephen Sondheim Theater. That's when Quinn showed her the tickets she'd bought for them to see one of the newest revivals on Broadway: Anything Goes.

At first, the brunette looked like she might pass out right there on the sidewalk, but then her true nature took over in full force and she dragged Quinn into the line, talking a mile a minute, only stopping to take a breath every now and then, up until the very moment that the curtains opened and she went dead silent and absolutely still until the very end when she was on her feet with the rest of the audience in thunderous applause. She didn't even talk very much during intermission, only to say “yes” when Quinn asked her if she wanted something to drink.

It wasn't until after they left the theater that Quinn finally got her proper thank you. They walked for a while until Rachel suddenly shoved Quinn off to the side, out the crowd, and jumped into her arms.

“Did I get it right?” she mumbled happily against Rachel's lips.

“It was just...incredible.” She delved into her mouth with a thorough urgency. “I'll never forget this night, Quinn, never ever.”

“That was,” she giggled as Rachel nipped at her throat, “the plan.”

Quinn cupped her face in her hands and held her there for a moment, stroking the soft skin of cheeks with the pad of her thumbs. Then she smiled.

“I love you too.”

They'd been walking for a while now and Quinn had no idea where they were. It looked more like a neighborhood and it was actually really pretty. The architecture looked older; the streetlamps were fashioned the same. They were walking past elegant townhouses that Quinn knew must have dated back to the early 1900's, maybe even older. There was so much to learn about this city, so much to see. She couldn't wait.

Still, it was late. It was freezing. They were lost. Her heels were killing her, but none of that mattered because they were in New York City and she was walking hand in hand with her girlfriend on what had to be one of the best dates she would ever have.

Besides, Rachel carried a rape whistle, they both had mace in their purses, and all they had to do was find a cab to get them back to the hotel.

“My feet are killing me.”

“Mine too.”

“I don't want to go back yet.”

“So we won't.”

“Can we find somewhere to sit though?”

“We might freeze to death if we stop moving…”
Rachel snuggled up to her side with a smile. “You'll keep me warm.”

“And hopefully alive.”

“Find me a bench, Fabray.”

“Working on it, Berry.”

Quinn was looking around, trying to guess which direction they should take, when Rachel suddenly stopped and yanked her back. When she didn't say anything, just stood there looking up at her with those big brown eyes, Quinn's curiosity was piqued.

“Yes?” she asked, amused.

“You're not supposed to call me that. You promised.”

Now she was genuinely confused. Rachel was upset with her for the teasing? But, they always did that...

“My Berry’,” she explained patiently. “You said you would call me 'my Berry' from now on.”

Blushing, Quinn ducked her head at the reminder of that night. She still couldn't think about it without simultaneous feelings of embarrassment, amusement, anger, and lust. The four combined always hit her hard and she had yet to get a handle on it.

“Rachel, I'm not seriously going to-”

She was cut off mid-sentence when the brunette stepped in closer, pressing against her intimately, and touched Quinn's cheek.

“You promised.”
“I was high!”

“*You promised.*”

“Anything said or done while drugs are involved is invalidated.”

“So all the times you told me you loved me that night...” She frowned. “You didn't mean it?”

Quinn narrowed her eyes at the smaller girl. “Nice try, but I know you too well by now to let you use guilt on me.”

“Sam.”

“What?”

Rachel gave her a stern look. “*Sam . Evans .”*

“What does he have to...” she trailed off, her eyes widening as it hit her. “You did *not* just do that.”

Rachel's mouth split into an enormous smile.

“I did!” she chirped. “And it worked, didn't it?”

“You can't do that!” Quinn protested. “Are we going to be like this for the rest of our lives? You say his name, reminding me of everything that I did wrong, and then you get your way because I'll always feel guilty for what happened?”

“I promise to wield this great power wisely,” Rachel said seriously.

Quinn's mouth dropped open.
“Now, let's hear it.”

“I refuse!” She shook her head. “On the grounds of moral integrity! Something you're apparently not familiar with.”

Rachel leaned up on her toes and pulled Quinn down to her lips. The touch was far too brief and not at all satisfying, but it was just enough to make her heart begin to race.

“You do realize how wrong this is?” she said in a near whine.

“Say iiiit,” Rachel sang happily, obviously not listening to a word Quinn said.

The blonde glared at her for a long moment, then growled in annoyance before seizing Rachel's face, kissing her deeply this time. Their mouths fused in languid exploration, tongues meeting again and again as they flickered and twined, gently sucking and melding into one another. By the time she released Rachel, they were both breathless and glassy eyed, content to stay just as they were, wrapped up in each other's arms, their lips only millimeters apart.

“Come on, my Berry,” she whispered. “I'll find you that bench.”

Giggling, Rachel gleefully leaned back in for more...heels, pain, and bench forgotten.

“I promise I won't do that again,” she murmured between kisses. “I didn't mean it.”

“I know you didn't,” Quinn replied, kissing her again. “But it still worked.”

“I love you. We're not going to live with guilt like that hanging over our heads anymore.”

“I don't think it will go away for a long time,” Quinn admitted quietly. “But someday.”

Rachel traced her finger lightly over Quinn's kiss swollen lips.
“Sooner rather than later, please. I'd like to see you without a dark cloud over your head someday.”

“I'm never going to be all sunshine.”

“But that's exactly what you look like when you smile,” she said with a twinkle in her eyes. “My golden haired ray of sunshine that makes me feel wonderful and more happy and beautiful than anything else in the world.”

Quinn made a face. “That was so cheesy.” She tried to look put off, but it didn't work; there was nothing but a smile.

She made Rachel happy.

They were kissing again, and Rachel was right; Quinn did know how to keep her warm.

They only broke apart when there was a loud bang, followed by a woman grumbling and ranting as she pulled a dog on a leash down the stairs out of one of the townhouses.

“Unbelievable...” they could hear her muttering. She was in her pajamas, but it was too dark and too far away for them to see what she looked like yet. “You bark and you whine and you stare at me with those eyes, begging me to take you for a walk, and when I finally do, in the middle of the goddamn night, that's when you decide you changed your mind? Well tough luck, buddy! You wanted a walk. You got one!”

Rachel tensed up beside Quinn and she wondered why Rachel would be afraid of this woman. It's not like she sounded threatening, just cranky, no different than any neighbor in Lima, really. She was walking towards them now, still talking to herself, and maybe the dog too.

“It's freezing out here! Dammit. This is why we live in Connecticut. So I don't have to walk my damn needy, whiny, pissan of a pet at night in the city!”

The dog simply sat down in response and she couldn't even move him anymore.
She put her hands on her hips. “So it's like that, then?”

Quinn could hear Rachel hyperventilating beside her and she wrapped her arm around the smaller girl's waist comfortably.

“Hey, what's wrong?” she murmured against her ear and kissed her cheek.

“That dog walker is spoiling you silly. You never behave like this at home!”

“Q-Quinn...that's...I think that's...”

Suddenly, Quinn was holding nothing but air because Rachel had bounded out of her arms and run straight towards the strange lady who was still arguing with her headstrong dog.

“Um, excuse me? I'm so sorry to bother you, but you're...”

The woman turned around and Quinn finally saw her face in the glow of the streetlights.

Now she understood.

“Oh, Ms. LuPone,” Rachel stammered, not letting the shocked look on the woman's face stop her, nor the way she looked around warily to see if there was anyone nearby in case she needed to call for help. “I have to say that you're my idol.”

She seemed to relax a bit at that and smiled with a cock of her head. “Well, thank you. That's very sweet of you...if not slightly inappropriate to approach a woman in the middle of the night on a dark street when she's alone with nothing but an ungrateful dog that would sooner see her run over than do anything that might be considered obedient.” She jerked on his leash and glared down at him like he would be able to understand what she just said.

Quinn came up quietly behind them, careful not to interrupt, but she didn't want to be too far away from Rachel either. She crouched down without a word to pet the friendly brown lab who was still sitting contentedly, watching them all.
“I completely understand, I do apologize. I just...when I saw you...I knew I had to-”

“Are you an actress?” Patti cut her off as she looked away from Quinn who was enamored by the dog.

“Yes. I'm-I'm in high school. We're here for the National Show Choir Championship.”

“We?” She looked down at Quinn's crouched form.

Using that as her opportunity, the blonde stood up with a smile.

“Yes, we're performing with our Glee club, but she's our star.”

The woman locked eyes on her. They were all standing under the glow of the streetlight now.

“You, my dear, are stunning.”

“Thank you,” she replied politely, but didn't give it a second thought.

“I especially like the classic look you're sporting.” She gestured to her mouth. “You know, the 'lipstick all over my face because I've just been kissed silly' one.” She looked to Rachel. “And you've even managed to match!”

Rachel turned a dark red, but Quinn refused to allow herself to be embarrassed. She didn't make a single move to fix her mouth and simply stared back at the older woman evenly.

Amused, Patti gave her a slight nod to show that she was impressed, and turned her attention back to Rachel who was desperately trying to wipe away the mess on her lips.

“I was in choir in high school,” she said. “It was my favorite class. What's your name?”
She looked at her sheepishly, lowering her hands in defeat. “Rachel Berry.”

“Well, Rachel Berry, promise me one thing...that you'll never give up.”

“Yes, Ms. LuPone,” she nodded, in awe, “I promise.”

The woman leaned forward and shook Rachel's hand with a smile. “Good luck. I better hear your name again someday.”

“Thank you,” she nodded determinedly, “you will.”

She turned to Quinn and shook her hand as well with a sly smile, but said nothing. The lab seemed ready for his walk now and didn't protest when Patti started to walk away. Just as she passed Rachel, she whispered, “Hope she's a good one.”

Rachel opened her mouth to reply, but by the time the words came, the woman was already rounding the corner. The last thing they heard her say was, “Come on! Faster before I fall asleep right here on the street like a bum. I'll be covered in newspaper and change by the morning and that simply will not do!”

Quinn looked at Rachel to make sure she was all right. The dumbstruck, starry-eyed look on the brunette's face made her chuckle. As long as she was still breathing, they were okay.

With her arm around Rachel's waist, she hailed a cab, and got them both safely into the car. After telling the driver where to go, she settled back with a still shell-shocked Rachel.

“Did you short-circuit? 'Cause we have Nationals tomorrow, you know. The others will kill me if I broke you just before the competition.”

Rachel was staring out the window in awe. “Did that really just happen?”

“It did.”
“I met Patti LuPone in her pajamas in the middle of the night on the streets of New York while she was walking her dog and she told me to never give up on my dreams?”

Quinn groaned. “I have a feeling I'm going to hear this story repeated for many...many years.”

“I'll tell this story on my deathbed after I sing a powerfully stirring rendition of 'Don't Cry for Me Argentina'. It'll be the perfect follow up anecdote. Or perhaps I should tell it before as a lead-in...” She tilted her head thoughtfully. “I don't know. I'll have to ask Kurt what he thinks would work better. Oh my God!” she squealed. “Kurt is going to die when he hears about this!”

“You'll be singing on your deathbed? Why am I not surprised?”

“What else would I be doing?”

“Dying?” Quinn returned dryly. “That's what everyone else does on their deathbed. That's why they call it 'the deathbed'. You die in it.”

“Well, I'm not like everyone else.”

“No, you're not,” she agreed with a smile.

She sat up straight, squaring her shoulders proudly. “I'm a star.”

“You're more than that.”

Intrigued, she gave her a long look before cautiously asking, “All right. What am I then?”

Quinn shrugged, as if the answer were obvious. “You're Rachel Berry.”

It was as though her entire body lit up with happiness the moment Quinn said it. Her eyes filled with unshed tears. “This...this was the best date of my life.”
“It is going to be hard to top this one.” Quinn sighed. “We'll have to meet Liza in a hairnet and slippers while dancing for spare change on a street corner to top this one.”

“Do you think that could happen?” Rachel gasped, clutching the blonde's arm tightly. “Oh my God, because if it did, I would-”

“I was joking.”

“Oh...” she mumbled dejectedly, relinquishing her painful grip.

Quinn exhaled loudly and shook her head as she wrapped her arm around Rachel's shoulder, pulling her closer.

“We need to get you to bed. I think this night has been a bit too much for you.”

“I'm not crazy, Quinn!”

“I didn't say you were,” she replied calmly.

“But you're thinking it.”

She didn't answer.

“QUINN!”

Rachel was woken the next morning by someone tapping her on the shoulder insistently. Quinn stirred and moaned sleepily next to her ear, clutching Rachel tighter.
“Rachel, wake up, wake up!” Kurt said in hushed whisper, but it didn't mask his excitement.

Blearily, she looked around, wiping the drool off her mouth as she tried to take in what was going on. Kurt was on one side of the bed poking at her while Quinn was on the other side, wrapped around her from behind.

“How?” she whispered back, still trying to blink the sleep out of her eyes.

He crouched down at eye level with her, wearing a huge smile. “We're going to breakfast at Tiffany's!”

That had her wide awake in a flash. She gently tried to wriggle out of Quinn's embrace without waking her girlfriend, but it didn't work. Quinn just whined and held tighter.

“Stop moving,” she grumbled.

Rachel finally managed to slip away and kissed Quinn's cheek. “Shh, it's all right. Go back to sleep, honey.”

Apparently, she didn't need any more encouragement than that because she clutched the pillow Rachel abandoned to her chest and fell asleep again.

“That is the about the sweetest, most darling thing I've ever seen Quinn Fabray do,” Kurt whispered. “Your feminine wiles are a force to be reckoned with if you managed to turn the she-lion into a whipped little cuddle ball.”

Rachel giggled, looking back at a sound asleep Quinn. Her Quinn.

“She loves me; that's all.”

“Oh, that's all?” he echoed in amusement.

“Come on!” She barely restrained herself from clapping. “You have to help me find the right outfit!
A Breakfast at Tiffany's homage deserves nothing less than absolute perfection.”

About ten minutes later, all hope of escaping with none the wiser was lost. Rachel shrieked at the top of her lungs, waking the other sleeping girls. They all muttered and groaned for her to shut up. Lauren and Mercedes put a pillow over their heads. Tina whined and burrowed under the blankets.

Quinn managed to get it together enough to lift herself up on her elbows, eyes half open, and call out, “Rach, what’sit?”

“Brittany and Santana are pantless and pantieless in the bathtub!” she replied shrilly.

“Britts! I told you to lock the door!”

“Oh. I thought you said to take you on the floor…”

Kurt sighed. “I have been deeply, emotionally scarred by this very moment.”

Safe in the knowledge that no one was hurt and there wasn’t any impending danger, Quinn just rolled over and went back to sleep.

Rachel's eyes nearly fell out of her head when she came back to the hotel and found a very different looking Quinn Fabray waiting for her. Kurt physically had to close her jaw for her before she started to drool.

The blonde fidgeted shyly, smoothing down her now short and choppy locks. She seemed excited about her new hair cut, but Rachel could tell she was waiting for her opinion.

“Santana and Brittany thought I could use a change. Um…what do you think?”

Rachel was still in shock.

“D-did you plan on this?”
Quinn’s face started to drop. “No. It was a spur of the moment thing. I-I thought...”

“You look so hot.”

The others started to laugh at Rachel’s awe-struck, unusually inarticulate, announcement.

“No! I mean, not just hot, but sexy.” She reached up with wide, child-like eyes to run her fingers through the soft blonde locks. All she could think of was how much she wanted to mess it up as much as possible, what it would feel like to grab onto when... “Oh my God, Quinn! Why didn't you ever think to cut your hair like this before?”

“So you approve?”

“Yes! I approve. I so approve. I approve more than one can approve anything ever.”

“Keep it in your pants, Berry!” Santana groaned. “No one needs to witness your obscene drooling, but I will admit my girl looks wicked awesome. All that attitude is coming out for reals now!”

“It is incredibly flattering on you, Quinn. Not many can pull off that kind of a cut.”

“I don’t look butch, do I?” she winced, her cheeks flushed with embarrassment.

Kurt laughed. “As butch as I am on a good day.”

Rachel was still toying with Quinn's hair, unable to remove her hands. Quinn noticed the way she was chewing on her lower lip, she knew what that meant, what Rachel was thinking about. Swallowing thickly, she chuckled a bit forcefully and removed Rachel's hands herself.

“We...we should go. I want to have lunch before we get ready for the competition.”

“Right, if you three could just excuse us...” Rachel waved Santana, Brittany, and Kurt off, turning
her attention back to Quinn and licked her lips. Her idea of “lunch” was something entirely different than what Quinn meant.

Before any of them could protest, Quinn grabbed Rachel's hand and pulled her towards the door. “That's okay; you guys stay. We'll be back soon.”

“But-!”

Rachel was pouting when Quinn dragged her into the hallway and towards the elevator.

“Don't!” the blonde said sternly. “We had an agreement. No fooling around on this trip!”

“That was before you went and got the sexiest haircut possible!” she whined. “That's not fair, Quinn!”

She grinned wickedly. “You like it that much, huh?”

Rachel answered her question by shoving her backwards into the elevator, pinning Quinn against the wall. Her mouth was quick and forceful; the blonde just tried to keep up. But when Rachel raked her nails over Quinn's scalp, it sent a rush of tingles coursing through her body and she lost control. She pushed off and slammed Rachel into the other side of the wall, attacking her throat. The brunette keened happily, hooking one leg around the back of Quinn's to get her closer.

“Oh, God.” Quinn groaned when Rachel's hand slipped under her skirt, “I need to change my hair every day if it makes you act like this.”

Quinn finally managed to disentangle herself from a determined Rachel, but it wasn't in time to avoid an awkward meeting with the people waiting for the elevator in the lobby. Rachel just cleared her throat casually and tucked her hair behind her ear as she walked out with Quinn behind her, pretending like the crowd of people standing there hadn't just witnessed her mauling her girlfriend.

She wasn't sorry!
As they walked through Central Park, Quinn listened intently as Rachel told her all about the morning with Kurt, breakfast and then singing on the ‘Wicked’ stage at Gershwin. They just had lunch at The Boathouse, a ‘quintessential New York’ restaurant, as Rachel liked to put it.

Rachel was so blown away by Quinn's idea to eat there, she could hardly speak through their meal. They ate outside right next to the water where they could see people drifting by in rowboats and gondolas, enjoying the gorgeous, warm spring day just like they were. There was a mention of Sex and the City, people falling in the pond, and then Quinn was worried Rachel might have suffered an aneurysm because she went nearly catatonic from emotional overload.

They stopped on a bridge and Rachel perched herself on the edge while Quinn just leaned over to watch the people passing through underneath them. Rachel still couldn't keep her fingers out of Quinn's newly shortened hair. She was like a child with a new toy to play with. Quinn didn't mind, especially because of the shivers that ran down her back.

“It’s everything I’ve been dreaming about…everything I’ve worked for…” Rachel said, smiling as she took in the blossoming cherry trees around them. Her experience with Kurt that morning had truly been an eye opener. “Now, more than ever, I know I have to do it.”

Quinn pulled her hand away from her hair long enough to kiss her palm. “You will do it. No one deserves it more than you.”

“You’ll be there with me?”

“Every day, every night, I’m yours.” She waved her hand out in front of them at the city skyline rising above the trees. “New York is all ours.”

“And Kurt's and Blaine's,” she corrected her.

Rachel had filled Quinn in on how Kurt planned to come here with Blaine too next year after they graduated.

“Fine, them too,” the blonde agreed grudgingly, “but it's still really just ours.”
Rachel beamed and held her arms out for Quinn to help her down from the ledge. They walked a little further, off the bridge, when she suddenly grabbed the blonde's hands, spinning them around in circles until they were too dizzy to keep upright. They fell together on the grass in a whirlwind of giggles that naturally ended with kisses.

“You know what my favorite part about last night was?” Rachel asked, breathing hard as she rested her forehead against Quinn's.

“Seeing Sarah Jessica Parker? Having a fabulous vegan meal in a popular New York restaurant? Attending an actual, honest to goodness, Broadway production? Meeting Patti LuPone?”

Rachel shook her head.

“No to all of the above.”

Quinn tilted her head curiously. “Okay...what was your favorite part of last night?”

“When I came downstairs into the lobby of the hotel. You were standing there waiting for me; you looked so nervous-”

“I wasn't nervous!”

Rachel pretended like she didn't hear her. “I couldn't believe that I was going on a date with this most extraordinarily beautiful girl, that she was waiting there for me. Everyone else was looking at you too, thinking the same thing, but I was the one you wanted. And when you saw me, your face just...lit up.”

She shrugged helplessly, overcome with emotion.

“The way you looked at me...” her voice trembled, “Quinn, it was as though you thought I was the most incredible thing you'd ever seen. Like I was...I was the only person that existed. You had everyone fawning over you and you never even noticed. You held out your hand to me and you were so happy. I've never felt as beautiful or as loved as when I'm with you.” Rachel took a deep breath. “You make me feel more important, more special, than any spotlight ever has or probably ever will.”
Quinn was breathing raggedly, but she didn't say anything. She just listened and held Rachel's hand in vice-like grip.

“That was my favorite part of last night,” she whispered. “That moment.”

The blonde struggled to speak, shaking her head when she couldn't find the words.

“I-” she started roughly and cleared her throat before trying again more easily this time. “Well, if I had known that, I wouldn't have spent all that money. We could have just ended the date there.”

Rachel gasped, horrified. “Not for the world!”

Quinn smiled weakly, seemingly overwhelmed by it all, and took Rachel's face in her hands. “It was my favorite part too,” she murmured. “That...and seeing your eyes roll into the back of your head when we met Patti LuPone.”

Rachel giggled. “Okay, that was a definite highlight, I will admit.”

“We have to get back to the hotel,” Quinn said reluctantly. “The others will already be getting dressed now for the competition.”

Rachel nodded in agreement and they started walking, hand in hand, out of the park.

“Quinn?”

“Hm?”

“When we come back next year, when we're living here, I want this to be the place we revisit first.”

“I was thinking the same thing.”
Grinning, she tugged on Quinn's arm affectionately and glanced at her phone. Her face dropped.

“OH MY GOD!” She screeched. “WE'RE SO LATE! RUN! WE HAVE TO RUN! NOW! GO!”

Quinn didn’t hesitate and the two of them flew full speed towards the nearest opening to the street where they could hail a cab.

“I WILL NEVER FORGIVE YOU IF WE MISS THIS COMPETITION, QUINN FABRAY!”

“How fickle the heart...” Quinn muttered to herself, rolling her eyes, but she was amused all the same.

After all, it had been at Rachel's insistence that they take a romantic walk through Central Park to relax before the performance.

They had only been rehearsing their original songs for a week before getting on the plane. The choreography was even shakier than that, but the songs came out well. Rachel and Sam sang a duet written by Tina. It was about longing for the right person at the right time. The club had unanimously voted for Tina’s composition. Finn reluctantly went along with it even though he had written a song too, but it was terrible and, obviously, about Rachel, which was uncomfortable for everyone.

All of them collaborated on the group performance song, which was pretty good too. Rachel was satisfied with their material, but extremely worried about the lack of rehearsal time, not just for the songs, but for the choreography. Since they were so late in getting the songs finished, Brittany, Mike, and Mr. Schue had even less time to come up with a decent plan and everyone knew that dancing was not their strong point. Honestly, they should have been rehearsing every spare moment they had, but everyone was so worried about their own lives, the tension in the club, and being distracted by New York City, that they lost out on the opportunity. Still, they were optimistic. After all, they had pulled together a Sectionals winning performance with only minutes to spare after their set list was ripped off. Rachel insisted they should have worked harder, but most people brushed her off with excuses about how they do their best on the fly. As it turns out, they did place in the top 10, but landed at the very bottom. During the group performance, Finn stumbled and whacked Brittany so hard she fell over Artie in his wheelchair.

Brittany was a hero in her own right because she managed to recover just in time to try to make it
look like it was intentional by tucking herself into a roll when she hit the floor and popped back up again into the choreography without missing a step. They went on as best they could, even with Brittany's cheek swelling, but it did cost them a higher placing. No one could deny that Vocal Adrenaline had them beaten, but they did want to do better than that. Rachel thanked Tina by hugging her, after the appropriate warning ahead of time, of course. Everyone knew that Sam and Rachel's duet was what had gotten them into the top ten given the near-disaster in the group performance.

The shock wore off by the time they got back to the hotel and Santana had to be held back by Quinn, Rachel, Sam, AND Mike, as she tried to go after Finn, ranting and raving in Spanish about how dare he lay his freakish, giant paws on Brittany and stuff about how things go down in the Heights and what she was going to do to him. It took Brittany wrapping herself entirely around Santana in a full body hug to calm the Latina enough to be unrestrained.

No one spoke on the flight home. Rachel slept against the window while Quinn slept in her lap. The rest of the club was too shocked, too angry, too sad to talk. Everyone kept to themselves.

Surprisingly, Rachel wasn’t devastated. She was upset, of course, but not devastated.

“I'm proud of you,” Quinn told her when they settled onto Rachel's bed after their first day back in school.

There were only a couple weeks left before summer vacation and they couldn't wait. Without the confines of school, they had so much more freedom to spend time together. Rachel was already planning a road trip for the two of them to Columbus and a Glee club outing to Six Flags.

“You're taking this really well.”

“It's not as bad as all that. We got to go to New York! We performed at Nationals! It was amazing. Losing because Sunshine was so good and Finn was such a klutz isn't all that terrible in the scheme of things. And I'm not afraid to say it; it wasn't because of me that we lost!”

“You always love to look on the bright side...” She chuckled.

“We have another chance at Nationals. I know we'll get there again. And this time, we're going to work our butts off! Because next year? We're winning the whole darned thing! Then we're going to graduate; we're going to go to New York together, and we're going to live our dreams. No looking
“Sounds good to me.”

“Do you want to know the real reason why our defeat at Nationals hasn’t gotten to me like everyone else?”

Quinn curled up to her and nuzzled her throat teasingly. “If you want to tell me.”

“It’s because I have you.” Rachel smiled. “We have so much ahead of us, Quinn, and I can’t wait to start. If I have you with me,” she shrugged, “well, there’s nothing that can stand in our way.”

Quinn reached down to interlace their fingers, holding them tightly there for a moment before she looked up again.

“I think you're growing up, my Berry.”

“I think we both are.”

Chapter End Notes

The little Brittana/Rachel/Kurt moment was inspired by a fanart by jelee- on tumblr: http://jelee-.tumblr.com/post/6180754842
It was the last day of school and everyone was dying to get out and finally start the summer, but they still had the last Glee club meeting of the year to attend. No one was bothered by that. Santana was actually so eager to go, she grabbed Brittany's hand and skipped off ahead of Quinn and Rachel.

"I'm so nervous about tonight."

"You have no reason to be. You and my fathers get along just fine now!"

"It's my first official dinner with them as..." Quinn looked around the crowded hallway warily, "you know."

"That doesn't make it any different than you coming over practically every night and cuddling on the couch with me."

Sometimes more than cuddling.

Quinn wasn't even sure how she was going to handle facing them again after they caught them half naked right before Nationals. This would be the first time she saw them since that encounter. "Disaster" was the only word she could think of to predict tonight's outcome.

"It's different and you know it! This is their time to scrutinize me. Okay, so they've accepted I'm no longer the evil bitch that tortured their precious only daughter, but now that I'm out of the negatives...I still have to start from the beginning. Actually, after they found me on top of you last week...I might be back in the negatives."

Rachel shook her head. "I don't understand a word you're saying."

"I have to prove myself worthy! If I don't make a good impression, I'm no better than Finn. I have to pass the test. Tonight is a test! If there is anything my parents ever taught me, it was about how to prepare for moments like this. The Fabray way of life is just one test after another to prove your worth."

"Quinn...you are really over-thinking this."

She rolled her eyes. "You still can't manage a convincing lie with me."

The brunette smiled, knowing she was caught. "Okay, you're right. It is a bit of a test, but it's a Berry test. So while it will likely be over-the-top intense, filled with dramatic and well-timed comedic moments, it's not like facing anyone else's parents. It's certainly not like anything you ever experienced with your family. My fathers already like you, Quinn...whether you want to believe it or not. So just be yourself and they will fall in love with you at once."

"Just be myself? Which self?"

"Are you schizophrenic now? Is that another secret I had yet to discover? Multiple personality disorder? It would certainly explain a lot."

Quinn narrowed her eyes at the smaller girl. "You're so pushing your luck."

"I strive to push boundaries..." she replied easily, "or break them."

"That's true." The blonde nodded. "You do have absolutely no concept of boundaries."
Rachel's mouth fell open in indignation. "Hey! I've gotten better!"

They were so engrossed in their conversation that they didn't notice Puck standing in the hallway, waiting for them, until Rachel ran right into him.

"Oof! Puckerman! What are you doing?"

"I, uh..." He glanced at Quinn uncomfortably before turning back to her. "We need to talk."

"That sounds like we're breaking up," Rachel said humorously, looking at Quinn for an answer, but Quinn just shrugged, not knowing what was going on with him either. "Are you breaking up with me, Noah?"

"Just come on!" He huffed and pulled her back by the arm, away from Quinn.

"Go ahead," Rachel told Quinn with an eyeroll. "I'll meet you in Glee."

Quinn didn't look happy about it, but reluctantly kept on walking while Puck urged Rachel in the opposite direction.

"What is this all about?" she asked in bewilderment when he led them both into an empty classroom and closed the door behind them.

Puck was acting more skittish than Rachel had ever seen him before. He wasn't angry with her, exactly, but he was upset.

"You and me need to have a talk."

"You said that already."

"Quinn," he said simply. "You can't do her like you did me. Okay?"

Her eyebrows shot into in her hairline. "Excuse you?"

"Not like that!" He huffed, kicking the floor. His hands were jammed deep into his pockets and he looked over Rachel's shoulder, to avoid making eye contact. "I mean, you can't mess with Quinn, okay? Like...if you're really in this, not like that BS stuff you had with me, Finn, and that other loser, you have to be IN it, okay? Do you get it?"

At first Rachel wanted to say no, because really she was having a hard time trying to make Puck's words resemble anything close to sense, but when he finally looked her in the eye, she understood.

He was trying to protect Quinn.

"I'm in love with her, Noah," she said quietly. "I have been for a very long time."

"I didn't know about that stuff with her Dad...her parents. I never; she never..." He grunted in frustration again, running his hands over his head. "She never told me. If I had known, I would have...I would have helped her."

"She never told anyone."

"I could have protected her!"

Rachel sighed and put her hands on the boy's shoulders. She could feel the heat radiating off him. Puck was so angry...and so sad. In his own way, he cared for Quinn. She was the mother of his child.
and as much as Rachel wanted to deny it ever happened, it did. And, so, Noah Puckerman was always going to be a part of Quinn's life, whether actively or inactively. They created a life together; they shared a child. Rachel could resent that bond they shared until the day she died, but it would never change it. Puck had something with Quinn that Rachel never could. It was time she accepted it and moved on. Quinn loved her, but just like Rachel had a family, so did Quinn. She realized in that moment that Puck was always going to be there for Quinn if she needed it, maybe only because of Beth, maybe because of that little girl and something more; it didn't matter. He was going to be there.

"I can't speak for Quinn," she said somberly, "but I think she's starting to understand that now. She didn't believe it before, but now? We all need to start proving to each other the things we say. If we say we care, if we say we love, if we say we'll be there no matter what, then we need to do that – we need to do it all. No backing out, no excuses. We have to mean it. Do you get that?"

He nodded jerkily. "No promises I can't keep."

She shook her head with a slightly incredulous smile on her lips. Was this the Noah Puckerman who slushied her on a weekly basis for nearly two years? Who went to juvie for dragging an ATM out of a Quick Stop with his car and who made it his personal mission in life to sleep with as many girls as possible, claimed to have his first threesome at the age of seven, and should he succeed in breaking some world record as a man-slut, would consider it one of his most admirable life achievements?

"You're a good person, Noah. You really are. I knew it the day you walked in the door and chose Glee club over the football team. You have a wonderful heart, however misplaced it may be sometimes."

"You're wrong." He shook his head vigorously. "I'm a loser. A good-for-nothing screw up, just like every other guy in my family. Just like my Dad. A good guy wouldn't have done the crap I did. W-what I did to you. What I did to nearly everyone in this place." He looked around the empty room miserably and lowered his gaze. "What I did to Quinn."

"We all make mistakes."

"I've made a shitload of them."

"And you think there's no chance of redemption for you?"

"Huh?"

She paused for a moment to rephrase. "You think you can't make up for them?"

He gave her a disparaging look. "I said 'a shitload', Rachel."

Without warning, she pulled him into her arms and embraced him tightly. "The fact that you want to make up for your mistakes, Puck, is exactly why you can. Someday you will. Just be the man I know you are."

"What man is that?"

Pulling back, she looked up at him with a gentle smile. "The one who would do anything for the people he loves."

"Do you think she'll forgive me someday?"

It didn't matter if he was talking about Quinn or Beth. The answer was the same.
Rachel nodded slowly. "Someday."

As Quinn was about to pull into the Berrys' driveway, she noticed that the neighbors across the street had wrapped a large yellow ribbon with a green ribbon into one bow around the biggest tree standing at the edge of the yard. Yellow ribbons were hardly an unusual sight in Lima. Nearly everyone in the small town had at least one family member, if not more, in the army, but the green ribbon was different. She was curious, but that quickly disappeared as soon as she turned in the driveway and parked.

Her first official dinner with Rachel's Dads in the role of Rachel's girlfriend and not just the girl who was a very unwelcome friend...

After all they'd been through at this point, if the Berry men didn't like her, then they never would (she knew she was going to have to make up for that couch incident though).

However, Quinn had a newfound confidence. She was determined that even if they didn't want to like her, she was darn well going to win them over! She could do this now. She knew she could do this. She could be the girlfriend Rachel deserved.

Quinn had never been the type of girl that parents liked, but that was all going to change, just like the rest of her life had. This Quinn was going to be the girl that parents fawned over! The Berry men simply didn't have a choice in the matter. Besides, they were different. All of this was so...different. It was going to work. It had to.

She couldn't imagine what she would do if they ended up really just not liking her after everything. Rachel always insisted she'd be with Quinn and love Quinn regardless of her fathers' opinions, but...they were her parents. Rachel was so close to them, loved them so dearly, if the men didn't like Quinn now then how were they ever going to make it work? They weren't sneaking around them anymore.

It was going to work.

Rachel answered the door with her usual beautiful, mega-watt smile. The one that lit her up from the inside out, and was so incredibly infectious that even in her worst mood, Quinn would find a way to smile back.

The blonde couldn't help but laugh at the surge of emotions that overwhelmed her at just the sight of Rachel. It seemed so surreal. How could you feel so much in just a mere few seconds of being in someone's presence? She loved this girl so much.

"What?" Rachel pouted self-consciously, smoothing down her hair and her, of course, carefully selected red and white heart patterned dress with a hairband to match. She looked every bit the part of the innocent daughter having a family dinner with her girlfriend.

_Girlfriend._

Typically she would always have to correct herself in her head, changing _boyfriend_ to _girlfriend_. After 16 years of thinking one way was the only way...it was a hard habit to break.

But this time she didn't have to correct herself.

"Is it my dress?" Rachel asked worriedly. "Does it not fit the occasion? Ohhh... I knew I should have worn the blue one. You like the blue one!"
"You look perfect."

"Then why are you laughing?"

Quinn shrugged, the corners of her mouth curled up ever so slightly, confusing Rachel even more.

"Am I allowed to come in or have I been banned again?"

The brunette gave her a blank look before Quinn gestured to the porch she was still standing on while Rachel blocked the doorway.

"Oh!" She gave a little start and smiled sheepishly. "Of course not! Come in!"

As if Quinn couldn't manage it on her own, Rachel grabbed her hand and pulled her inside. Even as she closed the door behind them, she didn't let go and instead interlaced their fingers. Quinn's heart skipped a beat at the simple gesture. It was so normal, so easy...

She never imagined it could just be easy.

She also never imagined that holding hands with another girl would give her stomach butterflies, yet comfort her at exactly the same time in the most oddly wonderful sensation. Her life was nothing like she imagined it would be, nothing like she'd been told it would be either.

It was so much better.

"There she is!" Leroy appeared from the living room, walked up, and pulled Quinn into a big hug.

"Didn't lose any of your clothes along the way this time, did you?"

"Dad!" Rachel cried, mortified.

Quinn did everything she could not to blush. She'd prepared herself for comments like this.

"I'm kidding. Quinn knows I'm kidding. You know I'm kidding, right, Quinn?"

She shook her head. "You were definitely not kidding."

"See?" Rachel frowned as sternly as she could at her father who only laughed and winked at Quinn. "I see you've brought a present?"

Quinn handed over the neatly tied box of desserts that she'd driven across the county to get from the nearest vegan bakery. "I couldn't come empty-handed. I thought maybe you would like some pastries for dessert. They're from Belladonna's."

"Isn't that over an hour away?" Rachel furrowed her brow.

Quinn shrugged. "Forty five minutes without traffic. It really wasn't a big deal. I would have made something myself, but I'm a terrible baker and I thought I would save you the trauma of having to try anything I made."

"Did you forget that we have several places here in Lima that would be suitable?" Leroy chuckled in bemusement. "But thank you for being kind enough to spare us."

"Dad," the brunette squeezed his arm with a smile, realizing what Quinn had done for her, "Belladonna's is that incredible vegan bakery I was telling you about. I've been pestering you for ages to go with me!"
Leroy turned back to Quinn with a slightly impressed expression on his face, but he was doing his best to hide it.

"You didn't have to bring anything, Quinn, but I can't wait to try it. Rachel has been on us for ages about that place. I'm sure it will be just as delicious as she's been making it out to be."

"We'll see about that!" Hiram interjected, finally coming to join the group in the foyer.

He was wearing an apron that said "My Daddy is #1!" and still had an oven mitt on one hand.

"I'm in the middle of cooking a delicious, delightful meal for us all, but I had to see what all the hubbub was about since Quinn appears to have refused to move more than a few feet away from the main exit. Should I take that as a sign?"

Quinn pursed her lips. "I've been hijacked."

Smiling, Rachel went to take her coat, but Leroy waved her off and did it himself. Quinn thanked him before moving closer to give Hiram a warm hug.

"You're absolutely right, Quinn," he agreed as they pulled apart and put his hands on her shoulders. "Our daughter has appalling manners! It's all Leroy's fault, you know, he always liked to baby her too much."

"Me?" the other man replied indignantly. "You cave as often as designers cry on Project Runway! Don't even get me started on the 'Daddy pout'."

Hiram gasped and held the hand with the oven mitt on it to his chest. "How dare you! I'm immune to the 'Daddy pout' and you know it!"

"Like the time you thought you were suddenly immune to your allergy to stone fruits, ate a plum, and ended up in the hospital being treated for anaphylactic shock? Some doctor... It was mortifying!"

"Daddies..." Rachel chastised and gestured to Quinn as if to remind them she was still there.

"That's right!" Hiram said, pointing at Quinn. "Hush up! I won't have you dredging up sordid family history with our guest present. And we're only allowed to tell such stories about Rachel! That's how these dinners work."

"Ah!" The brunette squeaked and jumped in, waving her hands. "I'm using this opportunity to once again fiercely protest against that horribly cliché practice and encourage you to only tell Quinn the wonderful things about me and my numerous achievements thus far."

"And you think I don't already know about your dark side and/or embarrassing moments?" she retorted cheekily.

Rachel's jaw clicked shut.

"It's settled then!" Leroy clapped. "Tonight will be a tell-all about our rising star, the one and only, Rachel Berry."

Rachel covered her face with her hands.

"Well come on in, Quinn." Hiram waved her through. "I've got to get back to dinner before it's inedible."

"Pretty sure that's already happened," Leroy muttered out of the corner of his mouth to Quinn's
amusement.

"I heard that!"

"I meant for you to!"

Leroy walked ahead and disappeared into the kitchen, still bickering with his husband. Quinn felt a smaller hand in hers again and turned around to see Rachel looking up at her.

She was perfect.

They were all perfect.

She knew right then that if she didn't find a way to fit in with this amazing family, she'd mourn the loss for the rest of her life.

"Hi."

"Hi."

"You okay so far?"

Quinn leaned down and pressed a chaste kiss to Rachel's lips, only taking the briefest moment to revel in the softness.

Then there was that smile again, the one she'd seen in the doorway, and it filled her heart until she thought it just might burst. Still, Quinn couldn't keep from laughing.

Rachel threw her hands in the air exasperatedly. "What now?"

Quinn only shook her head.

"If you won't tell me why you keep laughing at me, then at least tell me you love me. I'm practically jumping out of my skin about tonight and here you are... just laughing at me!"

She didn't bother to remind Rachel about what she had said earlier in school and that this was her turn to be the calm one. Instead, she just answered her girlfriend's question and did as she asked at the same time.

"I love you."

Dinner, which was far from inedible, was quite delicious even though it was vegan. No wonder Rachel managed to maintain such a diet with a father who could cook like that.

They talked about everything and anything, just nothing to do with Quinn's home life. It seemed with the Berrys, very few topics were off limits. It would take some time for Quinn to get used to how open they really were with each other as a family, the past few months notwithstanding. Quinn was seeing the real Berry family now. It was unnerving the way they already knew so much of their history and personal details about their relationship. Rachel had taken the first opportunity to fill them in on all the closeted dating drama they had missed. She still edited here and there, but for the most part, Quinn was pretty sure they knew enough that it was as though they had been there every step of the way. Her private nature rebelled against this openness with people who were...not Rachel, but she also realized that to be a part of Rachel's family and Rachel's life, there would be a lot of new things she would have to learn. All in all, it really wasn't a bad lesson.
The subject of Quinn on the Cheerios popped up and so did the day that Quinn came to the house and barged right past Leroy to see Rachel. They could actually laugh about it now when just a short time ago it had seemed like the beginning of the end of her relationship with the Berry men.

"Why on earth did you put up with this...sociopath for so long?"

"Why else, Daddy?" Rachel chirped. "Popularity, of course. The day Quinn became head cheerleader, she took over the top tier at McKinley."

"That and because it was expected of me," Quinn added. "But Sue wasn't all bad. As head cheerleader, a lot of pressure was on me, but I got a lot of perks too. If I wanted to hand in a paper late or skip a class, Sue would take care of it. I was her go-to person, I could get things done, so she returned the favor sometimes."

"Get things done..." Rachel rolled her eyes, "like spying on the Glee club and reporting back to the enemy camp?"

"It wasn't for that long! Brittany and Santana took over for me. May I remind you that at the time I was 16, pregnant, and you were trying to steal my boyfriend?"

The two men looked at their daughter disapprovingly.

"We certainly did not raise you that way, Rachel Berry."

"You should apologize to Quinn for the stunts you pulled."

"What?" she cried in disbelief. "You two encouraged me to 'woo' Finn away!"

"A decision we sorely regretted after MEETING him."

Quinn ducked her head to hide the smile.

"We gave you too much credit for your taste in boys. Your taste in girls however..."

"Even worse?" Quinn finished for him.

Hiram raised an eyebrow. "A thousand times worse."

"Can we just move on, please?" Rachel sighed. "I just wanted to say that I'm grateful that Quinn no longer has to deal with that monster."

"I told you, there were perks to dealing with her. I never would have been able to get you the Glee yearbook picture without my in with Sue," Quinn said offhandedly, taking a bite of her food.

The brunette stared at her. "What are you talking about?"

Quinn suddenly realized that there were three pairs of eyes staring at her intently. She hadn't even really been thinking when she said that. It felt like since it all happened so long ago, what did it matter now? But, Rachel's shock reminded her that she never did tell anyone how the Glee club got their picture in the yearbook the way Rachel so desperately wanted. She still remembered how sweaty her palms were when she walked into that office with her uniform on the cusp of no longer fitting. To cover up her shaking hands, she put them on her hips, and Sue was none the wiser. It's how she always stood in that office. It looked stronger, more intimidating. It showed she wasn't afraid, no matter how much she actually was.

"You really wanted the Glee club to have a yearbook photo. It was important to you. So I got Sue to
give us one of the Cheerios usual pages."

"But...but..." Rachel stammered, "hadn't she already kicked you off the team for being pregnant by then?"

Quinn just nodded, feeling uncomfortable under the intense scrutiny at the moment. She could have told them about Sue's subsequent offer to rejoin the Cheerios and how she turned it down, but there was already enough attention on her, she couldn't handle any more. Maybe she would tell Rachel later, after dinner, when they were alone.

"So it was because of you that the club got their first year photo in the yearbook?" Leroy asked.

Again, she nodded. "It wasn't a big deal."

"Why?" Rachel asked, mystified.

"You wanted it. That's all. After all you did for us, for the group, the least I could do was get us a picture."

"You never told me."

"There was no need to."

Rachel seemed to be at a loss for words and dropped her eyes down to her plate in a stunned silence.

Hiram cleared his throat, breaking the quiet that had fallen over the dinner table. "Well, now I definitely think you owe this beautiful young lady an apology for making off with her boyfriend!"

"Daddy!"

"Believe me - Rachel owes me no apologies."

"I think we should adopt her instead, Leroy," he announced, swirling his wine glass with flourish. "I would love having a blonde daughter..."

"Hey! That's so unfair!" Rachel cried. "You can't like Quinn better than me now!"

"Sorry, sweetie. That ship has sailed." Leroy waved her off. "What do you think about Rachel's room, Quinn? Would you want to repaint? I have a book of colors we could peruse together and choose your color scheme."

"DAD!"

Quinn didn't try to hide her smile this time.

They were on dessert before long and everyone was raving over the pastries Quinn brought. Rachel was practically bouncing in her seat with joy. At least Quinn knew she'd earned some solid points for that move even though she'd already been thinking about surprising Rachel with some treats from that bakery ever since she mentioned it a few weeks ago.

Oddly, the tree with the two ribbons still niggled at the back of Quinn's head. She found her mind periodically wandering away from the table conversation to wonder what the family could have wanted to say with the green one. A name? A symbol? Something uniquely meaningful to that family?

Why was she still thinking about this?
Fortunately, her girlfriend seemed to be on the same train of thought and beat her to it.

"I saw that Mrs. Bea put up ribbons on her tree, Dad. Do you know anything about that? I wasn't aware she had any family in the army. Then again, she hasn't really been altogether friendly with me ever since our falling out with the lawsuit she joined the Monroes in about 'noise pollution'..."

"You were sued?" Quinn asked incredulously.

"We quickly settled the whole matter by reassuring them that we would soundproof key areas of the house and Rachel promised to make certain hours off-limits for practicing," Leroy answered.

The blonde scoffed. "That's ridiculous. They should be paying you instead of getting to listen to a future Broadway star for free."

"That's exactly what I said!" Rachel cried, beaming at Quinn while feeling very satisfied with herself.

Leroy smiled into his wine glass, but said nothing. Hiram cleared his throat once, then twice, while fiddling with his utensils before turning to Quinn purposefully.

"I put those ribbons up," he said quietly. His gaze never wavered.

"You?" Rachel asked, her brow furrowing in confusion. "Why would you-"

"I put them up for Quinn."

Rachel was just as shocked as Quinn was.

"Me?" she replied dumbly. "What does that have to do with me?"

Rachel was gearing up for a bombardment of questions, but Leroy held his hand up and gestured for her to stay quiet so her father could continue.

"It's a peace offering," Hiram explained. "A first of many in my attempts to make amends for what happened between us. I thought that might be a very good place to start."

Understanding dawned on her just then and she nodded slowly, taking it all in. "That's the tree I backed into that night..."

Hiram nodded.

"Yellow and green?"

"My baby girl said yellow was your favorite color and after that story about how she picked out your corsage for Prom, I couldn't resist."

"Green to match your eyes," Rachel said softly.

Quinn could hardly wrap her head around any of it. This man, who seemed to abhor her so vehemently, for everything she was, came from, and appeared to stand for...this same man was showing her how much he cared. Not just about Rachel, or Rachel's girlfriend, but about her.

"We're starting to heal now, Quinn," he said. "All of us and not a moment too soon. The past needs to be left behind, once and for all. After all, you told Rachel that yellow roses mean new beginnings? I'd like to look at this that way. We'll heal, just like that tree. It didn't look too pretty after your car's assault."
"The tree assaulted my car, not the other way around," she tried lightly and got a smile from Leroy and Rachel, but Hiram's expression never changed.

"It'll bear its scars for our lifetime, but as it ages, the marks will fade. New will grow over the old. And one day, long after we're gone, those marks will have disappeared. Hopefully we can move faster than the tree though." He winked. "Time is not on the side of us lowly humans."

Overwhelmed and just completely at a loss for words, Quinn didn't have the slightest idea of what to do. After a moment's hesitation, she could feel her eyes burning with tears; she did the only thing she could think of. She reached out and took Hiram's hand that was resting on the table and squeezed it lightly.

"Thank you," she whispered.

"You're welcome."

"May I propose a toast?" Leroy's booming voice broke the quiet reverie of the moment and Quinn suddenly found herself breathing a bit hard because she'd been holding her breath without realizing it.

He held up his glass and Hiram picked up his own in response.

"Of course, dear! Just don't make it too long. We don't want to be here all night."

"This coming from the man who took three hours to propose! It was four words!"

"And I had to think very carefully about them!"

He rolled his eyes. "To my beautiful daughter, who we love and cherish more than anything else in the world."

Me too.

When three pairs of eyes looked back at her and Rachel ducked her head shyly, Quinn realized she had actually said that out loud and blushed furiously.

"And...to her also very beautiful, kind, intelligent, and loving girlfriend."

Rachel slipped her hand under the table to rest on Quinn's thigh reassuringly.

"We've been through quite the ordeal both together and apart, but now it is my hope that we will move past it as one, as a family, and Quinn...I speak for my husband as well when I say that we welcome you with open hearts, as it always should have been."

Quinn latched onto Rachel's hand under the table for support. She smiled shakily and they all touched their glasses with gentle clinks before taking a sip.

"Ah, now, that the somber serious stuff is over. Let's get back to the lighter mood of the night!" Hiram sighed, clapping his hands together. "Oh! I know! How about a little melody à la the Berry tradition of turning a regular meal into dinner theater? I've already got the perfect song-"

"Oh, Daddy!" Rachel interrupted eagerly. "Why don't you let Quinn and I sing for you tonight?"

Panic bubbled over in her. "Rachel, I don't think..."

"It'll be fun, Quinn!" she insisted happily. "Come on. Please? For me?"
"How delightful!" Hiram exclaimed. "Leroy! They're going to sing for us!"

"I'm sitting right here," he replied dryly. "I heard."

"Don't be such a sourpuss."

"Now that was just rude."

Rachel had already pulled Quinn away from the table and over to the Berrys' piano.

"What should we sing?"

"I don't know..." Quinn mumbled, not at all happy about having to do this in front of Rachel's fathers.

The other girl didn't seem to pick up on Quinn's anxiety. It was either that or she chose to ignore it.

"I know!" She gasped excitedly. "How about the number we did when you were talking me out of getting a nose job?"

Both Hiram and Leroy lit up at the idea, pulling their chairs forward eagerly in anticipation. Quinn shook her head in disbelief. Rachel really hadn't wasted any time in filling them in on everything they could have possibly missed.

"This I can't wait to hear!" Leroy said.

"Not such a sourpuss now, are we?"

"Oh, stuff it," he huffed before looking back to the girls. "It was lovely what you did by the way, Quinn. Thank you for supporting our daughter like that. We've had the cosmetic surgery conversation over and over for years and she was starting to wear us down until you stepped in. You saved us old men quite the heart strain."

"Speak for yourself! I'm not old!"

Leroy ignored his husband's indignant reply. "We would have had to call in Barbra herself to change Rachel's mind if it wasn't for you."

"Which never would have happened because she's too busy shopping in her underground mall," Hiram added with a sigh.

Rachel looked to Quinn imploringly and the blonde knew there was no getting out of it, not with how excited the Berry men were and how much Rachel wanted her to do this.

"Go get your laptop." She sighed in defeat. "You still have the music on there, right?"

Rachel nodded eagerly, her eyes lighting up as Quinn had just given her the moon. She was a few steps away before both of the men cried out in protest.

"No, no, no! Let's just have it be you two," Leroy said.

"You don't need music; you are the music," Hiram added firmly.

The way he looked at Rachel as he said it made Quinn think that was something they spoke of often,
especially when Rachel nodded in understanding and walked back over to her without a word.

*Well! Thing's had just gone from unpleasant to spectacularly worse.*

Quinn was already insecure about the weakness of her voice and now she was going to put it on full display for Rachel's fathers without even some accompaniment to carry her? What if they thought she wasn't talented enough to be with Rachel? What if they thought she needed someone with a voice like Jesse St. James' to be able to keep up?

"Just sing for me," Rachel whispered softly against her ear.

For Rachel.

She could do anything if it was for Rachel.

So, Quinn took a deep breath and opened her mouth.

"I wish I could tie you up in my shoes,  
Make you feel unpretty too."

After they sang and the table was clear, Rachel and Quinn had gone upstairs for awhile. Quinn was just on her way back down for a glass of water when she overheard the men talking in the kitchen.

"She certainly can't sing like our girl can."

"No, she can't. Who can anyway? But...Hiram..."

"I know," he said tersely.

"I had no idea," Leroy murmured.

There was a silent pause and then a loud clatter of utensils that made Quinn jump.

"It's my fault! All of it is my fault!"

"Honey, don't-"

"She fell in love, Leroy! Our little girl fell madly, deeply, passionately, in love for the first time, not just an infatuation like before, and we weren't there for it! We missed it! Everything! Just because I was so selfishly wrapped up in-"

"Stop it," the other man said quietly, but sternly. "Remember what you told Quinn tonight. We have to put the past behind us and start to heal. What's done is done. We need to be here for our daughter now and never miss another moment if we can help it. What good does it do for you to continue to punish yourself for this?"

"I thought it was bad enough..." he sighed, "hearing her tell us about all that's happened these past months, but hearing it is nothing compared to witnessing it with my own two eyes. I felt like a stranger watching them. A stranger! With my own daughter, in my own home!"

"She's happy," Leroy reasoned. "Happier than I've seen her in...God knows how long."

"She never looked at that Finn kid like that, that's for sure."

"They never sounded that good together either."
"They were...beautiful." Quinn could hear Hiram's voice crack at the last word and a knot formed in her throat. "Do you really think it's as serious as...what we saw?"

"And then some."

"Damn it," Hiram muttered. "How did I let this happen?"

"Enough. I won't listen to you beat yourself up anymore over this. We have Rachel back and it looks like we have her back even better than before. Let's be thankful for that rather than ruminate on mistakes we can't go back and change now."

"I still can't believe you haven't said, 'I told you so' yet."

"I'm saving it for a rainy day."

Hiram chuckled and they fell silent once again. Quinn wondered if she should take her chances and try to escape now without them knowing she was there, but then he spoke again and stopped her in her tracks.

"She lied to us about them having...intimate relations."

"Of course she did," Leroy replied. "What reason have we given her to trust us when it comes to their relationship?"

"You mean what reason have I given her to trust us?"

"Hiram, I'm not going to say it again."

"I know; I know. I just can't help but feel..." He sighed forlornly. "I always thought we'd be the first to know when she made the decision to take that step and now? Our daughter isn't a virgin anymore and we're still kept in the dark. This isn't how we raised her! This isn't how our family works!"

"She's a teenage girl who wants to be with her girlfriend without her nosy parents interfering. Would you do any differently?"

"It's completely unfair to make that comparison. Neither of us had the kind of openness with our parents that we worked so hard to have with our own daughter! We swore it would be different. And then...a part of me wonders if we - if I...deserve her lying to us still."

"Don't take it that far. Yes, mistakes have been made, but we are still her parents and she cannot lie to us like this, taking advantage of our trust, not to mention the guilt that's still floating around at the moment... We need to get this family back on track and that means complete honesty."

"Honesty, respect, and dance," Hiram recited firmly. "Our family motto."

"Do you think Quinn can dance?"

"I would be shocked if she couldn't. The girl has fantastic legs. It's no wonder she was a cheerleader."

"Guess our daughter does have a thing for letterman jackets after all."

"Just like you do," he teased.

"Oh, please! Just because you played volleyball in college..."
"I happen to remember you being quite the eager thing after watching a match."

"You're getting senile. I recall no such thing."

"QUINN!" Rachel called from upstairs. "What's taking you so long?"

She froze in a panic, knowing she was caught red-handed. Leroy stuck his head out the door before she could move an inch and raised an eyebrow before waving her in.

"I-I'll be right up!" she called back before shamefully following him into the kitchen.

Hiram was wearing dishwashing gloves and had his hands propped on his hips when she came in.

"Eavesdropping, Miss Fabray?"

"I wasn't... I didn't hear anyt-"

They both gave her a knowing look and she had to come clean.

"I'm sorry," she relented. "I know I shouldn't have, but it's an old habit. In my family, the only way you ever really found out what was going on was by listening behind a closed door..."

"Well, in this family, if we want to know what's going on, we ask," Hiram said. "I know we haven't had many examples of honesty around here lately, but that's going to change."

"I understand."

"Any questions about what you heard?"

She shook her head, ashamed.

"So will you be having sex with our daughter tonight?"

Quinn's eyes widened in horror. For a moment, she was sure she was going to pass out.

"Now you've gone and scared the poor girl out of her wits." Leroy clucked his tongue. "Don't you think she's had enough of that for a lifetime?"

"I...uh...hah...I'm...um...not..."

"I think we broke her, Leroy. What do you think?"

"She sounds pretty broken."

"RACHEL!" Quinn yelled, desperate for someone to save her from having to face this alone.

The men began to laugh and Rachel's hurried footsteps sounded on the stairs. Quinn wished she could stick her head in a bucket of ice water right now to cool her flaming cheeks.

How was she ever going to survive these people?

Somehow she knew she would be just fine.
It wasn’t until the following weekend that Quinn and Rachel had the house to themselves again when the Berry men went out for a dinner party. They wasted no time in taking advantage of it. The second they left, Rachel was on the phone as usual, and Quinn was pulling into the driveway in no time. They didn’t have to hide their relationship from Hiram and Leroy anymore, but they still found themselves sneaking around all the same. It felt different though. When there wasn’t an underlying guilt or terror of being caught, it was actually just exciting and fun.

Normal.

Rachel was already waiting upstairs for Quinn when the blonde walked in. She was slightly disappointed that Quinn didn’t really run into the house or into her arms with the same zeal that Rachel was absolutely on edge with. Hadn’t almost three weeks of being denied any real intimacy had an effect on her? Was she already growing tired of their sex life? She knew this would happen eventually, she just hadn’t expected it this quickly. Why didn’t she buy some of those toys she saw online? She could have kicked herself for not going ahead with it! Quinn hated surprises and when it came to trying new things in their sex life, Rachel had learned that her girlfriend needed time to get used to the ideas and process them rather than having them sprung on her. Not that Quinn was ever against anything, she just needed a little time in advance to wrap her head around anything new. Still, she should have just bought those toys! That way she wouldn’t be faced with this horrible realization that Quinn’s sexual appetite for her was waning...

Rachel was spiraling into another world inside her head and was completely oblivious to the way Quinn sauntered into the room, exuding confidence, dripping with desire, and simply hungry for the brunette in front of her. It was the way she glided through the halls in her Cheerios uniform, hands on her hips, above all the rest, there for them to fear and admire, but instead of being untouchable, she had zeroed in her focus on being exactly the opposite for one person and one person only.

"You..." she purred, looking up at the brunette through her lashes as she rested against the bed with one knee, "need to take your clothes off."

Rachel blinked dumbly, only realizing then how close Quinn had gotten.

Instead of waiting, Quinn reached behind her and slid the zipper of Rachel's dress down. Then she stood back and started to undress herself, rocking her hips back and forth seductively in a slight dance as each item fell away.

"Do you want me?" The blonde turned around and looked at Rachel over her shoulder. Her piercing gaze made the brunette flush with heat throughout her body. The unadulterated power Quinn had over her...over her body...to be able to reduce her to this quivering mess just with a look...

"You know the answer to that," she replied hoarsely and quickly removed her dress.

Her hands went behind her to unclasp her bra, but Quinn held a finger up and shook it slowly in reprimand. Gulping, Rachel let her arms drop. Quinn was down to just her underwear now and her breasts were on display in all their glory.

Why was she so far away? Rachel couldn’t think of anything else but leaping off the bed and into Quinn’s arms. Was now really the time to tease her like this? How did Quinn have so much self-control and she had next to none? Thoughts like those let the doubt continue to creep its was back in.
Quinn was a goddess. Rachel was...Rachel.

Of course the sexual balance would be far too uneven. How could Quinn want Rachel as much she wanted Quinn? It just didn't work like that. Rachel would have to try harder.

Then Quinn was on her, pushing her back on the bed, undoing the clasp, and then Rachel was divested of her bra as well. The blonde looked victorious as she smirked and dropped the garment on the floor with a purposeful flourish.

Quinn teased her by moving her lips in just close enough to brush against Rachel's, but pulled back when she tried to make contact. It was maddening. It was infuriating. It made her need more.

"Stop teasing," Rachel whined breathlessly.

"Then stop thinking," Quinn murmured in reply.

That caught her attention.

"W-what?" She croaked, licking her lips.

She tried to look Quinn in the eye, but failed.

"You have that look on your face on that says you're thinking too much and not about anything good."

"Oh...I..."

Quinn cut Rachel off by pressing her lips to hers and kissed her until neither of them had a breath left. Then she kissed her again, and again, deeply, softly, lovingly, passionately.

Lips and tongues and taste and need all swirled together making Rachel's head spin until she could think of nothing else but her desperate desire for Quinn. She forgot every doubt she had. She forgot where they were. She forgot she had even been thinking at all. Quinn was extraordinary. Every little breath, every slight brush of her hands, the tiny moan in the back of her throat...every single thing made Rachel shiver and feel that much closer to coming undone.

Quinn had left her mouth and moved on to other things as she made her way down Rachel's body slowly, dragging her lips across the warm, soft skin. When she took the edge of Rachel's underwear between her teeth and snapped them, Rachel laughed delightedly.

Her gorgeous, sexy girlfriend seemed to want to kiss her everywhere and Rachel relished every moment. She wasn't worried about instant gratification anymore. The things Quinn was doing to her were far better than what she had in mind.

Looking down at Quinn, Rachel couldn't help but think she looked like a blonde panther crawling up the bed towards her. There was that predatory gleam in her eyes...the one that always shot directly between her legs, making her throb and soak through her underwear from just that spark alone.

All of a sudden, Quinn stopped and peered at Rachel strangely.

"Why do you keep doing that?"

"Doing what?" she replied distractedly, licking her lips eagerly.

"You keep comparing me to large cats."
Rachel froze. She had said those things out loud?

"I mean, I think you even called me a lioness once."

Oh, God! She had!

"Well…Q-Quinn…" she stammered nervously, with a red tinge to her cheeks, "I just…well…you have a very predatory, domineering way about you. You just have this look…"

"I'm an animal, is what you're saying?"

"No! I mean, yes. Yes, in the very, very good sense."

Quinn was hardly convinced.

Rachel dragged her hands over Quinn's naked back and fell to her arms so that she could pull the blonde up closer. "When...when we're together...there's something so raw and powerful about it. Wild, even." She swallowed thickly, squirming underneath Quinn's weight in her heightened and currently unattended state. "I have never been so aroused as when you get...well, when you look like you just were."

"Which was what?"

"Like you wanted to devour me whole."

This time, it was Quinn who blushed.

"I-I really like it," Rachel said softly. "It's exciting and you make me feel, well, a lot of things. Wanted, is one. Attractive. Aroused. Safe."

"So I'm a wild animal that makes you feel safe?" she translated with a sharp raise of her eyebrow. "You realize how completely contradictory that is?"

"As primal as our desire for each other can be, it might even feel dangerous, I still know somewhere deep down that it's you. I'll never feel safer or more trusting of anyone than you - even when you're acting like a large cat that's about to pounce on its prey."

"This is so disturbing. You're insane, you know that?" Quinn huffed exaggeratedly.

Then, without warning, she leapt forward on top of Rachel and grabbed her wrists, slamming them above her head on the bed, effectively pinning her down. Rachel's breath caught in her throat and she stared up at her girlfriend with wide eyes, heart racing, the pressure between her legs getting worse by the second.

"Is this what you were talking about?" Quinn said huskily, her lips drifting a tantalizing few millimeters away from the brunette's mouth. She pressed her thigh a little harder into the heat between Rachel's legs, making the girl squirm. "You like it when I do things like this to you?"

"Y-Yes," she gulped.

"But it's not dangerous?" she said in that same seductive purr, almost encouraging Rachel to deny it. The roll of her hips became more prominent.

Rachel's breathing grew unsteady and she wriggled delightedly against her girlfriend's fierce hold.

"You're my Lion Quinn," she answered simply.
At that, Quinn released Rachel's wrists and slumped against her with a groan.

The spell was broken.

"Oh, God," she muttered against Rachel's shoulder. "Just when the Bacon Quinn thing was starting to die down."

Rachel laughed and wrapped her arms and legs around Quinn in a full body hug.

How could she still find ways to doubt them? It was a habit that she was determined to put an end to.

Rachel was desperate. This was an emergency of the highest order and that was her only justification for making this call. She took a deep breath before shutting her eyes tightly and braced herself for the barrage that was about to hit her from the other end of the line.

"Hey, Santana!" she said as cheerily as possible.

There was a pause.

"What are you doing calling me, Gayberry? This better have been a misdial."

Rachel jumped right into it, bypassing any pleasantries. "I realize this is somewhat out of the ordinary, but I'm afraid something rather worrisome has occurred and as Quinn's oldest, albeit dubious, friend, I'm hoping that you might be of some assistance because at this point I'm considering taking her to the hospital. She is just not acting like-"

"Deathly Hallows Part Two comes out tonight, right?"

Her mouth dropped open. "How did you know?"

"RACHEL! WE HAVE TO GO! WE'RE GOING TO BE LATE!" Quinn shouted from downstairs.

"B-but the movie doesn't start for another five hours, baby!" she called back.

"WE HAVE TO GET GOOD SEATS!"

"I'm sure it'll be-"

"GET DOWN HERE NOW!"

"Yeah, I dealt with that for the first seven movies," Santana's voice brought her back to the phone.

"So you're saying this is...normal behavior for her?" she tried cautiously.

"Normal? Hell no. But, yeah, Q is a total closeted Potterhead...among other things, of course. She claims she loves the books, but she really just has a mega lady boner for the British chick who plays Hermione."

"Marvelous," Rachel groused. "But, Santana, she completely flipped out on me yesterday when I didn't know what a muddle was-

"Muggle."

"Right, that. So she yelled at me and muttered things about a 'racist pureblood' and that I would
probably have been shifted into a slimy house…"

"…sorted into Slytherin."

"That's it! And then she threw all seven books of the series at me, demanding I read them in the next twenty-four hours or she'll…well…she won't…she'll…"

"Cut off the honey pot? Shut the beaver gate? No more breakfast of Champions?"

"Those are absolutely disgusting euphemisms for something as simple as-"

"...you won't be getting any."

"Precisely. And they were hard covers! The largest one narrowly escaped knocking me unconscious."

"Berry, why are you still talking to me?" Santana said exasperatedly.

Rachel was losing her attention fast so she had to be quick about this.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING UP THERE? RACHEL! COME ON!"

"I have an idea! We have two extra tickets that were for Sam and his date, but Sam's sick, so I was thinking perhaps -"

"Not a chance in hell."

"But you obviously know the stories and you are Quinn's friend…however tenuous that tends to be…"

"It ain't happening. There is no freaking way I am EVER going on a double date with you two freaks, especially when Quinn's in Potter-mode. I dealt with it for the last ten years. You're bumping fuzzies with her - she's your problem now, sick wizard fetishes and all."

"Oh, well," Rachel feigned defeat. "I suppose I could always just call Brittany and give her the tickets. No doubt she'll be overjoyed!"

There was dead silence on the other end of the line.

"However, I'm offering you the chance to be the hero and present your very beautiful, sweet, fantasy genre-loving, girlfriend with two tickets to the midnight premiere of the last ever Harry Potter movie… I can only imagine how delighted and appreciative she would be by your thoughtful surprise."

There was a long stretch of silence and Rachel started to panic, wondering if Santana had hung up.

"I really…really hate you."

"Wonderful!" She exhaled loudly in relief. "I'll see you two there tonight!"

"If you make this calling me thing a habit, I will crush your midget skull with my bare hands."

"Perhaps you should consider seeing an anger management therapist for your violent tendencies, Santana. It can't be healthy."

"Not a problem. I already have one."
"Really?"

"Yeah. Her name's Brittany."

The Latina hung up and Rachel smiled down at the phone, shaking her head. But an extremely eager blonde grabbed her by the wrist and hauled her down the stairs.

"God! What was taking you so long? Who were you talking to?"

Rachel barely managed to wave goodbye to her fathers who looked far too amused by Quinn's antics as she ushered Rachel out the door. She barely managed to hold on to her purse when Quinn thrust it into her arms. Rachel was so relieved that Santana and Brittany would be there to help with this rather peculiar and overwhelming side of her girlfriend that she didn't have the slightest clue how to handle.

"You'll see."

Quinn wasn't even listening as she threw the car into reverse and peeled out of the driveway. Rachel wondered why she was wearing that blue and grey necktie...not to mention why Quinn demanded that Rachel wear black and green.

When Santana and Brittany showed up later at the theater with an enormously obese cat hidden in a large tote bag, Rachel was so happy to see them, she didn't say a word about it.

It was pouring rain and they were driven back inside after two weeks of glorious sun. For most, the rain was a welcome change from the scorching sun, but for the kids on the summer vacation, a day without sun was just a wasted day. Rachel gazed from her window at the gray open skies as the rain drenched the ground while Quinn laid on her stomach on the bed.

"I want you to wash a car," she said suddenly after a prolonged silence.

Quinn didn't really seem to hear her...or maybe she didn't care that much because she just kept flipping through a magazine as she lay on Rachel's bed and never looked up. "What?"

"I said, I want you to wash a car."

"I heard what you said," she replied shortly, finally looking up. "And I repeat, What?"

Rachel moved away from the window and sat on the edge of the bed cautiously, her hands nervously flying about as she spoke. "Well, rather...I want to watch you...washing a car," she said shyly. "The weather's obviously warm enough for it now. Tomorrow is supposed to be a beautiful day. You could...you could, um, wear one of your bikinis."

Quinn raised an eyebrow and scoffed, going back to her magazine. "Rachel, your pervert side is showing."

"Don't poke fun!" she whined.

"You're telling me you want to ogle me while I wear a bikini and hose down a car like I'm Kim Kardashian or something equally cheesy and slutty... You deserve to be made fun of." She flipped over another page casually.

"You don't understand!" Rachel blushed. "It's not like that. S-sophmore year...when we had to do that car wash fundraiser for Glee club..."
"When you wore that pink raincoat," Quinn giggled, looking up at her.

"You remember?"

"Uh, yeah! It was completely ridiculous!" She saw the embarrassed look on Rachel's face and quickly corrected herself. "Adorably ridiculous."

"You're just saying that," she muttered dejectedly. "You thought I was a loser."

"No. I was..." Quinn rolled her eyes and tapped her fingers anxiously against the magazine. "I wondered why you didn't just wear a bathing suit like the rest of us. I-I knew you had a great body. I would never admit it then, but..."

"Really?"

"Yeah. I think I was..." she chuckled, "actually disappointed when you showed up without one."

"We can rectify that!" Rachel said quickly.

"That's what brought on the perv moment?"

"Stop calling it that!" She petulantly kicked the air. "It's a fantasy, okay? We said we would tell each other about our fantasies."

Quinn's eyes lit up mischievously and she sat up, scooting closer to her embarrassed girlfriend.

"A fantasy, hmm?" she purred in a low voice. "Go on then."

"I just – I couldn't take my eyes off you when you were playing with Brittany and Santana. You had the tiniest bikini known to man on and Santana soaked you with the hose and I..."

"Drooled?"

Rachel let out frustrated groan and slammed her palms on the mattress. "Forget I ever said anything!" She leapt off the bed and ran out of the room.

Quinn tried to get her to come back, but Rachel said she was too humiliated, and that's when Quinn started feeling guilty. She'd only been trying to have fun, not make Rachel feel bad. Just knowing that Rachel had been watching her that day had her flushed with heat. Rachel liked it...

She walked out the Berrys' door with her umbrella in hand, feeling terrible for not being more sensitive to Rachel's feelings, but as soon as she saw her car in the driveway and how big that driveway was...with more than enough room for a few cars...a plan started to form and she whipped out her phone.

The next day, Rachel was walking into the kitchen to make herself lunch when out of the corner of her eye, she saw several unknown cars sitting outside her house, glinting in the sunlight. Then she heard laughter. Curious, she pulled open the front door to see seven cars all crowded into her driveway, spilling out into the street and a hoard of teenagers running around in their bathing suits carrying buckets and sponges. Music started blasting from somewhere and a few started dancing and singing along. As she took it all in, she realized those "teenagers" were Santana, Brittany, Kurt, Blaine, Tina, Mike, Sam, and Puck. Someone started spraying the hose and several shrieks filled the air as they tried to get away from the water.

"Rachel!" Sam called, waving her down. He was wearing bright orange board shorts, his tanned
torso on display and his blonde hair shone in the sunlight. "Come on! I'm not washing your car by myself!"

"I wouldn't go out there with those clothes on," someone said from behind her and she spun around to see her breathtakingly beautiful girlfriend clad in just her tiny red bikini that barely covered anything at all. It was the same exact one she wore that day at the car wash fundraiser. "You need your suit this time. No pink raincoats allowed."

Shrieks of laughter sounded out again. Brittany was dripping wet, but she had successfully managed to wrestle the hose away from Puck and was attacking Tina and Santana. Mike came up from behind Puck and dumped a bucket of dirty water over his head, which led to them wrestling it out on the lawn. But Rachel was oblivious to it all.

"Quinn...what is this? Why are they all here?"

The blonde smirked. "We're having a car wash. Only this time, you're going to join us properly." She quirked an eyebrow and looked Rachel over knowingly. "Bathing suit. Now."

Her confused gaze suddenly cleared, overtaken by her signature mega-watt smile, and Rachel ran back into the house to get changed. She made it halfway to the stairs before skidding to a stop and turning on her heel. She ran back and jumped into Quinn's arms to kiss her breathless before scurrying off again, squealing with excitement.

Quinn watched her go with a happy sigh, still a bit dazed from that kiss. She licked her lips excitedly, loving that she could still taste Rachel there.

She'd fixed it.

The serenity of the moment was ruined by a sudden blast of icy cold water hitting her back. Yelping, she spun around to see Santana there, laughing hysterically, with the hose in her hand.

"You looked like you needed to cool off, but don't worry, Auntie Santy's here to help!"

Quinn was already trying to find a way to retaliate, but Kurt and Tina took care of it for her. While Santana was busy laughing, they snuck up behind her and emptied an entire bucket of water over her head. The Latina was so shocked she stood there, frozen, with her mouth hanging open. Quinn used the opportunity to run down and steal the hose away. The evil gleam in her eye came with the power she had gained.

"This is gonna be bad..." Brittany said and dove under one of the cars for cover just as Quinn unleashed.

When Leroy and Hiram pulled up in front of their house to see the raucous party that was going on, both their jaws dropped.

"When Quinn asked us for permission this morning...this is not what I was expecting!"

"Oh, good Moses... We're going to have the police showing up any minute now."

"What? Why?"

"Leroy!" He cried, waving wildly at the half-naked group dancing around, soaking wet, hand washing the cars. "This looks like we're hosting an underage porno shoot!"
Then Rachel in her bikini came running into view, giggling delightedly, apparently trying to escape Quinn who was chasing her with a couple of sponges. Her face was joy-filled and they heard the screech of surprise when Mike scooped her up from behind and spun her around. That left enough time for Quinn to catch her when he put her down and the two of them fell back on the lawn, covered in bubbles, laughing so hard there were tears in their eyes.

It'd been so long since they saw their daughter that happy...not since she was a little girl.

The two men exchanged a look.

"We could try the new ice cream shop?" Hiram suggested.

"Sounds good," Leroy agreed, already turning the car around.

A couple hours later, they had returned, the cars were clean, the buckets and other materials were put away, and the Gleeks were tuckered out as they laid on towels and beach chairs spread on the Berry's front lawn. Puck was making it a point to hit on every single female that walked by, no matter who they were. Sam actually whacked him upside the head when he made lewd comments to an elderly woman who was clearly over seventy years old. That didn't stop him though.

A dark haired woman in her thirties jogged by with her dog and Puck sprang up, giving a loud catcall, while gyrating obscenely.

"Just say the word, baby! Say the word and Puckerman will take care of all your needs!"

The woman didn't bother looking back, but raised her hand with one finger extended in his direction. He chuckled and laid back down on his towel.

"She didn't have to say a word, but I believe she got her point across," Rachel said mildly from her chair.

"When are you going to give it up already?" Santana snapped. "It's bad enough I'm being seen on Berry's lawn, but then with you making an ass out of yourself every time someone with a vagina goes by..."

"What happened to Lauren, anyway?" Tina asked, trying to keep the conversation from turning into an argument. "I thought you guys were doing okay."

"I ain't no one-trick pony. I gotta spread the love. Lauren was cool and all, but I can't be tied down. Not in my nature."

"Which means she dumped your sorry ass," Quinn interjected.

"Who said that? Did she say that? That's a lie!"

"I think you just gave it away, dude," Sam chuckled.

"Whatever! I was going to break up with her anyway," he said sullenly. "Doesn't matter."

Rachel gave him a knowing smile, a tinge of sadness in her eyes.

"Our cars look so clean and shiny," Brittany said happily. "Like the top of a bald guy's head or a naked baby penguin after swimming."

"Baby penguins are always naked, Britt." Santana pulled down her sunglasses curiously.
"No they're not. I'm talking about when they take off their feathers to dry, obviously."

Santana blinked twice before pushing her sunglasses back and settled on her towel without a word. No one else even thought of touching that one.

"We're lucky we're not experiencing a drought," Rachel said disapprovingly. "I can't believe we wasted all that water..."

There were various murmurs and grumbles of discontent through the group, but Quinn cut them off at the pass.

"We had a good time, Rachel. Leave it at that."

She looked at Quinn's sweet, pleading smile and gave in. "Oh, fine."

Mike pretended to cough. "Whipped."

Santana rolled her eyes. "Wrong way 'round, boy-Chang."

"Don't start," Quinn glowered.

Rachel was still smiling and patted her girlfriend's arm reassuringly.

As if they needed one, another car managed to find a space to pull in front of the Berry house.

"PIZZA! PIZZA! PIZZA!" Puck, Sam, and Mike all started to chant and jumped to their feet.

The poor kid was actually a McKinley sophomore. He was scared witless to see he had to deliver pizza to the most formidable crowd at McKinley High. None of them really seemed to notice how frightened he was or even recognized him from school. Puck ran up and took the tall stack of pies out of his hands and went running into the house with the rest of the kids following. The delivery boy was left standing awkwardly alone outside.

"Um..is someone gonna pay for that?"

Fortunately, Hiram strode out a few minutes later with his apologies for their overzealousness and gave the kid a bigger tip than usual. He deserved it for braving that crowd even if it was only for a few seconds.

Quinn threw paper plates at the group that had now taken it upon themselves to claim the Berrys' living room, spreading out everywhere with a slice of pizza in their hands.

"Oh my God, pretend like you have some semblance of manners instead of acting like a bunch of wild monkeys."

"Hey-Hey! We're The Monkees!" a few chimed back in reply and laughed.

Quinn was hardly amused.

Rachel came in with a stack of napkins. "If there is a single red sauce stain on this carpet or the couches, I will hunt you down."

They ignored her, but grabbed napkins anyway.

"How's it going, kids?" Leroy came in to check on them. "Everyone have a drink?"
A bunch lifted up their cups to say yes.

"Thanks for having us over, Mr. Berry," Sam said.

"Lovely as always to be here!" Kurt chimed in.

"We're glad to have you," Hiram said from behind Leroy, but then glared at them all in warning.
"No stains in my house or you'll be paying for the steam clean!"

Santana snorted. "I guess we know which one the midget takes after."

"Did you just call my daughter a 'midget', young lady?"

She stopped suddenly, her mouth opening and closing a few times as she tried to stammer her way into an excuse, which was hard to do under Hiram's death glare.

Quinn broke the tension by bursting out laughing. Hiram, Leroy, and Rachel followed, much to Santana's surprise. Apparently, Hiram had only been messing with her. When the rest of them figured it out, they were all in an uproar.

Santana had never looked so sheepish.

When they were finally able to kick the Gleeks out around dinnertime, Rachel and Quinn helped the Berry men clean up the disaster area their friends left behind, before going up to Rachel's room.

Quinn sighed and fell back onto the bed. "That was a long day."

Rachel climbed on top of her. "But it was an amazing day. I've...I've never had that before, Quinn. A bunch of my friends, just spending the day at my house, making a mess of my living room, joking with my fathers..."

"The look on Santana's face!" She burst out giggling again at the memory.

The brunette sighed, scrutinizing her for a moment. "Do you do things like this because you feel guilty? For the way you used to treat me?"

Quinn blinked up at her for a moment before pushing up on her elbows.

Were they really still here? Why did it seem sometimes as though they'd come so far, only to have moments like these pop up again and it's as though nothing changed at all. Would it always be this way? Or, would time really heal all wounds?

"Rachel..." she shook her head, "I do it because I want you to be happy. I like seeing you happy. Besides, it was just a day with our friends. I didn't really do that much. Your Dads are the one that paid for ten pizzas!"

"You did more than that and you know it."

Quinn sighed and slipped her hand underneath Rachel's hoodie, smiling when her fingers came into contact with the warm, soft skin underneath. "Did you like seeing me run around in a bikini all day again?" she asked, raising her eyebrow knowingly.

They needed to get away from that subject as quickly as possible. Rachel knew what Quinn was doing, plain as day, but went along with it. Moments of doubt were going to be just that...moments, fleeting moments, where she second guessed herself, her relationship, motivations, dreams, and
desires. As quickly as they came though, they would fade away. Life would always have moments like that, but as long as they remained deep in the shadows, always chased away by the light, it was all right to experience them. Doubts come and go, but faith? Loyalty? Love? Those could never waiver. And ever since they had come out to her fathers...Rachel had known nothing else.

Quinn's hands on heated skin brought her back to the present and she gazed down at her girlfriend with a smile. Rachel could see how Quinn was trying to hide her smugness. They both knew full well what the answer was. Instead, she decided to turn it around and leaned over Quinn teasingly.

"The better question is, did you like seeing me run around in a bikini all day?"

Quinn's touch grew bolder as she slid her hand across Rachel's stomach and pulled down the zipper of her sweatshirt so her bathing suit appeared again.

"I thought I was going to go insane having to keep my hands off of you," she said huskily. "It was torture. You bent over at one point and Tina thought I was suffering from heatstroke."

Rachel giggled, a prominent blush creeping up to her cheeks. "There were a few times I had to remind myself that I was not allowed to push you up against a car and have my way with you right then and there..."

"Who said you weren't allowed?"

"The entire crowd of teenagers surrounding us?"

Quinn scoffed. "You're such a prude."

Rachel gasped indignantly and stared at her for a moment before they both fell into a giggling mess. "I can't believe you just said that!"
Lindsay's last dance class before she left for college was a week ago. Rachel was happy for her, but she knew she was going to miss her dance friend terribly. They'd been in this routine of seeing each other every week for over six years. It wasn't going to be the same without her. Quinn tagged along to the last class and the three of them went out for dinner afterward. It was all laughter and a lot of tears too. Whenever Rachel wasn't crying, laughing, or hugging Lindsay, she was holding Quinn's hand as tightly as she could under the table.

True to form, Lindsay flirted with them both shamelessly the whole night. Quinn was actually impressed by the number of times she had managed to subtly insinuate the potential for a ménage a trois in the conversation without it being uncomfortable or crude, instead it came across almost flattering. The girl had a sincere talent!

After they left the restaurant, in the parking lot, Rachel was a mess as she hugged Lindsay goodbye. They promised to keep in touch, but it was a promise they all knew would be broken. Even though the other girl had kept it together pretty well the whole night, Lindsay got teary-eyed before having to let go of Rachel.

"You're going to be brilliant, Broadway. If I'm ever in New York, I'm expecting VIP tickets to your show, backstage, the whole deal!"

"You got it."

She turned to Quinn with a sigh. "Well, I'm glad I got to meet you...despite what a raging bitch you are."

"WERE!" Rachel corrected her firmly. "Past tense, Lindsay!"

"Nope." She shrugged unapologetically. "Still a total bitch and all right by me."

Quinn had to smile. "I'll take it as a compliment."

"You should."

"I'm glad I met you too."

"You're so much better for her than those other guys. Granted, I never met the giant, but from what I heard, no need. I did meet the grade A asshole, St. James, so no comparison there either."

Quinn shook her head. "It's not her past I need to live up to, it's what she deserves for the future that I have to make happen."

Lindsay didn't have the slightest bit of a comeback prepared for something like that. Instead, she just nodded. In a way, it seemed like she was relieved. Maybe it was because she believed that her friend would be taken care of after she was gone.

Rachel slipped her hand in Quinn's, interlacing their fingers, but she didn't say a word.

"Okay!" Lindsay sighed, breaking the tension, and rubbed her hands together. "Last chance, Fabray, you sure I can't get a decent parting gift?"

"I'm not flashing you," she replied wearily.
"You wound me! I would never ask for something so shallow as that. I was thinking something much longer and more...pleasurable...than just a silly flashing..."

"Listen here now!" Rachel said, shoving her finger in Lindsay's face. "The only one Quinn will be flashing is me! And anything else of a sexual nature for that matter!"

The blonde covered her face with a groan and Lindsay was grinning from ear to ear. Rachel just crossed her arms defiantly and lifted her chin defiantly. She wasn't embarrassed!

"I am going to miss you, Rachel Berry."

They hugged one last time and as Lindsay pulled away she had the same mischievous look on her face that Rachel knew so very well by now.

"In addition to those tickets," she eyed Quinn for a moment before turning back, "I better be getting an invite to the wedding!"

She winked, and before anyone else could say another word, the older girl spun around, walking off towards her car.

Rachel blushed the second Lindsay said "wedding". How was she supposed to respond to something like that? Marrying Quinn Fabray... Was that even possible? She couldn't bring herself to look at the blonde next to her for fear of what she might find. If Quinn seemed okay with the idea even being broached, then Rachel didn't think her emotions could quite handle something so overwhelming and she was certain fainting could be a possibility. Then there was the chance that Quinn would look embarrassed and uncomfortable with the prospect. How could she even begin to handle that? It would destroy her. So she just did the safe thing and kept her eyes on the girl walking away.

When Lindsay's car left the parking lot, Rachel buried her face in Quinn's shoulder, waiting for the tears to subside. Quinn led her back to the car without a word. She could see how much it was hurting Rachel to lose her friend, especially one who had meant something different to her than everyone else in Glee club. This girl had been supportive of her from the beginning. Saying goodbye to Lindsay was almost like saying goodbye to a part of her life that no longer existed.

It was quiet for most of the ride. Quinn wanted to give Rachel her space and time to collect herself. But about ten minutes before they would be arriving at the Berry house, she tapped her fingers on the steering wheel, looking straight ahead, and said nonchalantly, "So when are we picking out the wedding invitations?"

Rachel whipped around in shock to see Quinn's sweet smile.

The following class without Lindsay was absolutely miserable. Rachel had underestimated how much it meant to have a friend there as support. After agonizing over the loss for a few days, the proverbial light-bulb over her head switched on. Brittany! She remembered how amazing the girl looked when she was doing that dance-off against Mike at Puck's party last weekend. So, Rachel called Brittany up and invited her to the class, just to see if she liked it enough to want to start attending weekly as well. Brittany was all for it. She hardly ever said no...to anything...ever.

"So how was dance?" Quinn asked as she plopped down on Rachel's bed. "Any better than last time?"

"It was amazing, actually!" Rachel replied as she bent over and shook the water out of her hair. She was in her pajamas after just having gotten out of the shower. "I brought Brittany along with me tonight."
"You did?" Quinn looked up at her in surprise. "Why didn't you tell me? Why didn't anyone tell me?"

"Anyone" meant Santana. Quinn was sure that if the Latina knew Rachel dragged Brittany along with her alone somewhere; she'd be getting an earful of angry ranting on the phone for at least an hour.

"It was a last minute thing." She waved her off. "You know how lonely I was in the last class, so I thought of Brittany dancing at Puck's and just called her yesterday, to see if she would like to go with me. Quinn...did you know that she has never taken a single official dance class in her entire life?"

Quinn nodded, distracted as she licked her fingers, finishing the snack Hiram had made for her. "Yeah. She's a natural."

"No, you don't understand. The way she moves, what she knows, she picks up on it so quickly! All we had to do was run it through twice before Brittany was easily doing the routine along with the rest of us who have been working on it for weeks and still haven't gotten it down!"

She sat up on the bed and crossed her legs with a shrug. "Why do you think she's so highly valued on the Cheerios? Brittany learns the routines ten times faster than Santana and I do. She corrects us all when we make mistakes. It's like breathing to her. She'll do a full lay out twist and come down in a split with a smile like it's the easiest thing in the world. Brittany is our secret weapon. She even helps Sue choreograph the routines. That's why Sue wanted her in the cannon in the first place. If anyone had even the slightest chance of pulling that death sentence off, it would be Brittany."

"But..." Rachel hesitated, "not to be mean...I didn't think she was that successful on the Cheerios because-"

Quinn was already laughing, nodding her head. She knew what Rachel was going to say.

"Because of what a mess she is during the football games?"

The brunette winced apologetically.

"That's because she can't remember the words when we have to do the cheers. What we do at the football games is irrelevant. Our competitions have nothing to do with lame cheers. There, it's basically a gymnastics floor routine incorporated with dance, a lot more flashy hand movements, and people being tossed in the air. Brittany hasn't made a single mistake during a competition in three years. I'm betting she's going to make that four years by May."

A few days ago, Santana informed Quinn that she and Brittany had rejoined the Cheerios and that she was already leading the summer training as Captain. At least twenty girls would be cut before the school year and it would be Santana's decision who got to stay and who was out. Quinn wasn't the least bit surprised that the two of them went back, but for her, it was different. The Cheerios held a lot more meaning for her than it did for Brittany and Santana.

"Do you realize how rare that is?" Rachel said excitedly, eyes wide. "For someone to have such a natural ability like that?"

Quinn rolled her eyes and gave her a purposeful look. Of course, she was aware of that.

Exasperated, the brunette shook her head. "You must remember, I have talent, Quinn, but I work for it. I work really hard. As much as I'd like to say it, it's not true, I didn't just wake up one day singing like this. I've trained for as long as I can remember to be able to do what I can do now. Brittany is already at the level of a professional dancer and when I asked her where she learned how to do it,
"What are you saying? You think Brittany is a dance prodigy?"

"Maybe not a prodigy, but definitely someone with a true ability. Quinn, we need to get her into real classes. This could be Brittany's career! We both know she's not going to college, but if she learns more about dance, the techniques, different styles...it could change her whole future. She's not only an amazing dancer, but she's remarkably creative when it comes to choreography. She has the whole package!"

"I never thought about it that way before..." She mused, cocking her head. "I just always thought she was having fun."

"She is having fun and she's brilliant at it."

"I'll talk to Santana," Quinn nodded, "then the three of us can go to Brittany." She bit her lower lip before peering up at Rachel. "You really think she can make a career out of dancing?"

"After what I witnessed last night? There's not a doubt in my mind."

"Then let's make sure it happens."

Quinn was sunbathing by the pool with her the most recent book on her never-ending summer reading list when someone stepped directly into her light, casting a shadow down on her. Looking up, she saw her, apparently, very displeased mother. Judy had her mouth drawn into a tight line, making it look three times smaller than it was.

"I just received a phone call from one of my friends at the club."

"Was it Martha Haines? Because someone needs to tell that woman about her overgrown femmstache. Her hell-spawn certainly won't."

"I'm not in the mood for your jokes, Quinnie," Judy snapped. "Ellen said that she was driving through a neighborhood a few weeks ago to visit an old friend and she saw someone who looks very much like you, sitting on a lawn with a group of delinquents in your bathing suits. She said it was all very unseemly considering whose lawn it was."

Fear seized her chest and her heart began to thump wildly, but Quinn made sure not single iota of it showed. She didn't even so much as look up from her book, simply turning the page, faking nonchalance.

"And whose lawn is that?" she answered calmly.

"You admit it was you that she saw?"

There was nothing she could do, nothing she could say that would get her out of this. It was going to happen sooner or later. Unfortunately, it happened far sooner than Quinn wanted, though she had still held on to the hope of it being never.

"Yep. It was me."

How her voice didn't crack, she'd never know. At that moment, Quinn thanked Sue Sylvester for everything she'd absorbed under her tutelage. Judy moved Quinn's legs over so that she could sit on the lounge chair as well. Internally, she desperately searched for the strength to make it through this.
"Just what do you think you're doing here?"

"Reading." She held up her book for emphasis.

"I told you," Judy replied darkly, "I am not in the mood for your jokes."

"And I'm not in the mood for your hysterics."

"Sweetie, I thought we moved past this rebellious stage of yours last year." She patted Quinn's knee in a strained sort of way. "Why are you acting out now? Is it because I'm working too much? Should I be home more?"

"Not acting out, Mom," she replied coolly.

"Then for heaven's sake! What were you doing there?"

"I was spending the day with my friends, just like I told you."

"And that girl...is your friend now?"

"That girl, is Rachel Berry, not the anti-Christ, and, yes, I have decided to be friends with her. The world has not come to an end because of it."

"But those people are-!"

"Have been kind and gracious to me despite what a bitch I was to their daughter."

"You know I don't approve of that kind of language," she said tersely.

"Mom?" Quinn finally dragged her eyes up from the pages of her book. "I'm friends with her. It's not a big deal. It's not an act of rebellion. It is what it is. I'm sorry you don't agree, but it's really not my problem. She's my friend, not yours. I'm willing to accept whatever punishment it is you want to give me for it, but it still won't change anything. In the meantime, I'm going to go back to reading now and I'd like to be alone. I only have another hour of good light and you're blocking it."

Judy exhaled shortly, her mouth growing smaller by the second like she had just sucked on a lemon. "I'm not going to punish you, Quinny," she said firmly. "I just can't understand what it is you're thinking. Have you forgotten everything about the way you were raised? The values we taught you? The very core of our faith?"

"I haven't forgotten anything, Mom," she replied quietly. "I never could."

"Then why? Just tell me why."

Quinn looked up at her and shrugged. "I'll leave it for God to know."

She frowned deeply. "We're going to church tomorrow, 8 AM service. I expect you to be dressed and ready to go on time."

"But tomorrow's a Thursday...you have work."

"I'll go in late. This is more important."

Quinn scoffed and rolled her eyes, donning a smile that anyone could have spotted as fake a mile away. "Sure. Fine. 8 AM, bright and early."
Judy put her hand on Quinn's leg again and she could feel the ice spreading through at the very touch.

"I only want the best for you, sweetheart. I feel like you're losing your way again. I'll do anything to help you keep that from happening. This time, I'm going to be here for you, I promise."

Quinn felt like she was free falling into the abyss, with nothing to touch, nothing to hold on to, nothing but fear and loneliness. In the last two years, being cast out and abandoned were things she had come to accept as the grim reality, even if they were pretending otherwise right now.

How could her mother love her in the ways she claimed and yet still be able to make Quinn feel like this? How could a parent 'love' the way her mother seemed to love? On her terms, based on her standards, and nothing less? Was her mother truly such a bad person or did she just truly not know how to be anything else?

Judy finally got up and went back inside, leaving Quinn alone to feel like she'd just been through a day's worth of torture in the Inquisition.

"So that was it? She just didn't bring it up again?"

It was the following afternoon and Quinn had managed to escape her mother's clutches after she went to work and she was free to go to the Berrys'. Rachel sat cross-legged on the couch while the blonde was on the floor next to the coffee table with the chess board on it, strategizing her next move. She was playing Leroy in their spare time, and this one was about three weeks in the making.

"She hasn't mentioned you again, if that's what you mean. However, I'm being forced to go to church seven days a week now. I think that pretty much says it all."

"So, she thinks maybe all the religious reinforcement will help you change your mind about me?"

"Yeah. She's hoping they'll brainwash me. Pastor Jacobson approached me yesterday about 'private counseling sessions for spiritual struggles'. All my Mom's doing."

"You have to go to counseling just because you told her you're friends with me? Is it just because my dads are gay or is it also because I'm Jewish? I suppose the two together just makes it worse..."

"Don't worry about what she thinks, Rachel. It doesn't matter."

Rachel wanted to argue with her. Of course, it mattered! It was her mother they were talking about! But Quinn and her family was a topic she knew very well by now that needed to be treaded upon lightly.

"I just want to understand why. I want to understand what your beliefs are, your religion."

"My mother and I obviously do not share the same beliefs."

"But you still hold to your faith," Rachel pointed out. "I want to understand how she can come from such a dark, hateful place and yet there are others who believe in the same things you do..."

"It's different for everyone," Quinn sighed. "Scripture is read and interpreted with different priorities. Sam and Mercedes are perfect examples of that. They have strong beliefs, but they understand that the Bible can't be taken literally. I used to think like that...taking it literally. Well, as best I could anyway, but in the end I just kind of woke up. I saw what I was doing, what was really happening."
She shrugged, still scrutinizing the chess board.

"Look, there's a lot in there that doesn't make sense anymore...if it ever did. The Bible refers to so many things as an 'abomination', like eating lobster, or planting different crops in the same field, even giving someone a proud look. But you know what's not an abomination? Slavery." She shook her head. "We don't hold on to those things, but somehow it's still not okay to love who you love? I don't accept that. When it comes down to it, Jesus never said anything about gay people and that's a fact."

Of course, that was a fact; she had researched it extensively. Rachel's fastidiousness had nothing against Quinn's knowledge on the subject. She had to know. She had to find a way to make this right inside of herself, to reconcile herself with the fact that she wasn't wrong, as a person, as a human being, as God's creation, she didn't come out wrong.

"Good people, no matter what their faith, follow their hearts and heads, they use their judgment about what seems right, and just like Sam and Mercedes, they are wonderful people. But for most in this town, Rachel, you're a non-believer who was raised by sodomites."

The brunette winced at the harshness of her words. It surprised her how casually Quinn was able to say something like that. She did it so dispassionately, as though it were nothing at all, as though they were talking about the weather.

*It's going to be raining buckets of sodomites today, so everyone, please remember to wear your crucifixes and be sure to watch the executions on Main Street!* 

She shook her head and blinked furiously.

*Get a grip, Rachel.*

"It's a royally screwed up world and I can't change it."

She grabbed a pillow and hugged it against her stomach for lack of anything better to do with her hands. "I'm not asking you to."

Quinn glanced up at her for a moment before turning her head away again. "I wish I could."

"You will," Rachel insisted. "You're going to change the world in your own way. I know it."

"Oh, yeah? And just how am I going to do that?"

"You tell me."

Quinn shook her head and redirected her attention to the board, having finally made a decision. She moved a piece and re-joined Rachel on the couch.

"I'd like to see your Dad try to get himself out of this one!"

Rachel just kissed her girlfriend's cheek.

One day Quinn would understand all the ways in which she had already changed the world.

She was pissed. No, she was freaking pissed. Rachel was supposed to meet her over twenty minutes ago. The movie had already started! She'd called her five times already, only getting voicemail, which they really needed to talk about because it took a ridiculously long time to listen to her sing the opening lines of "Put On a Happy Face" from *Bye Bye Birdie.*
Rachel insisted it was a way to cheer up whoever intended to speak to her, but were unsuccessful, and that was her way of making up for it. Quinn thought it was cute, if not a bit egotistical, but now after listening to it for the hundredth time, she felt like smashing the phone.

Another five minutes went by and still no Rachel. Livid couldn't begin to describe how upset she was. She was Quinn Fabray! No one stood up Quinn Fabray! Not even Rachel Berry!

Fuming, she stormed out of the theater, roughly shoving through a group of preteen boys who looked genuinely frightened by the irate blonde. She drove entirely too fast, the HBIC on a mission, and narrowly escaped clipping an elderly couple crossing the street. So what? They were jaywalking! Morons would have deserved it!

There was only one car in the Berry driveway. It was the one Rachel usually shared with Leroy. Quinn stormed up to the front door and banged on it hard, not caring if the men were home. That girl was not getting away with this! But no one answered and Quinn's hand hurt, so she tried the handle and found it was open. She stalked into the house yelling for her girlfriend, but there was no answer.

Maybe she wasn't home…

Even more infuriated now that she couldn't find her, Quinn flew up the stairs just to make sure she wasn't cowering in her room like she should be for standing her up!

When she flung open that stupid pink door, all the anger just evaporated in a matter of seconds. Out the window. Never to return. Quinn sighed and leaned against the doorjamb, shaking her head.

She had it bad, didn't she?

The most adorably sexy sight was laid out before her. Rachel was sprawled on top of her bed, sound asleep in a white tank top and the gold star underwear that Quinn bought for her on their six-month anniversary. It looked like she had been in the middle of getting dressed before succumbing to sleep, not even bothering covering herself with a blanket.

Quinn simply melted. Who cared about a stupid movie when there was something like this waiting for her right here?

Unable to keep the silly grin off her face, she crawled onto the bed, carefully positioning herself alongside the sleeping brunette. She could never get over how beautiful Rachel looked like this. She was always bubbling over with energy during the waking hours of consciousness, and she loved that – of course she did – but there was something about this too, a peacefulness. When she was quiet (impossible!) and simply free, only to explore her dreams. Gently, she brushed some of the silky, dark hair off her shoulder and pressed her lips to the warm skin. Rachel stirred slightly and Quinn continued kissing her, moving slowly upwards, sucking a little harder with each one. When her tongue came into play, Rachel sighed.

"Th'feels good," she mumbled sleepily.

Quinn took that as her chance to slip on top, wrapping her arms securely around her, her hand going underneath the shirt, and straddling a bare thigh, before finding her way to Rachel's mouth. The other girl moaned, returning the embrace and hitched her leg up higher on Quinn's waist out of pure instinct. They kissed deeply, languidly, as the blonde took her time exploring the inner recesses of Rachel's sweet mouth.

"Quinn…" she moaned, pulling her closer, then froze. "QUINN?"

Rachel shot up with a start, inadvertently forcing the other girl off. Quinn didn't let the movement
deter her though; she had expected this, and kept kissing her, pulling off the tank top without a word of protest.

"Wh-what time is it?" she gasped between kisses, trying to crane her head around to see the clock. "The movie! Oh no! Did I…?"

"Yes," Quinn answered simply and pushed her so she was down on the bed again.

"I'm so sorry!" she exclaimed. "I-I didn't mean to- I was just so tired; I only wanted to lie down for a minute…"

Quinn wasn't really paying attention as she took off her own shirt and ran her mouth over the exposed flesh at Rachel's chest.

"You'll just have to suffer the punishment," she murmured, sliding her hands down the smooth skin of Rachel's thighs, kneading lightly before coming back up to undo her bra clasp.

"P-punishment?"

She tossed the bra aside and circled her tongue round a dusky, hardened nipple, making Rachel clutch her tighter to her body.

"You have to make love to me."

She was on the other breast then, using her hand to toy with the abandoned one.

"Quinn!" she whined breathlessly. "Don't you think that's unduly harsh? It was an accident after all."

"You weren't the one standing alone in a movie theater."

"But to demand such a thing of me…"

"It's the only way you'll learn," she muttered and slipped off the gold star panties, taking a moment to tease them over Rachel's head with a gleam of victory before dropping them off the bed.

"Very well," she groaned. "If that must be my consequence…I suppose I'll have to endure it with a smile."

Quinn laughed, teasing her lips over Rachel's trim belly before she nipped hard enough to make the girl yelp. Nuzzling that same spot, Quinn smiled still. She loved the way Rachel felt against her, how warm she always was, how good she smelled, how soft her skin was, how she tasted... The sensations were enough to make her wish she could burrow inside of Rachel forever, forever feel this way, forever be touching her.

She wrapped her arm around Rachel's waist and pulled her into the center of the bed so they were no longer at risk of falling off. Kneading Rachel's inner thighs, Quinn was delighted to find how turned on her girlfriend was already.

"Tell me what you want," she murmured against Rachel's ear and licked her lightly.

Rachel's breaths came in short and hot.

"I...uh...uh..."

Making her way across Rachel's jaw, Quinn made a similar journey with her fingers moving higher on Rachel's leg. When she stopped just short of touching her fully, Rachel whined, realizing that she
really was going to have to speak if she wanted Quinn to keep going.

"I want you to touch me," she huffed and shifted her hips to try to get closer, but Quinn's fingers always danced back.

"I'm already touching you."

"Quinn!"

Any further protests were muffled by the blonde's lips on hers. Quinn kissed her thoroughly, almost to the point where Rachel literally ran out of breath, until she broke away at the last second, leaving them both gasping.

"Tell me what you want, Rachel," she whispered with her eyes ablaze and her mouth gloriously swollen.

Every single word uttered in that low, husky voice Quinn had, shot straight to Rachel's core, making her throb with an almost unbearable anticipation. Quinn licked her lips and settled herself in between Rachel's thighs, making the other girl gasp lightly.

"Your tongue," she gulped and raised her eyes to the ceiling in momentary embarrassment. "I-I want to feel your tongue on me."

Quinn gave a strained sort of moan, breathing hard against Rachel's throat where she was buried.

"Here?" she asked, slipping her hand up higher and into the heated wetness that waited there.

"Yes!" Rachel groaned and wrapped herself more tightly around Quinn, refusing to allow her to relinquish the contact she had finally given her aching body. "Yes, please."

"Please?" Quinn chuckled softly. "How polite you are when you know you were in the wrong."

Rachel was nearly insensate, gyrating her hips against Quinn's hand, desperate for more, and frustrated with how little her girlfriend was willing to work with her.

"Sorry, baby, but that's part of your punishment. You can't have what you want."

That woke Rachel up enough to open her eyes and stare at the blonde in bewilderment. "W-what?"

Quinn thrust into the warmth, dropping down to lave over the fragile flesh of Rachel's breasts again while she worked up a steady rhythm inside of her.

"...teach you to stand me up...!"

Rachel hardly heard her.

It didn't take long until she was swept over the edge and as her breathing slowed, she drifted off while nestled on the blonde's shoulder, warm, satiated, and absolutely exhausted.

"Hm, that was mean," she said sleepily.

"Are you actually going to try and tell me that you didn't enjoy it?"

Rachel cracked one eye open to peer at Quinn.

"It's just not fair." She shrugged lightly. "It's totally against the rules to make me tell you what to do
"Did I happen to mention the part where you stood me up? Left me standing alone for over a half an hour with a bunch of prepubescent boys leering at me?"

"Oh, give it a rest, Quinn. You whine too much."

"Me?" Her mouth dropped open. "You're the one complaining that I didn't satisfy you exactly the way you wanted."

Rachel giggled. "Well, that's supposed to be your job. Doing it exactly the way I want."

She burrowed in closer and kissed Quinn's throat, perfectly content and ready to drift off into a blissful slumberland with her wonderful, adoring girlfriend.

"Fine," Quinn said softly.

Rachel was already half asleep, but managed a groggy, "Hm?"

"I said 'fine'!"

All of a sudden, Rachel lost her human pillow and was flipped onto her back with Quinn's hands around her legs, holding them open. Her eyes widened when she realized what Quinn was going to do.

"No, no, I was kidding!" She tried to push Quinn away in vain and groaned. "Baby, I can't! I'm so tired, ohhhhh…"

She gave up protesting.

"Now, was that to your satisfaction, Ms. Diva?"

Rachel gropped around clumsily before getting a good hold and pulled Quinn in for a lazy, sweet kiss. She tasted herself on those lips. Quinn soon dropped down beside her again, and Rachel curled into her side, her eyelids drooping heavily with exhaustion.

"Quinn, please tell me you know I was only teasing about the first not being good enough? It was-"

"Shhh." She kissed her again. "I know. Just consider that one for me." She trailed her fingers up and down Rachel's arm lightly. "I wish you would have told me you were so tired. We didn't have to go out tonight."

"But we so rarely get to go out…” Rachel yawned and moved closer. "I didn't want anything to get in the way of that. I really wanted to go tonight."

"We'll go tomorrow."

"Promise?"

"Yes," she said, then added, "But I'm picking you up. You can't be trusted now."

"One time and I'm branded for life?" Rachel rolled her eyes and then softly added, "I'm sorry you got stuck there alone."

"It's okay. I mowed down an elderly couple on the way here so that worked out most of my anger."
"QUINN!" she gasped and sat up, gaping at her in astonishment. "You did no such thing!"

"What? They were old. It was probably their time anyway. I did them a favor."

"Stop it! Stop it right now!"

She laughed. "Okay, okay. I didn't hit them. They were pretty spry for old people. You should have seen them diving for the bushes."

"Your sense of humor astounds me sometimes…"

"I could say the same for your mouth."

She gave her a suspicious look. "I'm not sure whether to take that as a compliment or an insult."

Quinn rolled them over, settling herself on Rachel's chest, in the crook of her neck.

"Take it however you want."

"Vehicular homicide is nothing to joke about, Quinn." She instinctively slid her hand into her hair, absently stroking the shortened blonde locks. "I didn't find that at all amusing."

"Did I mention you stood me up tonight?"

Rachel pinched her arm and she yelped laughingly. They snuggled down more cozily and soon drifted off to sleep. Quinn definitely got a taste of her own medicine when she woke the next morning to a wide-awake Rachel Berry and she wouldn't have had it any other way.
"I need to talk to you."

Rachel perked up at once. "Is it about something naughty? Because I was just thinking..."

"No!" Quinn rolled her eyes. "Why are you always so gutter brained?"

The brunette lowered her eyes in embarrassment. "Oh, I-I'm sorry. I shouldn't have-"

Groaning in exasperation, Quinn picked her up and started walking towards the stairs with Rachel's legs around her waist. Rachel stared down at her in disbelief.

"Of all the..." She shifted her weight as they went up the staircase. "All I said was that I wanted to talk to you. Why do you always have to be such a wounded puppy? You should know better than this."

"I'm not a dog," she protested lightly, but was more focused on the ease with which they were moving up the stairs. "You are surprisingly strong, Quinn Fabray."

She smirked up at her. "I've had experience carrying girls around all day."

"I'm not sure if that makes it better or worse..."

They made it into Rachel's bedroom without injury and Quinn dropped them both onto the bed. Rachel made sure her hold around Quinn's waist tightened so that the other girl was forced to stay there with her. She didn't need to do that though because Quinn had no plans to go anywhere, instead she rested her weight comfortably on top of her, settling in with a smile.

Rachel cupped her cheeks and brought her down for a kiss, but when she went to deepen it, Quinn pulled back.

"What now?" she almost whined.

"We're still having that talk first, you nympho!"

"I don't appreciate being called names just for wanting to-"

"Rachel."

"All right, all right." She nodded seriously and pushed herself up onto her elbows and looked at Quinn intently so that she knew Rachel was ready. "I'm listening. Go."

"Santana and Brittany have been on my back about rejoining the Cheerios. They've been bugging me ever since the summer cuts to go back. Santana and I would be co-Captains. All I have to do is say yes."

"I know."

"And I was just thinking-" Quinn cut herself off and looked at her in surprise. "Wait. You know?"
"Of course." Rachel shrugged. "Brittany told me how much they miss having you there. Apparently, the Cheerios is just not the same without the fearsome, illustrious Quinn Fabray at the helm. Although, I was surprised to hear that Santana would be willing to share her position with you, when for two years she was practically salivating at the mouth to get her chance at Captain alone. You two were awful to each other about that!"

"If you knew they were trying to get me back, why didn't you ever say anything?"

"I figured you would talk to me about it when you were ready..."

Quinn took that in, nodding slowly.

"So have you made your decision yet?"

"No. Well, not really. I mean, it was different before. My reasons for being there would be completely different now. To be honest, I do miss it sometimes. I miss the competions, being in charge, never having to worry about what to wear to school... Look, you run the Glee club, Rachel, and that's because you're the best, but with the Cheerios, I was the star."

Rachel opened her mouth to speak, but closed it again, hesitating. She needed for this to come out right so she thought her words through carefully before trying again. "Would it have anything to do with you wanting to be more popular again?" she asked carefully. "Because I wouldn't begrudge you for wanting that."

"No, no, not at all." Quinn laughed softly. "Santana's biggest argument was that the only way to be 'top ho's' as seniors is to wear the uniform again, but my priorities have obviously evolved beyond that. Yes, being on the Cheerios and having to deal with Coach Sylvester was crazy and awful sometimes, but I actually do miss spending time with Santana and Brittany there. The three of us started together and it would be nice to end together."

"It sounds like you've already made your decision."

"I haven't." Quinn shook her head. "Rachel, I won't do this if you don't want me to."

"What?" Her voice had gone up a few octaves.

"It would be fun to go back, I admit that, but I don't need it. It's not like before." She sighed. "I won't do it if it's going to upset you. It's not worth it to me. Not even close."

"It's just a uniform..." she mumbled unconvincingly.

"Is it?" Quinn raised an eyebrow. "Or would it bring back memories better left in the past?"

"I..." Rachel swallowed thickly before shrugging. "I don't know."

Quinn nodded like she'd just been proven right. "And that's why I wanted to talk about it. I'm leaving the decision up to you."

"Wait, no! You obviously want to go back, Quinn!" she insisted. "You can't just put it on me to decide-!"

"I can and I am. Listen to me," she gingerly traced the line of Rachel jaw before meeting her eyes again with a small smile, "I don't need this. If you would rather me not go back, that's more than okay. I don't need the Cheerios, but I do need you. If it meant more to me, we would be having a different kind of conversation, but it doesn't. It's something I'm thinking about and you are the
deciding factor. So...please...believe me when I tell you that whatever you choose, I'll be perfectly fine with it. It's our senior year, Rachel. I refuse to let anything get in the way of us. We've had more than enough of that. So, just think about it."

Rachel laid her head back on the bed, her head turned to the side so that she saw her desk, her laptop closed on top of it.

_Myspace._

'Please get sterilized.'

'_If I were your parents, I would sell you back._'

She shook her head to rid herself of the unwelcome memories.

Was it really just a uniform?

All she could see was red and white permanently entangled with those terrible memories of cruelty and humiliation.

Would it be different now that she truly knew who was in that tight fitting tank top and skirt? Or would she be reminded of the past every day that Quinn strode through the halls?

"I have an idea."

"All ears."

"What if..." Rachel toyed with the hem of Quinn's shirt, letting her knuckles graze the bare flesh underneath, "you could ask for your uniform back on a trial basis? Without committing fully. That way I'd get a better feeling for what...you know."

Quinn tilted her head with a wince. "I could _try_, but Coach keeps them locked in her vault, and I'm not sure I'd be able to convince her to let me back unless it was an iron clad agreement. Literally signed with my blood and everything."

"So just try then."

She pursed her lips, wrinkling her nose. "Is this just some kind of kinky fantasy fulfillment thing you want to do before asking me not to go back?"

Rachel's mouth dropped open and she shoved her lightly. "Stop it! You know I wasn't thinking about that."

Her face was bright red because she _had_ been thinking about exactly that. But it wasn't _only_ that!

Quinn just giggled knowingly.

"It's all right," she cooed, brushing her lips over Rachel's. "I know how much you love your fantasies. I'm happy to do whatever I can to bring them to life. Even if it means you perving over me in a cheerleading uniform. Though, _really_? You couldn't be more creative than that?"

"This is not fair!" she huffed. "I thought we were having a serious conversation here!"

"We are! It's not my fault you're a nympho."

"Again with the name calling."
"Shhh, my little nympho," Quinn nuzzled her nose affectionately, "be quiet and kiss me."

Rachel refused.

"I don't know why you felt the need to add a slight about my size to an already derogatory moniker!"

Quinn groaned and stretched herself out on top of Rachel. She grasped the brunette's wrists and pinned them on the bed above her head.

"The only thing you need to pay attention to about that," she murmured huskily, "is the part where I said 'my'."

She leaned in and pressed her lips to Rachel's, finding an eager and willing response. They broke away only so that Quinn could release Rachel's hands to remove the brunette's top.

"So..." she said breathlessly and raised her arms to make it easier for Quinn to pull off her shirt, then she was staring up at her with an eager, shining, innocent gaze, "I'm your little nympho and...you're my Lion Quinn?"

Quinn shut her eyes in disbelief and dropped her head against the brunette's bare stomach, shaking with silent laughter.

"Oh." Rachel pouted. "Does that mean we're not going to have sex now?"

They were in the Berrys' kitchen, Quinn was sitting behind the counter while Rachel puttered about to make them lunch. Usually Quinn would be helping her, but she'd been sitting there quietly for some time now. In fact, she'd been quiet ever since she came over, but that wasn't unusual. Quinn had days like that and Rachel didn't mind, mostly because even when Quinn wanted to be quiet, she never seemed to need Rachel to be, so it all worked out. But this was starting to feel different than the norm.

"My Mom's going to visit my sister in Seattle for two weeks," Quinn spoke finally.

"Um...okay?" Rachel furrowed her brow perplexedly, looking over her shoulder as she retrieved some lemonade from the refrigerator. She started to fill two glasses for them. "Will you be all right over there alone for that long?"

"Oh, yeah, no, no, it's fine, that's not it." She waved her off.

Rachel stopped what she was doing to face her. "Then what is it?"

Quinn shook her head, running her hands through her short, choppy locks.

The brunette came around the island worriedly to stand in front of her. "Sweetie, your face is bright red...and it's not from sunburn because when we went to the lake yesterday I made sure you wore the appropriate amount of sunblock and reapplied it hourly for you."

"I know I said it couldn't happen, that it was too risky," she followed up quickly. "But my Mom will be gone for a couple weeks, several states away, and I know how much you've wanted to see it, even though there's really nothing to see. I still don't like the idea because you shouldn't ever have to be in that place, but I-I...we have a pool, a-and a hot tub, so I thought we could hang out for a little
bit instead of having to go to the lake or the community rec place. And Santana's been on me to throw a pool party since I usually have one every summer except last year, for obvious reasons. And I thought it would be...w-we could use the time alone."

Rachel pounced on her with a squeal, thankfully ending Quinn's nervous spiel.

"What are you doing?"

"Isn't it obvious?" Rachel frowned. "I'm trying to be discreet, Quinn. You know...in disguise. Undercover! I thought it might help ease your anxiety a bit."

"Wearing a fuzzy hat with giant sunglasses and a ski jacket in the middle of August is not exactly discreet, Rachel. If anything, you're like a homing beacon for every nosy busybody in my neighborhood."

"Okay, but at least they still won't know it's me. That is the point, right?"

Quinn sighed and looked out the windshield at the road, not saying anything.

Rachel heard what she said anyway.

"Okay, okay, the ski jacket is coming off," she said as she peeled the coat off her.

Quinn still didn't say anything.

"...and the fuzzy hat." She tossed both of them into the backseat. "Can I at least keep the glasses?"

Quinn shook her head bemusedly with a smile and took her hand. "Yes, you can keep the glasses."

Rachel had seen the exterior of the Fabray house before. More than once, she'd driven by to catch a glimpse of this forbidden place that seemed so light and lovely on the outside, but held such dark secrets.

It was big. They could start there. They were in Lima's only upscale neighborhood with McMansions on every corner. The outside of Quinn's house looked like something out of Better Homes and Gardens, the big American colonial home that every Martha Stewart wannabe wanted to have. The perfectly manicured lawn, the red door, the pristinely painted shutters, the flowers and mini bushes lining the walkway, and the hydrangeas under the windows. It was perfect.

Too perfect.

Quinn stepped in first, moved aside for Rachel to follow, and closed the door behind them.

Immediately she was faced with the long hallway stretching out in front of her, a wide staircase on the left, and a chandelier hung above them. Rachel was already in awe and she'd only taken one step inside. Quinn took her down the hall, quickly pointing out the dining room, the kitchen, the closets, the bathrooms, the living room, the den, and she was going so fast, Rachel could hardly catch a glimpse of each one as they went by in a blur.

What she could tell so far was that everything, absolutely everything, was perfectly organized. There wasn't a single item out of place. She was willing to bet that the portraits and framed pictures on the wall had been straightened with a leveler and bolted down so they could never be crooked. Everything was so painfully sterile, that you didn't even feel comfortable even breathing the air
because you might contaminate it. Rachel had only been in this house for a few minutes and she was already beginning to feel stifled. Is that what Quinn felt like everyday? She wanted to stop and explore each room more, but Quinn was acting so strange, Rachel didn't want to push her luck. When they passed the den though, she saw a closed door on the other side that Quinn didn't point out.

Rachel took hold of Quinn's wrist with both hands, preventing her from moving on. "What's in there?"

She turned around to see what Rachel was talking about and stiffened slightly when she saw the door. Her face was a blank mask, but Rachel knew her girlfriend far too well by now. There was a storm raging behind that stony exterior.

"My Dad's office," she replied tersely. "We don't use it."

Rachel sighed, her heart going out to Quinn. She couldn't bear to see her in pain like this. Her father disowning her was something Quinn still hadn't been able to get over and may never get over...at least not completely. How do you forgive and move past something like that? Your very own father abandoning you when you needed him the most? The man who was supposed to love, cherish, and protect you from all the scary things in the world until you were ready to take it on yourself?

Russell Fabray was practically a figment of Rachel's imagination. She'd never met the man, she only knew him as the monster who had hurt her father and her lover more than she could bear to think of. There were no pictures of him in the house that she'd seen yet, but she didn't expect to see many family photos with Russell in them. If there were family photos, she was pretty sure there was some editing done so he disappeared.

She wanted to know more about this man, this illusion. She wanted to see what the office of a person like Russell Fabray would look like. In her mind, it was more like a dungeon with chains and a tiny little slit as a window to allow for light, but she wanted the truth.

"May I see it?" she asked softly.

Quinn frowned at her. "Why? There's nothing interesting in there. I don't think my Mom's even touched it since he left. She got rid of all his other crap, but we just closed the office off. I haven't been in there since..."

She shook her head and the frown disappeared, replaced by that cool mask again that Rachel hated to see.

"Then let's go in there together?"

"Rachel, I don't-"

But she was already pulling her into the other room, weaving around the couch and the coffee table. When they were in front of the door, Rachel looked back to double check with Quinn that she wasn't overstepping her boundaries...at least not too much...and Quinn just nodded listlessly.

It smelled a little stale when she opened the door. Remnants of smoke from cigars and the fireplace lingered in the air, probably because it permeated the thick carpet and the dark wood filling the room. It was bright inside though; the curtains were pinned back to let the daylight pour in. Rachel expected it to be literally untouched, with dust lining the shelves and the massive desk that took up half the room, but it was just as clean as the rest of the house, not a single item out of place. All the books were perfectly aligned, dusted, picture frames shining. Apparently this room was not off limits
to their cleaning woman. Judy and Quinn may not go in there, but even an unused room like this was not allowed to be "let go." It would maintain the same integrity as the rest of the house, even if they never wanted to go in.

Rachel jumped a little bit when she saw the giant deer head mounted above the fireplace and felt sick so she quickly averted her gaze so that she didn't have to see those fake, glassy black eyes staring at her. That poor creature...she hoped his death was swift. This was already bad enough without having a corpse in the room to add to it. The walls were painted a dark, rich, brown. Everything else there matched the massive beast of a desk on the right side. It was heavy, dark-stained solid oak and there was a high backed leather chair behind it.

She moved over to the desk and saw there were some picture frames on it, along with an old calendar, a marble pen holder, but not much else. She picked up one of the pictures and it was of Judy with a young girl she didn't recognize. The girl was probably Quinn's older sister. Setting it down, she picked up another one that she saw was of Quinn. That surprised her. Even after kicking her out, Russell still kept it there. Didn't that mean something? Quinn was smiling, though with no teeth showing. She must have been at least five. Her hair was so long, almost white blonde, and it was pushed back with a headband. It looked like she was at a party because she was wearing a formal dress and she had her hands clasped in front of her dutifully.

Rachel wanted to cry.

She could picture this little girl, this tiny, sweet, fragile, innocent, five-year-old girl standing behind this behemoth desk, looking up with those big hazel eyes she knew so well, desperate for her father's approval. She wished she could hug that little girl and tell her that it would all be okay, save her from the pain of growing up and losing her family more with every year. Every year that her eyes got a little wider, every year that she matured just a little more. But she turned back to Quinn and reminded herself that she could hug her and tell her those things now.

Quinn took the frame out of her hands and placed it face down on Russell's desk.

"My Mom put that there after he moved out and I came back. She's always trying to convince me that my father cares more about me than he does. Fruitless effort on her part. She forgets I actually know him."

"How do you know she put that there? It could have been-"

"Because my father never used that picture of me on his desk," she answered simply. "He had the same one there for nine years. It probably burned in that fireplace the same night he kicked me out."

Rachel must have looked exactly like she was feeling because Quinn smiled sadly and shook her head.

"It's okay. Really. I accepted all this a long time ago; I've moved on."

Rachel didn't believe her for a second. Something like this could never be "okay," but this wasn't something they needed to address today, and not for some time. Quinn wasn't ready yet. Maybe one day she would be.

So she took Quinn's hand, interlacing their fingers and left that dreadful place behind. Quinn was getting more and more on nervous longer Rachel was there. When they came back inside after Quinn showed her the yard, the pool, and the pool house/guest house, she was reaching the height of anxiety. Rachel could see it clear as day. She was jumping at every sound. Each time the house creaked, Quinn tensed as if it meant someone was there or someone was coming or someone would
find them. She was trying to show her the second floor, when Rachel finally took matters into her own hands and asked to see Quinn's room, skipping the rest of the tour.

After they went in, Rachel quickly found the lock on the door and turned it behind her. When she looked at Quinn again, the blonde looked more embarrassed than anything else. There was no reason for Rachel to lock the door; no one was home or would be home, but the fact that her anxiety was so obvious made her feel sheepish. But Rachel wasn't upset by it; she knew how hard Quinn was trying, what a significant step this was for her. So she was just going to make this as easy as possible on them both.

Quinn sat down on the edge of her bed, her knees locked together with her hands tucked under her. She didn't say anything, so that told Rachel that she was being given free rein to look around. Quinn's room was so different from what she thought it would be and yet she wasn't that surprised. It was almost completely bare with the exception of the bed, her vanity, a bureau, and two bookcases. Rachel gravitated towards the shelves because there definitely wasn't enough space there for all of Quinn's books. She would know, there was an ever-growing pile of them in her own room that Quinn left behind.

She turned to the blonde with a questioning look and Quinn shrugged, admitting that only the "parent/church approved" books were on the shelves. The rest of her collection was in piles at the back of her closet and hidden in drawers under her bed. It wasn't like her Mom couldn't easily find them if she went looking, but that was just it. Judy would never go looking. As long as everything appeared right, then there wasn't a problem.

Quinn went on to explain that her father forced Judy to dismantle her room after he kicked her out. He didn't want any reminders. Once Quinn was out, she was out. So Judy boxed up Quinn's things, but instead of leaving them on the street like Russell wanted, she brought them up to the attic to store away.

"I never got around to unpacking. It was mostly just Cheerios stuff anyway. I didn't really see the point."

Rachel nodded and wiped away her tears quickly while her back was still to Quinn and then turned around to face her again. The blonde hadn't moved from her spot on the bed. Rachel wondered if she'd even breathed since she sat down.

"You didn't even want to decorate it differently? You didn't have to use your Cheerios things again."

Quinn only shook her head. You decorate your home. You make it a place you want to live in, a place that's yours, a place you can come into and feel safe and comforted. This house wasn't her home. It hadn't felt like home ever since her father had so easily disposed of her while her mother stood by and watched. How can you be exiled from your home? You can't. Even after her mother had taken her back, it wasn't the same; she never trusted it again. All Quinn wanted now was the chance to leave again and make herself a real home, one that no one could kick her out of.

Maybe she could have that home someday with Rachel.

Rachel's hands were running through Quinn's hair soothingly and she found such relief in that touch. When she finally looked up, Rachel leaned down to capture her lips in a gentle caress. After they broke apart, Quinn found herself breathing a little bit easier again. This house, this room, her mother, her father, all the bad and good and awful memories that had happened in that place were falling away and she was only seeing Rachel now...feeling Rachel...kissing Rachel.

She didn't realize it right away, but at some point Rachel had wriggled onto her lap and was
straddling her as they were lip-locked. With every touch of her hands against her skin, ghosting along her neck, down her bare arms, lacing their fingers together...all the tension was ebbing away. It wasn't this scary place; it wasn't something to fear. Everything would be all right. Rachel was there and that's the only thing that mattered.

They stayed liked that for a while, just letting themselves be near each other, breathe in each other. Quinn didn't understand how Rachel knew it was what she needed; she didn't even know it herself, but Rachel did. Somehow, she just did. It wasn't about the passion or frenzied desire; it was simply sweet and reassuring. They held it there with soft touches, light kisses, and when Rachel's tongue just barely grazed Quinn's bottom lip, they both giggled.

There was something so soothing about being able to hold her like this, to just be together. Was Rachel always going to be able to do this for her...just make the world fade away, make everything seem less scary, less hurtful? She told her once that she made her memories hurt less, and it was still true. After having some time with just the two of them, together, relaxing in the safety of her locked bedroom, Quinn began to calm down and started to adjust to having Rachel in the house.

Rachel was the one to broach it first by pushing down the straps of Quinn's sundress, a mischievous smirk playing on her lips. Quinn looked up her with a raised eyebrow.

"You want to go swimming, don't you?"

The brunette laughed and pushed herself off Quinn, skipping over to the dresser to rummage through it for bathing suits. She started throwing various mismatched pieces of bikinis at Quinn and stopped when she came across a more racy piece of lingerie that she hadn't seen before. Quinn jumped up at once to snatch it away and hid it behind her back. That was supposed to be a surprise for later! Rachel just beamed and went back to looking for something to wear, humming delightedly to herself. Quinn watched her with a smile. Could they just always be like this? Would the universe allow her to spend the rest of her life like this?

Happy?

They changed into their bathing suits and Quinn found Rachel already lying on one of the chaise lounges outside when she joined her with their towels. Her heart did a quick little skip at seeing Rachel stretching out in the sun, barely covered, tan from a summer's worth of beaches, pools, and even that trip to the amusement park.

They took turns helping the other put on sun block and Quinn had a slight coronary when Rachel turned over, pulling the strings of her top untied. But she firmly reminded herself that there was no one to catch them; plus the high fence and trees along the property line gave them complete privacy. Rachel was only hers to see.

"Normally, I sunbathe in the nude, as I'm sure you guessed by the lack of my tan lines, but I've tried to be respectful to your sense of modesty," she said lazily.

Quinn snapped to look at her in disapproval, jealousy stirring ever so slightly in her breast. "Where exactly do you lie out naked?" she asked testily.

"My backyard."

That threw her a little bit "But...your Dads...?"

"...know that and make sure they stay inside."

"Oh."
She felt better now, but was definitely going to be checking Rachel's backyard the next time they were there to ensure there were no peeping tom neighbors or horny little boys trying to get a look at the naked girl in her yard.

Rachel inched down her bottoms a bit. "Are you sure I can't just..."

Quinn quickly grabbed her wrist to stop her, giving her a stern look. "Rachel, there is only so much I can take."

"Oh, fine." She pouted and put her head back down.

Quinn exhaled heavily in relief. She was just getting used to Rachel in this house; she didn't know if she could handle a naked Rachel there! Lying on her back, she pushed up her sunglasses and enjoyed the feeling of the hot sun on her bare skin. Rachel was breathing quietly beside her; the trees were rustling slightly in the breeze, which felt wonderful as it flew across them. And there was a faint sound of a lawnmower running a few houses down. It was definitely summer and she couldn't remember a better one than the last couple months with Rachel.

The brunette shifted next to her and Quinn rolled her head to the side with a sweet smile. Rachel opened her eyes, squinting in the sunlight and then lifted herself onto her elbows, leaning towards her.

"So what is this about a pool party?"

A few days later, Quinn had the perfect idea for how to make this party different from all the rest. It was for the Glee club to enjoy themselves, not an opportunity to raise her popularity status. Also, she knew Rachel would love it most of all.

With Hiram and Leroy's permission, of course, Quinn borrowed Rachel's karaoke system. She asked Puck to pick it up at the Berry house while Rachel was out and build a stage in her backyard for the party. It wasn't easy because first she had to bribe Puck into it by saying that the girls would be topless at the party (which they most definitely would not be...though with Brittany there was always a good chance) and then he insisted on having Finn help him, which Quinn was adamantly against. But since they were the only two boys, with the exception of Sam, who knew anything about carpentry, she had to let it go.

She wished she could have asked Sam to do it instead of having to deal with Finn, but Quinn was in no position to ask him for any favors. The fact that he even came over to Rachel's house the day of the car wash was a huge step for them. He didn't have to be there, but he was, and they had a good time. Still, things hadn't completely healed between them; conversations were still awkward and stilted when they were alone. It was getting better though and that was enough for her.

The day before the party, the two boys were sweating it out in her backyard, and Finn had his typical sour, constipated look on his face for most of the time. She brought them lemonade - there were some things she just couldn't leave behind with her upbringing - and Puck griped about her not having the decency to buy them a lousy beer. However, Finn thanked her for the lemonade, and he didn't look as constipated anymore after that. After they cleaned up the mess and the stage was done, she sent them home and went over to the Berrys. Rachel was disappointed that they weren't spending the night alone at Quinn's; "wasting valuable alone time" was how she put it. But Quinn wanted her to be surprised on the day of and there was no way that a new wooden structure in her backyard was going to escape Rachel Berry's uncanny powers of perception. She would just know there was something out there the minute she stepped into the Fabray house.
The next day, Rachel spent all morning at Quinn's house helping her girlfriend prepare for the pool party later that afternoon. Of course, that was only after she'd spent a good half hour bouncing all over the place with excitement about the stage in the backyard. They had even managed to set up a rudimentary spotlight. Rachel kept going between hugging and kissing Quinn to running back outside to test how the platform felt only to go running back to Quinn again. She was like a rabbit on speed and Quinn was just grateful Santana wasn't there yet because she would have likely knocked Rachel unconscious at some point.

Puck was outside cleaning the pool along with Kurt and Blaine who were putting up decorations. Quinn had only managed to get Puck out there at such an early hour after eight phone calls, then a ninth one to his sister, who promptly went into his room and kicked him until he was finally awake. By late afternoon, everyone but Santana and Brittany had arrived and were already in the full swing of things. Music was blaring, almost everyone was in the pool, and drinks were being passed around like there was no tomorrow.

When Santana and Brittany came around the side gate, Rachel went to chastise them for being late. Quinn saw it out of the corner of her eye and ran to cut Rachel off at the pass before she said anything that would incite the Latina to unnecessary verbal abuse.

"Ease up on the 'tude, Jew baby. We stopped to get extra ice and..." She gestured to the box of liquor that Brittany held up excitedly with her tongue wagging. "So's why don't you backpedal your freakish looking dachshund legs into something of an apology before I go all Swimfan and drown you in the pool?"

Rachel rolled her eyes, but thanked Santana for her thoughtfulness and took the ice before walking off.

Quinn looked in the box Brittany was carrying and her eyes widened.

"Are you planning to have us all taking a trip to the hospital for alcohol poisoning?"

"You asks for the liquor, you gots the liquor!" Santana snapped. "Don't start pulling your fake ass Christian moral highness crap on me now."

Quinn glared at her for a moment before relenting, shaking her head. "Just...put it over there with the rest."

"You're totally gonna have people puking in the bushes tonight," Brittany said with a giggle.

"That's not helping me, Britt," Quinn sighed.

"Whoa, what the-" Santana stopped short, staring past the pool in horror at the makeshift stage. "Is that what I think it is? No! No effin' way, Quinn! I thought this was going to be an actual party. Like you used to throw! Not some...Berry freak show! We're so out of here."

Santana grabbed Brittany's arm and tried to storm out, but Quinn grabbed her by the shoulders and spun her around, marching her right back towards the pool deck. "Shut up and deal with it. By the end of the night, we'll have to hold you down to pry the microphone out of your hands and you know it."

"It looks like fun, San! We could totally dance on there too. Let's go pick out our songs!"

With that, Brittany had easily taken over the situation. She traded Quinn the box she was holding for Santana and dragged the Latina towards the sound system where the book was for all the songs Rachel had for her karaoke system. By the time Quinn had taken out all the bottles to put on the
table, Santana didn't seem that bothered by it anymore, and after a few minutes more, she was laughing with her girlfriend, looking excited by the prospect of getting their turn up there.

"Hey, guys! How about we do 'Call Me May-'?"

"NO!" came the simultaneous cry from every single person at the party except for Brittany who was nodding her approval.

Tina frowned and went back to looking through song choices. "But it's the top song of the summer..." She muttered to herself.

Sam was manning the grill with Puck, but Rachel kept running over to make sure they didn't burn anything or ruin her vegetable kabobs by letting them touch the burgers and hotdogs. Quinn made sure she locked the pool house ahead of time, but she still caught Santana trying to pick the lock. There was a ten second screaming match before Brittany announced it was time for a chicken fight, scooped Santana up into her arms, and took them both into the pool at a run.

They ended up having a tournament, which Artie eagerly kept a tally of on the deck. Almost all of the Gleeks participated and even Quinn got in the pool to let Rachel up on her shoulders. (Rachel insisted it was either Quinn or Puck, so it's not like the blonde had a choice.) But in the end, they lost to the undefeated winners, Santana and Brittany. Santana insisted that their prize be Rachel gagged for the rest of the party or Quinn allowing her and Brittany into the main house. Both requests were summarily denied and Quinn managed to get even with Santana later by "accidentally" hip checking her into the pool.

"IT'S MY TURN!" Rachel announced loudly to everyone and no one in particular. They were well into the evening and well into Brittany's box of liquor. "I WANNA SING! Get away from my cups!" She shoved Puck back who was trying to refill her drink like she'd asked him to, but had forgotten in the last two minutes. "Get your own, Puckerman!"

Before Quinn could reach her obviously drunk girlfriend, an equally inebriated Blaine grabbed Rachel's hand and pulled her up to the stage.

"YESH!" Rachel slurred and tossed her cup onto the grass without a second thought and fumbled for her bedazzled microphone.

Puck was not one to be deterred. He was dying to see how drunk he could get Rachel Berry for the first time in her life and handed her another wine cooler when she was up on the stage. The memory struck all too close with Quinn and the rage began to whip through her. She downed the shot that Mercedes handed her without so much as a wince and stormed over to Puckerman, prepared to have it out with him, but Sam got there first.

She watched in confusion as Sam seemed to be angry. Puck was acting innocent. But Sam wouldn't let it go, and before she knew it, he had shoved Puck and ducked the return swing. That was all that happened before Mike intervened, jumping behind Puck and held him back before he could go after Sam again. Sam just shook his head in disgust and said something else angrily, which Quinn couldn't hear, before walking away.

She hardly had time to register anything when Rachel's amplified voice was shouting, "IT TASTES LIKE PINK! QUINNNNNNNNN! IT TASTES LIKE PINK!"

She waved the already empty bottle in the air while Blaine was shadow boxing...without the shadows.
Rachel and Blaine were hardly the only ones drunk. Every single person at that party was wasted with the exception of Kurt who was the designated driver for the night. Quinn was no exception to the rule. She'd had her fair share as well, which is why she didn't have the sense to keep Rachel away from the microphone.

"IT TASTES LIKE PINK A-AND FAIRIES AND PUSS."

"RACHEL!" Quinn cried, stumbling over to the stage. "Sing with Blaine!"

"What should I sing?" Rachel slurried, bewildered by the blonde's obvious stress.

"Anything! Anything at all! Just sing, okay, sweetie? Sing for us."

"PLAINE BLANDERSON!" she announced loudly into her microphone. "WE'RE SHINGING TOGETHER!"

He looked up in confusion and twirled around a few times as he tried to find out who it was that was booming that voice down from the heavens at him before finding Rachel with relief. Kurt put the music on and to Quinn's relief, Rachel was then occupied doing something far safer and more enjoyable for everyone.

You were workin' as a waitress in a cocktail bar, When I met you. I picked you up,
I shook you out,
And turned you around.
Turned you into someone new.

Everyone else perked up and people were singing along as they danced around the pool, drinks flying, hands groping, tongues tangled.

Don't you want me, baby?

Rachel eyed Quinn hungrily and the blonde nearly tripped backwards over Sam who was on the ground on his back with his legs kicking in the air as he wailed on an air guitar.

Don't you want me? Oh!

"I WANT YOU!" Santana sobbed with her straw in her mouth and waved at the duo. "I DO!"

Brittany was too busy taking her bikini top off and rocking out to the song to console her girlfriend, but it turns out that was just what Santana needed anyway.

"Take it, mah shorties!" Artie shouted at Rachel and Blaine, swaying his arms in the air before he realized Brittany was topless and his attention switched at lightning speed.

Body shots, skinny dipping, more alcohol, more food, strip poker, more music, and even more alcohol had everyone well on their way into a coma for the night by the time Quinn sobered up enough to kick them all out at three o'clock in the morning. Her neighbors would never call the police - it wasn't their style - but she was certainly in for a grounding when her mother came home and answered the dozen different calls about her teenage daughter's "out of control" house party.

"BEST PARTY EVER!" Mike whooped as he spun Tina around on the front lawn before tripping, sending them both rolling on the grass.

Most of the group piled into Artie's van, which Kurt borrowed for the night. But Rachel stayed behind and Quinn was too tired to fight with Santana anymore so she let her and Brittany sleep it off.
in the guest room. She wasn't worried about being kept up by any inappropriate noises because Santana was already passed out when Brittany flung her over her shoulder and carried her up the stairs.

When everyone was finally gone, Quinn was too tired to worry about the disaster zone that was her backyard and instead curled up with Rachel on one of the lounge chaises, putting a blanket over them both to stave off the cool night air. Rachel was between her legs, nodding off, while Quinn watched the stars.

She had made sure they both stopped drinking after Rachel's duet with Blaine. Quinn did it because she didn't want Rachel to go so far that she spent the rest of the night praying to the porcelain god, especially when she knew it was the first time Rachel had ever gotten drunk. But she also did it for her own sanity because a drunken Rachel meant an even more unfiltered Rachel, which was like putting a toddler next to a big red button that could set off nuclear missiles to decimate half the planet.

It was just better for all of them in the long run and Rachel only protested a little before Quinn made up for it by unlocking the pool house for their own use. She expected to have to run interference with Puck still trying to sneak drinks into Rachel's hand, but he seemed to have forgotten all about it and was just enjoying the party, particularly Brittany's show, which he seemed to regard a personal gift from God.

Puck and God had a really odd relationship.

"What are you thinking about?" Rachel mumbled sleepily and shifted to curl into Quinn's warmth.

She wasn't as plastered as she was earlier, but she was hardly sober yet. Rachel had spent most of the night either up on stage or draped over Quinn, neither of which bothered Quinn in the least. She was fascinated by a drunk Rachel. Having her girlfriend in her lap most of the night seemed to change her own drunken temperament into a far more pleasant one. She laughed more than she could remember ever laughing at a party like this and didn't have a single angry outburst the whole time. Considering how much she drank in the beginning, it was an unprecedented event.

Every time she drank to a certain point, it seemed like everything and everyone who crossed her path could manage to make her see red.

YOU BREATHED ON MY CUP? DO YOU HAVE A DEATH WISH?

HOW DARE YOU WEAR THAT FOUL ORANGE DRESS WHEN YOU KNOW IT'S OUR RIVALS TEAM COLORS? GET OUT! I DON'T CARE IF IT'S YOUR HOUSE, THEY'RE MY EYES!

YOU ACTUALLY BROUGHT SOUR LEMONS TO MY PARTY?

I CAN'T BELIEVE WHAT YOU DID TO MY BODY! I USED TO HAVE ABS!

WHY ISN'T THE SALT LESS SALTY? AND IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE KOSHER!

She was an angry drunk - she knew that - and she actually kind of thought she deserved to be considering all that happened, but Rachel's warmth at her side, kissing her neck, singing constantly, laughing and being crazy, just brought about a sense of peace in her. She didn't even bat an eye when Brittany puked in the hedges or when the boys threw some of the patio furniture into the pool.

Actually, she could still see one of the plastic chairs floating around in there.
Oh, well...fishing expedition tomorrow.

"Someone once told me that they liked astronomy because compared to the vastness of space, it made their problems feel that much smaller. I'm trying to figure out if that's true," Quinn answered softly.

"Does it make you feel smaller?"

"Yeah. But not in a bad way. I just...never spent much time looking up before. It's different."

"Mhm," she agreed with a yawn. "You were always staring straight ahead, making sure no one got in your way or you'd have them slapped with a liquid iceberg. The most piercing gaze in all of McKinley...not to mention the most feared."

Quinn didn't know what to say. It was the truth...just not a truth she wanted to think of herself anymore. To hear Rachel refer to it so casually kind of hurt. It's not like she was being mean or she was doing something wrong by saying it... It still just hurt. Quinn didn't want Rachel to think of her like that. She didn't want her to remember it. But that was foolish.

"Who told you that?" Rachel asked after a beat when Quinn didn't respond. "The thing about astronomy?"

"Sam. He said it before he tried to kiss me for the first time."

"Oh."

"He also thought Mars was the planet of love."

She wrinkled her nose. "Isn't Mars the Roman god of war?"

Quinn chuckled. "Yeah."

"So I guess you two really were on different planets."

"Obviously."

Rachel rolled her eyes and looked back up at Quinn over her shoulder.

"He seemed...better...tonight."

She nodded. "He did."

Quinn's mind flashed back to the beginning of the party when Sam and Puck had nearly gotten into a brawl. She still didn't know what that was about. She wanted to be able to ask him about it tomorrow, but she didn't know if they were at the point where that kind of conversation would be okay again.

"Does that make you happy?"

"I want my friend back. You know that."

"I do. I want it for you too."

"It's not weird for you?"

"I think it's weird for all of us right now. But, with time, we'll be able to move past it. I'm actually
looking forward to that."

"Yeah..."

Rachel looked up at the sky and was silent for a long moment.

"I don't like it."

"What?"

"Feeling small." She curled her hand into a circle around her eye and pretended to peer through it as though it were a telescope. "It goes against my core beliefs. One should feel and be larger than life, actual physical stature notwithstanding. How else can you make your way to the top? I don't understand how the notion of being insignificant could be comforting." She scoffed and dropped her hand, burrowing down even further, if possible. "You're so warm and comfy," she mumbled against Quinn's chest. "Your breasts are the best pillows in the whole wide world...also the prettiest."

Quinn giggled and tightened her arms around her. Rachel was still tipsy and missing the point, but it didn't matter; she probably would have said the same thing stone sober. Rachel would always be exactly who she is - to hell with everyone else - and it was one of the things Quinn admired, not to mention loved, about her the most.

Chapter End Notes

"Call Me Maybe" by Carly Rae Jepsen (Yes, I know this actually came out the summer after this one based on my timeline, but just go with it!)

"Don't You Want Me" by Human League
"Didn't pick up the chihuahua this morning?"

"We had early practice. I wasn't going to make her come in two hours before school starts," Quinn replied with an eye roll, purposefully ignoring the dig. Besides, it was kind of ironic, not to mention laughable, that Santana would call Rachel a chihuahua when she was pretty sure that title was already taken...

Quinn had rejoined the Cheerios after Rachel took a few days to think about it. She wasn't able to get her uniform back from Coach Sylvester, but Rachel decided she didn't need it after all. She knew Quinn. Clothes weren't going to change what they had, what they were, or who Quinn was now. She did, however, make Quinn swear on the Bible several times that she would not revert to her old ways or even use the word "manhands" in so much as a jest. Quinn, of course, swore to it all. It didn't worry her a bit. She was just looking forward to getting back into her role as Captain of the Cheerios - "CO-CAPTAIN!" Santana usually interjected to correct her - and being able to have that control back in her hands now that they were going back to McKinley for their final year.

When she came in, the other girls immediately began the usual worship/fear routine. Quinn Fabray was a legend to the freshman and the other underclassmen knew her well enough not to cross her. Santana and Sue had already handpicked the team, which Quinn didn't mind so much because the girls they chose were pretty good. ...All except one, actually.

Kitty Wilde.

Quinn wanted her gone from day one, arguing with Santana that she didn't have what it takes to be a Cheerio. She didn't follow orders; she was lazy, and Quinn did not like the way this girl looked at her. There was something oddly threatening about the way Kitty would watch her, like Quinn was a bug that she wanted to squash. Instead of falling in line with the rest of the girls following their Captain, she just turned her nose up at Quinn. However, she did obey Santana, which made the situation even more frustrating and awkward than it already was. Quinn knew, from the first time she met Kitty, just what this girl's problem was. And every day since, that knowledge had only grown more secure.

Kitty wanted to be her.

And with Quinn back, there was no way that would ever happen. Kitty wanted Quinn's power, her fearlessness, the sway she held over everyone, how people obeyed her, the way the boys drooled over her, and the way the girls worshiped the ground she walked on. But she couldn't have it and, in her mind, Quinn was the only thing standing in her way. The only outcome was for this to end badly.

Santana didn't see that though and Quinn was struggling already with having to share power that had once been at her disposal alone. It was infuriating that she couldn't just get rid of this girl before any trouble started just because Santana thought Kitty was good enough to keep up and fit their image. She also thought it couldn't hurt to let her stick around because the boys loved her. Not to mention, she got such a rush from being obeyed by someone who didn't want to give Quinn the time of day. It was role reversal at its best, something Santana had been waiting for ever since Quinn got her demoted to bottom of the pyramid last year.

As the three of them, Brittany, Quinn, and Santana, crossed the parking lot together, Quinn saw Kitty laughing and running up the steps into the school with some of the other younger Cheerios.
Again, she brought up her objections to allowing Kitty to stay on the team with the trouble she could see brewing on the horizon.

"Since when do we allow the tiny brain in the guys' pants dictate the line up? That girl needs to be gone. As of yesterday. She's supposedly 14? She looks like she's 40! It's disturbing."

"Wasn't that a movie?" Brittany mused, frowning.

"Come on, Quinn. She's not that bad," Santana said. "You know that if she sucked, I never would have let her through. There were way worse people!"

"Yeah, Q. There was this majorly paraplegic girl who tried to convince us that she could be used as a human juggling ball, but Santana told her no. I thought it was a cool idea though..."

Santana held her hand towards Brittany as if to say "See?"

Quinn wasn't buying it.

"But that girl is an evil bitch!"

"So are we, honey. Did you forget? And we're so much better at it. I don't know why this chick has gotten under your skin like this."

"She even talks a lot about God and death and stuff. I thought you two would get along," Brittany added.

"She's deranged. Did you hear the nonsense she was spewing about 'Judgment Day' and 'being left behind' last week? She said she wants to start a club about it!"

"Okay, so she's a relig-obsessed freak. Whatever. Needs I remind you about your past, ex-Celibacy Club President?"

That earned her a scowl.

Santana was unfazed. "She hasn't done anything to deserve to be kicked off the team and you know it."

"Yet," she emphasized. "She hasn't done anything yet, but it's going to happen. I know it; you know it. Even Kitty knows it! So why are we waiting? We should cut her off at the knees before it gets out of hand."

"You're not allowed to cut off knees," Brittany mused, "but maybe the cops go easier on you if you just cut off a foot? I mean, it's just one foot..."

"Have you ever heard of 'innocent until proven guilty'?"

"Our squad doesn't exactly abide by the judicial court rules," Quinn replied dryly. "You've forgotten who our coach is. Need I remind you of the dietary restrictions, camp hazing, or that time she had you go-"

Santana's finger shot into the air to cut her off and she glared at Quinn. "You so do not need to go there."

"I'm right about this, Santana."

"I stand by what I said." She shrugged. "She hasn't fouled up and unless we go to Coach with some
damn good lies, there's no reason to get rid of her. Plus, we'd also have to hold auditions to find her replacement. It's too much work. She's fine where she is. What do you think, Britt?"

"Kitty's kind of boring and her basket toss is a mess; but I don't care if she stays or not. As long as she doesn't do anything super important. We need people to step on a lot and she's good at that. Just keep her at the bottom."

Quinn both loved and hated the adoring look on Santana's face as she smiled at Brittany, like the girl had just tied down the moon for her.

"All right!" she snapped. "Fine. But no warnings for her. The second, and I mean the second, she steps out of line-

"...We will kick her pretty little preachin' ass out the door." Santana nodded in agreement. "No worries, I got your back."

Quinn scoffed. "Well, that's a change."

"This year is all about the change, Lil' Miss Good N' Plenty." Santana stretched her arms out and spun around, gesturing to the rest of the student body that was rushing past them. "We are taking back this school and it's gonna be on our terms this time around."

"I do like the sound of that..." She grinned.

Santana raised an eyebrow in bemusement. "And some things will never change..."

They made their way up the steps, stopping at the doors, and looked at each other.

"Shall we?" Quinn said.

"Out of the way! I'm first!"

She chuckled, allowing Santana to push her back, but just as they entered the hallway, Quinn smoothly strode forward, cutting the Latina off, and resumed her usual place just slightly ahead of the other two. It was too late for Santana to get back in front now. Their entrance was made; everyone was looking, all eyes on them as they walked through the crowd parting for the Three Cheerio Queens...their masters and commanders.

"You bitch," Santana hissed under her breath.

Quinn let the corners of her mouth curl up into a smirk, feeling pretty damn satisfied with herself. She put her hands on her hips and walked down the hallways like she owned them...because she did.

Yeah, some things never would change.

Rachel was nervous.

Okay, nervous was an understatement, especially judging by the state of her nails and how raw her bottom lip was from being gnawed on all morning...

Quinn had been grounded for a week after the pool party when her Mom got home to several phone calls from the neighbors with noise complaints. Rachel was worried about what it would do for their relationship to have yet more stress like that added, but Quinn's anger was focused on the fact that it meant she couldn't spend time with Rachel, not with her Mom being upset with her. In fact, Quinn told Rachel that Judy seemed kind of relieved that her daughter was doing something normal again,
showing signs of that once pristinely perfect cheerleader, honor roll student, most popular girl in school, that her daughter had once been before the rug was pulled out from beneath them.

Rachel thought that was insane.

Between the grounding, Rachel giving her blessing for Quinn to rejoin the Cheerios, and subsequent summer training regimen that Quinn had to jump into, it left hardly any time at all for them to be together. Suddenly, summer was over, and today was the first day of their last ever year at William McKinley High.

Her stomach was in knots all morning. She hardly slept the night before. Quinn was so exhausted from practice that she had texted Rachel good night and said that she would see her in school before falling asleep. They never had a chance to discuss what seeing her in school actually meant.

After the bliss that could describe their summer vacation, the amount of time they got to spend together, alone and with their friends, getting to know each other better, knowing all their ins and outs, not a moment wasted...all that was going to change when school started. They would have less time for each other. They weren't going to be able to be as free as they were the past three months. They had to go back to making sure they only looked like friends and how were they going to manage that when they had a taste of knowing what it was like to be... Well, they hadn't been completely open in public, but they were able to be themselves around their friends, Rachel's fathers, and even when they left Lima for impromptu road trips. It couldn't be like that anymore, not for a long while. They had to go back to hiding again.

And to make matters worse, Quinn was Captain of the Cheerios again. Yes, she had given her consent, but that was mostly due to how much Quinn wanted to do it. Rachel wasn't going to deny her that just because she had self-esteem issues about having a popular, powerful, cheerleader for a closeted girlfriend...who just might realize what a mistake she'd made in wasting the last year with Rachel and needed to move on to bigger better things now that college was on the horizon. Her heart was protesting against such thoughts. She knew Quinn loved her! She knew how dedicated they were to each other. After all they had gone through, all Quinn was doing for her now, why would she question all of that simply because of a stupid cheerleading team?

However, the...questionably...logical side of her brain was screaming otherwise.

She remembered how badly it had gone when she tried to make Finn give up football so that she would feel more important to him, more secure about their relationship. He refused, of course. He always chose himself over Rachel or Glee club or anyone else. Finn was all about Finn. Was Rachel being unreasonable at the time to ask him to quit the football team to make her feel better about herself? Yes. It was absolutely wrong to ask him that and somewhere in the back of her mind, she knew that. But a part of her still needed him to say yes; to choose her over something else that meant something to him, to even make him less popular so she didn't have to feel so inadequate next to him in the halls when everyone wondered what the freak from Glee club was doing with the quarterback. She felt queasy when memories of that time flitted through her mind. What was wrong with her back then?

Finn.

Finn was what was wrong.

She knew better than that now and would never dream of asking Quinn to do something like that for her own selfish purposes, but there was such an astronomical difference between the situations that she couldn't even compare the two. Quinn didn't make her feel like she was somehow less deserving – the way Finn always did, whether he meant to or not. Quinn never made an issue of Rachel's
popularity. Quinn didn't make Rachel feel inadequate. In fact, she went out of her way to reassure her of just the opposite. Rachel's social, sexual, and overall confidence had skyrocketed in just the last few months with Quinn.

But even remembering all that didn't make her feel better about what she was going to face with Quinn this year.

Would they really just revert to how it used to be? Sam wouldn't be on her arm, but with the Cheerios...everyone would be throwing themselves at Quinn. Again. How was Rachel supposed to compete with that?

Quinn was stepping back up into the position she had before she joined Glee club. She didn't need them anymore. She'd gotten through her pregnancy; the school seemed to have some kind of convenient selective memory because no one ever talked about it anymore. Maybe the Fabrays had paid off all their parents so they would keep their mouths shut... Rachel rubbed her forehead. This was giving her such a headache, not to mention the panic attack that was bubbling up beneath the surface.

 Mostly, she was just scared of what she would find when Quinn walked down that hallway.

Someone slapped her hand, and she yelped, pulling away before they could hit her again.

"Consider that your first warning," Kurt said with a frown, leaning against the lockers next to her. "Your nails look atrocity...like some kind of mutant hamster has been gnawing on them."

Rachel just pouted.

"What's up with you? It's the first day of school; usually you're a bubbly mess of enthusiasm that makes everyone want to avoid you."

"I haven't seen Quinn yet," she said, glancing up and down the hallway anxiously.

"Down, girl. Don't let the drool show. Surely you can handle a few hours away from your lady friend."

"Kurt!"

He shouldn't have said that so loudly! There were too many people in this crowded hallway to overhear them.

" Seriously, Rachel, what is going on?"

She finally tore her eyes away from the hallway corners to look at the boy and he seemed genuinely concerned. A little part of her melted to know that she had a friend there to support her, who cared about her.

Sighing, Rachel tilted her head back to knock against the lockers. "Quinn's the Captain of the Cheerios again," she admitted forlornly.

"...Something that's been old news for a few weeks now. I thought you two were on the same page with that?"

"We are," she replied unconvincingly.

Understanding finally lit up Kurt's eyes and he nodded slowly. "Hey, listen to me." He squeezed her
"Nothing's changed and nothing will change. She's still the same Quinn that couldn't take her eyes off your precious, charming, adorable, occasionally irritating, self all summer long. The same one who held a car wash on your lawn and had an actual stage built just for you in her backyard to sing karaoke. Simply appreciate that uniform in all its sinfully formfitting, polyester glory, and leave it at that."

"And she made that shirt too..." Rachel mumbled.

"Shirt? What shirt?"

"She...she made this t-shirt that said..." Rachel trailed off with a sigh, deciding against it, and smiled up at him gratefully. "Never mind. You're right. You're absolutely right. I just...you never know, do you? One moment everything is more perfect than you ever thought possible and the next it's all been ripped away from you without a second's notice. Does that feeling ever go away? The fear?"

Kurt paused thoughtfully, tilting his head in a way that said he knew exactly what she meant. "I don't know," he answered honestly. "But is it really the way you want to live your life? Waiting for the other shoe to drop?"

"It always seems to for me."

"Seems to for Quinn as well. She hasn't exactly had the easiest time of it these past couple years."

"That would be an overwhelming understatement."

"It's your choice, Rachel. You can throw yourself into this head first and pray there'll be something to keep you from hitting the ground or you just hold back, let the fear eat away at you, and before you know it, you'll have lost her because you were too afraid of what bad things could potentially happen."

She let her head fall back against the lockers in defeat. "When you put it that way..."

"You really do not have anything to worry about," he said with a reassuring smile. "Quinn is transparent as cellophane these days. She has the most Sapphic of Sapphic love for you. It's not going to vanish in one morning as she walks into school with the Cheerios."

Despite frowning at his choice of words, she couldn't help but feel lightened just a little bit. "You're a good friend, Kurt."

"I should start billing you for this."

"Consider it even with the hours I spent talking to you about a certain person..."

He rolled his eyes. "Fair enough."

"...The same person that's right behind you now."

Kurt's eyes widened and he spun around.

"Hey guys!" Blaine walked up to them with an excited grin.

Rachel had called Quinn as soon as Kurt went home after hours of rambling over a tub of vegan ice cream about Blaine transferring from Dalton to be at McKinley with him. She got into bed as she relayed the whole saga over the phone to her girlfriend.
"I'm happy for Kurt, really, but...is it wrong that I'm jealous of him too?"

Quinn paused for a moment before replying quietly, "You mean because Kurt's already out in school?"

Rachel nodded before reminding herself that she was on the phone and said, "Yeah. It's just...I know how badly Kurt gets treated sometimes, but at least he's not-"

"...lying," she finished for her.

"That's it," Rachel said softly.

"I wish I could give that to you."

Rachel could hear how pained her voice was and it made her feel ten times worse for even bringing up the subject.

"You give me so much, Quinn. I'm not talking about this to make you feel badly or guilty, I just wanted you to know what I was feeling. We said no more secrets, right?"

"We did. And I know. I get it. I hate it as much as you do, Rachel...if not more."

The brunette sighed and burrowed down into her pillows. "Just...tell me more about what we'll do when we leave Lima."

"Another bedtime story?" Quinn teased.

Rachel loved it when Quinn talked about their future. Together, they would create scenarios about what they would do, where they would go, what they would see, just what their lives would be like, what an exciting day would be like, what a rainy day would be like.

Everything they could do together when they were finally free.

"Well, I am in bed, and it would be nice to have a little romantic fairytale to go to sleep thinking about."

"Fairytales aren't real. My stories are. Or, at least, they will be someday."

"So tell me another story."

Quinn chuckled at how demanding Rachel sounded. "All right. Once upon a time..."

"I thought this wasn't a fairytale," she interrupted. "That's how all fairytales start. You promised me real, Miss Fabray."

"If you could shut your mouth for a few minutes, you'd get your story!"

"You're a terrible storyteller. Don't ever volunteer to read to children at the library."

"No, I'll just invite the Wicked Witch of Show Tunes to scare them all away."

Rachel gasped. "You are this close to having me hang up on you!"

Quinn ignored her. "It's snowing. There's a blizzard. And the whole city is shut down. Our classes are canceled and we are stuck inside our cozy little apartment. There's frost covering the windows and you try something ridiculous with the hair dryer to melt it off so that you can see your city in its
winter wonderland. But you don't get to stay at the window long."

"Why is that?" she breathed.

Quinn had her hooked.

Quinn always had her hooked. She was an addiction that Rachel never wanted a cure for.

"Because I'm naked in our bed," she murmured huskily. "And you know me, I'm not the patient kind."

Rachel sucked in a breath. "I love it when you say 'our' bed."

"Our apartment, our couch, our TV, our table, our chairs, our bed, our kitchen, our sink, our shower..."

Quinn kept on listing every single item that could possibly be in their future living space and with every 'our', Rachel's heart swelled.

She wanted to be the 'our' and 'we' with Quinn Fabray for the rest of their lives.

Kurt and Blaine were talking excitedly to each other, but Rachel wasn't listening. Her gaze was still ping-ponging up and down the hallway.

Where is she?

After what felt like far too long, she heard the student chatter get louder and more pronounced before falling away into a hushed silence. Turning to the left, she waited for what she knew was going to appear through the crowd. She'd seen it so many times over the last three years...

And there it was.

The crowd parted. Kids whispered, riveted, fearful. And they appeared.

The three Goddesses of McKinley High strode down the hallway. They were gorgeous, fierce, and absolutely awe-inspiring. If that sight didn't make you stop in your tracks, then you were blind. There was such a tangible energy radiating off of them, one that spoke of beauty, power, and even a slight hint of malice.

Quinn was looking straight ahead, the slightest hint of a smirk on her face, her hands on her hips, with Santana and Brittany in tow. The other two glanced here and there at the other students along the side with that superior, knowing look on their faces, but Quinn never bothered. Her gaze was focused at the path in front of her; no one else mattered. She was better than all of them.

"Whoa..." Blaine whispered from somewhere behind Rachel. "That is surreal."

"Yes...they are certainly back in form for this year," Kurt replied uneasily.

Rachel's heart was racing, her palms sweating, making it more difficult to hold onto her books. She held her breath as Quinn got closer and closer to her.

And she wasn't looking at her.

Rachel felt herself crumbling inside. It really was going back to the way it used to be before. Hiding. She wasn't anything to Quinn right now. She was just Rachel, the annoying girl she talked to
sometimes because they were in Glee together. That's how it had to look.

*She loves you. She loves you. She loves you.*

Maybe if she said it enough in her head, she could make herself believe it.

Santana was grinning evilly at her; Brittany had a genuine smile for them, but Quinn acted as though they didn't exist...as if Rachel didn't exist.

Just as she was about to pass her by, Rachel saw it.

It was the tiniest little smile playing on Quinn's lips.

Not a smirk, a *smile*.

She didn't imagine it.

It was real!

Then, to Rachel's disbelief, Quinn turned her head as she walked by and winked at her before going down the rest of the hallway and around the corner, out of sight. The din of the hallway started up again as all the students were talking with more enthusiasm after witnessing the legendary Quinn Fabray with Santana Lopez and Brittany Pierce again.

Everyone knew that had just set the tone for the rest of the year.

"That was so weird," Blaine said with a frown. "Why didn't they stop to say anything to us?"

He was trying to be polite by avoiding saying what he really meant, which was 'why didn't Quinn stop to talk to *Rachel*?'

"Ah, don't," Kurt muttered out of the corner of his mouth, warning his boyfriend not to go there.

Rachel didn't care. A thousand pounds had just lifted off her shoulders, or her *heart*, rather. That sweet Quinn smile, *her* Quinn's smile, and that wink... Her heart felt like it could burst. Quinn didn't just acknowledge her; she had looked happy. She looked so happy. It was such a small moment, but it was so intimate, so perfect; Rachel was on cloud nine. It changed everything she was feeling. All the doubts she'd been tormenting herself with that morning and the night before had evaporated with that tiniest of confirmations that Quinn was still there.

She turned back to her locker and focused on remembering the combination, not wanting anyone to see the brilliant smile that was lighting her face. It would be too suspicious. You don't just grin like a lovesick idiot at another girl unless you actually *were* a lovesick idiot for that same girl. She finally got the locker to open while trying to contain her emotions so she could start the day, when there it was.

A folded piece of paper sitting neatly on top of her things.

She gasped unthinkingly, which prompted Kurt to ask if everything was all right, but she could only nod, turning her back to him while hastily unfolding the letter to read in private. As much as she loved her friend, this was something special between her and Quinn, so Kurt was definitely not finding out about this.

The first thing she noticed was that the paper seemed oddly crumpled, as if Quinn had to smooth it out a few times afterward. That was strange because all of her letters from Quinn up until that point
had always been on pristinely cared for stationery. Rachel didn't give it another thought beyond that, too eager to read what her girlfriend had in store for her today. Of course, she'd written her own already, and it was waiting in Quinn's backpack for the other girl to discover later today. But it had completely eluded her thoughts that Quinn would remember to give her one as well. She'd been too busy worrying about everything else.

Hey, you.

*Looks like it's the beginning of the end of our time here at McKinley. I know that it's supposed to be bittersweet, but it just makes me all the more eager for it to end and for the real world to begin. In the meantime, we'll have to make the most of it. I'm Captain of the Cheerios again*

There were some odd scribbles like Quinn was having a seizure on the page and then someone else's large, loopy handwriting cut in.

**CO-CAPTAIN! Don't make me regret letting you share with me!**

There was a gap and it was Quinn's writing again.

*Oh, and I must have heard Coach wrong when she said that I could have the spot alone if I wanted it. But, no, I asked to have my friend stay and do it with me! Maybe I'm the one regretting it!*

**BERRY, YOU'RE**

There was a lot more scribbling and marks all over the place. Did those two honestly have a tug of war over the pen? Rachel couldn't help but laugh. She was starting to understand why the letter was looking a little worse for the wear.

Finally, it was just Quinn again.

*Rachel, I would have thrown this out and started over or at least crossed all this out, but with your love for all things dramatic, I left it as is, and you will be pleased to know that Santana paid for that in practice later.*

*Don't be worried about today. I'm not. Nothing has changed except for how much time we have to be together. I know the Cheerios will take up a lot of my time again, but I promise I'll do everything I can to make up for that. I don't like being away from you and after this summer, I've been spoiled. You don't think I'm gonna give that up now? We'll make this work and we're going to have an amazing year. I'll lead the Cheerios to another National Championship title. You'll lead the Glee club to ours, and we're going to enjoy it all. This is our year, Rachel, and nothing is going to stand in our way.*

*Oh, and I know you had plans for this uniform, but plans have changed. I've decided that its going to be much more fun to have you wearing it... Be prepared to channel your inner Cheerio, Rachel Berry. And, yes, that is a challenge.*

*See you in Physics in an hour.*

She drew a small heart at the end of that sentence.

*Oh, remind me to thank Mike for hacking into the school database to change our schedules. We'll have to take him and Tina out to dinner for a double date sometime.*

Rachel wholeheartedly agreed. They really owed him for moving their schedules around so that the girls could have most of their classes together. He said that it actually gave him an excuse to do
something romantic for Tina and change their schedules as well, but all the same... Mike went full-on
ninja for them and they owed him.

She was about to tuck the letter safely into one of her folders when she caught a glimpse of writing
on the back. Turning it over, she read the words and tears stung her eyes.

Rachel? My love is here to stay. Don't doubt me. Don't doubt us. We deserve better than that now.

Somewhere in the background, she knew Kurt was trying to talk to her again. Mercedes had joined
the group by then, along with Artie and Tina, but she never paid attention to a word of the
conversations going on around her.

She was in a world all of her own...her world with Quinn.

This year was going to be amazing.

This year was going to suck.

Two weeks in and Quinn was convinced of it. She had no idea that sharing her captaincy with
Santana would cause such a problem. She was so used to the privilege of making all the decisions
about the team on her own, cutting whomever she wanted, punishing whomever she wanted, without
ever having to answer to anyone except Sue, and Sue stayed out of the way unless she thought
Quinn was being detrimental to the team. With the exception of her getting pregnant, Quinn never
did anything wrong as Captain in Sue Sylvester's eyes.

But, now, she was constantly captain-blocked by Santana!

Santana had to agree on every decision with her and vice-versa. Kitty was becoming a constant
headache following Quinn around day after day. Already she heard the rumblings of discontent from
the younger Cheerios. Quinn and Rachel's friendship was suspiciously at the center of it all.
Apparently her ability to lead was called into question because how could Quinn command any kind
of respect if she was hanging out with the diva freak with two Dads?

Kitty was behind this and Quinn didn't need actual evidence to know the truth. She knew it was only
the beginning. Meanwhile, Santana was in complete denial. She argued with Quinn every time the
subject came up and always took Kitty's side.

"You can't prove it's her that's talking smack about us, Quinn. It could be any one of those idiotic
froshies. We just haven't pushed them hard enough yet. We've gone soft; they don't know that they're
supposed to fear us. Let's just up our game!"

"We have barely started the year and already we're getting this kind of backlash? There's something
serious going on here and I know she's the one behind it."

Santana folded her arms across her chest. "Prove it."

Quinn ended up leaving in a huff.

The only reason why Santana was standing against her on this was because Kitty was one of the
decisions she had made as solo captain during the summer. Admitting that she made a mistake with
this girl was, in her eyes, like admitting that she wasn't as good a captain as Quinn. Her stubborn
pride was getting in the way and Quinn didn't know how to fight it without doing something that
would ruin their friendship.
And it wasn't even just the Kitty problem. Cheerios took up so much more of her time than she remembered and in the fourteen days since school started, she'd only spent one night with Rachel. And that was when they went out to dinner with her fathers. Otherwise, she'd been too busy with practice, schoolwork, and mandatory church attendance, to spend any time with her girlfriend.

Quinn was going out of her mind.

The one, brief, shining moment out of the past couple weeks was when Finn got mega-slushied. Yes, she was immature enough to admit that she got a great deal of satisfaction out of that.

He'd been walking around the school like he was God's gift to the world because he had sex with some girl at the end of the summer. He'd been bragging about it to all the guys. Apparently one time with this poor girl was enough to make him think he was the best lay ever because he couldn't wipe the dopey, smug grin off his face. That is until eight Big Gulps filled with blue icy humiliation wiped it off for him.

Quinn had Santana to thank for that and it was definitely going to be one of the highlights of her year, to see Finn storming off, blue as a smurf, finally put back into his place.

"Nice job."

"Ugh. If I had to look at Lumps the Clown's smirk just one more time, I was going to vomit. I wish we knew who had the misfortune of getting smothered under that sweaty, out of breath, sack of potatoes soaked in body spray because I would send her flowers expressing my condolences."

"But, Santana," she drawled teasingly, "doesn't it bring back all those warm and fuzzy memories of that precious, intimate time you shared with him?"

"You mean all two seconds of it?" she spat. "No, thank you. I've blacked out the whole thing due to severe emotional trauma."

Quinn chuckled. "You're not getting any sympathy from me. At least I knew enough not to have sex with him."

"You banged Puckerman!"

"So did you," she replied calmly. "And of the two, which would you choose to do again, if you had to?"

She grimaced. "No contest...and point taken."

"Thank you."

"QUINN!"

They both looked up to see a very displeased Rachel walking up to them and the reprieve ended. Rachel lectured them both about how they should be above antics like this by now. Quinn pled innocence because while she approved of Santana's actions, she actually didn't have anything to do with it happening. So she couldn't be blamed for it.

That didn't help though. Rachel was still upset with her for condoning it and they didn't speak for the rest of the day.

Freaking Finn Hudson.
And Kitty Wilde.

And Santana Lopez.

Just when she thought this could actually be a good year...

When Quinn plopped in the chair next to her in Glee, looking like someone had swapped her regular coffee with decaf, Rachel sighed heavily. Quinn had been in this mood for weeks now and it didn't look like it was going to break anytime soon. She hadn't been very forthcoming about it, but Rachel knew it had something to do with one of the new Cheerios and Santana. Cheerleading politics wasn't exactly her forte, but if this was going to continue, she was not going to be pleased. Quinn rejoining the team was supposed to be something positive for her, something she wanted to do for herself before leaving this school, but if it was going to continue to put her in this dark mood, Rachel wasn't going to stand for it. She was, however, trying to give Quinn a little time to work it out before she really chose to intervene with this train that seemed to be stuck on the wrong track rattling towards disaster.

"Hey..." she put her hand on Quinn's forearm and leaned in to whisper against her ear, "my parents are going to be out for a while tonight. Think you can make it over to my house without falling asleep?"

Quinn chuckled softly at Rachel's teasing tone in her ear; the tension in her body seemed to release a little bit.

"That actually sounds perfect."

"And maybe this weekend I could tackle that challenge you set out for me..."

Quinn's cheeks flushed red at the thought and she turned her head away shyly. Although it had been her idea, it didn't stop the embarrassment when she heard Rachel say it aloud. Writing something and having it spoken were two very different things.

"T-that sounds like a plan."

Rachel giggled and trailed her fingers down the back of Quinn's exposed neck. Quinn almost moaned at how good it felt. Three and half weeks of nothing but restricted, in-school interactions, had deprived her of what felt as essential as oxygen...Rachel's touch.

"I'll light some candles..." she murmured against Quinn's ear, low enough so that no one else chattering around them could hear, "maybe give you a massage with those new scented oils I bought when we went shopping..."

Quinn shut her eyes as Rachel's voice washed over her, immersed in the touch of her fingers gently stroking along the bare skin at the nape of her neck. The image she was conjuring up for her was unbelievable...unbearable...and oh God!

So inappropriate right in the middle of Glee club!

Quinn gasped and her eyes snapped open, pulling herself out of the heady trance and moved away so that Rachel had to drop her hand. She looked around worriedly to see if any of the others had seen what Rachel was doing to her just then; she'd been so obliviously sucked into it...

But people were still filtering in, talking amongst themselves, and no one seemed to be paying any attention to Rachel and Quinn.
"Don't do that!" she whispered to Rachel harshly once she was sure no one had caught on.

"What?" she replied innocently. "I was just discussing our plans for the week. There's nothing wrong with that."

"You were trying to seduce me in the middle of class!"

Rachel smirked. "Trying? I believe I succeeded, Miss Fabray."

"Did not."

"So you don't want to meet me in the auditorium before your Cheerios practice later?"

"Shut up," Quinn muttered halfheartedly.

"Fine."

Rachel sat back and folded her arms across her chest. "I'll just go straight home then."

"Hey, guys! Everybody ready to get started?" Mr Schuester walked in, putting his bag on a chair instead of the piano because apparently Brad filed a complaint with Miss Pillsbury about 'a co-worker who consistently showed a lack of respect for his valuable time, effort, talent, and personal space'. "Who wants to go first today?"

Quinn looked at Rachel out of the corner of her eye and saw the hand start to go up. She leaned over and whispered, "You better meet me before practice or there will be hell to pay for that stunt, Berry."

Rachel looked at her in surprise, not expecting that forceful comeback, and her hesitation lost her the chance to go first because Blaine had jumped up happily in front of everyone. Narrowing her eyes, Rachel turned away, and Quinn smirked self-satisfactorily. She wasn't going to let Rachel get away with her little joke that easily.

But before she even had a chance to revel in her tiny victory, Rachel leaned across her lap, placing her hand high on the inside of Quinn's thigh to support herself as she asked Kurt some ridiculous question that Quinn couldn't even pull her head together enough to listen to. Rachel's fingertips were brushing ever so lightly against her center, well hidden under her Cheerios skirt. The scent of her hair filled Quinn's nose. She'd even moved it to one side so that all Quinn saw was the exposed flesh of her neck, just begging to be tasted. Her heart was pounding violently against her chest and she rolled her eyes back to the ceiling, trying to control her breathing.

Game, set, match: Rachel Berry.

This girl was going to be the death of her.

"So then I told Santana that if we were going to have sex later, she had to buy me a unicorn. Which she did right away, of course. She basically ran to the counter."

"You really shouldn't use sex against her like that. It's not a healthy thing for your relationship, Brittany."

Quinn pushed the door to the Cheerios locker room open and walked in ahead of her.

"But how were we going to do what we planned if she didn't buy it?"

"Why do you need a stuffed animal for...?"

*Wait. Maybe she didn't want to know the answer to that.*
"Stuffed animal?" Brittany echoed in bewilderment and then shook her head. "No, Santana gave me Norman the Stegosaurus Unicorn years ago for my birthday. I meant the unicorn horn from the sexy toys place we went to in Columbus last week. Santana was going to be my pony so how was that supposed to work without the magical horn?"

Quinn wanted the earth to open up and swallow her whole just so she didn't have to hear another word of this conversation. Brittany didn't notice the extreme discomfort Quinn was feeling at their topic of conversation and kept on chatting casually, shifting her Cheerios bag over her shoulder.

"Oh, speaking of sexy times, have you and Rachel started playing 'My Little Ponies' yet?"

Quinn nearly collided headfirst with a row of lockers.

Fortunately, or perhaps not so fortunately, she was spared from having to respond because the chatter they heard when they first walked in had grown louder. There were a bunch of girls in the back of the room, close to the showers, and Quinn's first thought was 'why doesn't Santana have them out on the field yet?' They took turns leading practices and today was Santana's day.

But then they were close enough that the echoing didn't distort the voices too much anymore so Quinn and Brittany could clearly hear everything that was being said.

"And that Rachel girl she's always with? Stuck to her like glue? What is up with that?"

Quinn's face turned to stone. That was Kitty's voice. She stopped just behind the row of lockers where the group of girls were talking on the other side. Brittany was right next to her, quietly listening in as well.

"It's been like that since last year," another girl said. Quinn knew it was one of the older ones. "They're friends from that weird singing group."

"Exactly! Don't you see how bad it is? They even have Coach Sylvester fooled. She fawns over the three of them and still lets them be in charge even though they're dragging us through the mud with their gross version of 'Freaks and Geeks: The Musical'!"

"It's not that bad, Kitty," a different girl chimed in. "I've heard them sing; they're kind of good."

"That is so not the point, Rebecca!" she said shrilly. "We have a reputation to uphold. One of our captains is already certified lezzer, but at least she's keeping it inside the family with the retard."

Quinn exchanged a look with Brittany and the other girl just looked sad, shrugging.

"Are you saying what I think you're saying?"

"Duh, yes! There is something seriously off with Quinn and that girl."

"You're totally cray cray. Quinn's not gay. She's dated some of the most popular guys in school! Like, Finn Hudson and Sam Evans. She even got knocked up by Puck!"

"Something many of us have narrowly escaped..."

There were several low, meek murmurs of agreement.

"Shut up!" Kitty snapped. "I'm not kidding. Don't you see what's happening here? Our captains are not only hanging out with the freaks, they are the freaks! We're risking the entire reputation of the squad! The Cheerios legacy is being destroyed with them in charge."
"Don't you think you're being just a little-?"

"Excuse me. Did I say you could speak?"

"Kitty, why don't you just shove it-"

"Oh, I see. You want me to tell everyone what happened over summer break, right? You know. How I saw everything?"

There was silence.

"No? Good. Maybe you should just keep your mouth shut from now on, Rebecca. Like I was saying, there's something seriously wrong about Quinn and this girl. I think it's high time we called her out on it."

"You want us to ask Quinn if she's sleeping with a girl?"

There was some nervous laughter ringing through the room.

"You are so new. You have no idea what Quinn Fabray could do to us. Santana is wicked scary, but Quinn..."

Another girl picked it up for her. "Quinn Fabray has been in charge since she was a sophomore. She purposely knocked Bianca Perry down on the last day of practice before Nationals so that she could have the top spot in the competition. And, she got it. Coach Sylvester made her Captain right before they announced our team the winner. She always tells us that Quinn Fabray is everything we can never be."

"Because we're not singing dykes?"

A few of them gasped; some giggled, but Quinn was pretty sure that a few remained silent out of fear.

"Maybe she's right," a younger one spoke up. "How is it going to look if both of our captains are lesbians? As Cheerios, we're supposed to get top pick of any guy we want! It's one of the perks, why half of us joined the team in the first place."

"That and the safety of never being at risk of getting slushied," another girl added.

"No guy will want to go near us if Quinn and Santana are making it look like the whole squad has turned gay! They'll ask to watch, but..."

"Look, even if Quinn is like that, Kitty, you don't know what you're in for. Quinn Fabray is legend. She always will be. You don't want to take her on."

"Oh, but sweetie...that's exactly what I'm gonna do. And every single one of you is going with me. Quinn's little secret isn't so secret anymore."

"You want to out her?"

"You still don't even know for sure-"

"It doesn't matter! Quinn Fabray is over, dead, and yesterday's trash. It's time for some fresh blood to run these halls. We're taking over."

"YOU LAZY BITCHES, GET YOUR ASSES OUT ON THAT FIELD NOW BEFORE I
HAVE YOU RUNNING DOUBLE SUICIDES FOR THE REST OF THE WEEK!" Santana's bellowing was deafening as it echoed through the locker room.

There was a mad scramble as the girls squeaked and tried to get their things together, rushing out to get to the field before Santana made good on that threat. Quinn yanked Brittany behind the shelves that held the Gatorade coolers and they hid there, unnoticed as six or seven girls went running past them. Kitty was the last to leave and she wasn't in any hurry.

It took all Quinn had not to go scratch that girl's eyes out right then and there. The door closed and the locker room was finally empty. Quinn and Brittany stepped out from their hiding place and Brittany turned to look at her with wide eyes.

"We have to tell Santana."

"I don't have to do anything," Quinn replied coldly, staring at the closed door ahead of them. "Santana lost that courtesy every single time she defended that scum sucking bitch."

"But she didn't know..."

It didn't matter. Quinn was already halfway out the door, leaving Brittany to run after her.

Santana was walking along the sidelines as she inspected the squad during their warm-ups. Sue wouldn't be joining them until the end when they went through the routines from start to finish so she could pick it apart and add new, crazy stunts for them to try the next day. While often dangerous and physically exhausting, this was how the Cheerios won Nationals seven years in a row (before breaking the streak last year when her best three squad members defected). Sue Sylvester was a nasty, horrible, scheming, psychotic, woman, but she knew how to win. She always held Quinn's admiration in that respect. Winners got to be on top; winners never had to kowtow to others. Winners – the undefeated – were a force to be reckoned with and the only way to get by in this world. Winners were respected.

Quinn had made a promise to herself a long time ago that she was always going to be one of them. She walked briskly up to the field, using every ounce of strength and willpower left within her to stay in control of her emotions. She had to.

"Listen up, girls!" she called out, hands set on her hips, and the squad looked up from their stretching warily.

They knew that tone.

They knew to fear it.

"I want everyone in line! NOW!"

They scrambled to their feet to fall into formation, shoulder-to-shoulder, in front of the blonde.

"What are you doing?" Santana ran up to her angrily. "This is my day, my practice, so back off!"

"Not anymore. I had a chat with Coach Sylvester and she gave me specific instructions to carry out. You don't like it? Take it up with her."

Not waiting for Santana's response, she strode out in front of the girls. "It's been painfully obvious from day one that many of you are not living up to Cheerio standards. Actually, that's being too kind.
A bunch of you - we'll find out who they are shortly - are disgusting messes that should never have been allowed the privilege of donning our colors. So, today, we'll be doing 'Darwin'."

The older girls gasped, looking at each other warily. The freshmen didn't quite understand what was happening.

'Darwin' was one of Sue's creations: survival of the fittest. It was a sudden death game where each girl had to pass a test on individual skills and if they didn't prove themselves worthy, they were cut. It had only ever been used during the summer, before the official cuts were made. The older girls understood that Quinn was going to get rid of some squad members today, but the freshmen were still too naïve at that point to know that their position on the Cheerios was never a sure thing. At any given time, anyone could be kicked out, if Sue was just having an off day, if they wobbled on the pyramid, or if they just didn't have their ponytail high enough.

*Anything.*

No one was ever safe, not even Quinn Fabray, as the past year had shown them.

"What the hell?" Santana snapped harshly against her ear. "You can't do that! I handpicked this team!"

Quinn glared at her so viciously, Santana actually flinched, moving away slightly.

"And now I'm going to fix your mess," she said in a clipped, icy tone. "You should be thanking me."

"Thanking you?" she cried. "You're doing exactly what you've always done! You're taking the team, my spot, my place, again! You haven't changed a bit, Q. I was an idiot for thinking you ever cared about anyone but yourself."

Quinn was unfazed. "Step back, Santana."

Looking murderous, the Latina reached out to grab Quinn by the back of her hair, but Brittany's hand was suddenly on her, pulling Santana away.

"No! Let go of me, Britt! You don't understand! She deserves to have that pretty face of hers eating turf!"

As angry as she was, struggling against Brittany's vise-like grip, she still couldn't bring herself to yell at her girlfriend. So it all came out in furious whispers.

"You don't understand!" she replied, hushed, and wrangled her around so Santana was forced to look at her. "You have to let Quinn do this. It's the right thing. I'll explain it all later, but San, you have to support her right now."

"Support her? She's kicking me out of my spot as Captain!"

"No, she's not! I swear, she's not."

"Brittany, you don't-"

"Trust me. You just have to trust me. Do you?"

Santana stopped fighting against her at once, the pleading look on Brittany's face was impossible to ignore and tugged at her heart.

"I-I do, Brittany," she said tightly, her gaze fell to the ground. "Of course, I do. But I don't get-"
Brittany didn't let her finish and instead she grabbed her hand, pulling Santana back over to the rest of the squad. The Latina still fumed, staring daggers at Quinn's back, but she stayed silent as Brittany stood between them, and waited while Quinn gave her instructions.

"...If you pass, you earn your place on this team, a place half of you barely deserve and the other half definitely don't deserve in the least, but we'll make do with some of you. The rest? Not anymore. We've been too lenient on you this season; you've forgotten what it is to be a Cheerio. That all changes now. I'm not going to Nationals, let alone a simple exhibition competition, with this pathetic excuse for a cheerleading squad. If I think you suck, you're done. You'll hand in your uniform by the end of practice today and there are no second chances. Don't screw up. Becky!"

The girl came running up from the bleachers where she was watching, always watching, as Sue's eyes and ears.

"What up, bitch?"

Quinn rolled her eyes and held out her hand. "Clipboard."

"Why?"

"Because I said so."

"I'll tell Coach."

Quinn narrowed her eyes at her. "Be my guest, but you'll be giving me the clipboard first."

Becky scoffed. "You suck, Fabray."

But she still handed her the clipboard before walking away, presumably to go tell Sue.

Quinn didn't care. She scanned the list of all the squad members quickly and started to call out names. The first girl was a freshman and just so happened to be one of the voices she recognized in the locker room. She had her do a full layout and when the girl was finished, she chuckled, told her that a one legged gorilla could have been more graceful, and sent her to one side of the field. The same happened again and again until most of the freshmen were standing huddled in one group, each one told how unworthy they were.

"Rebecca Mallick!"

One of the taller Cheerios with dark hair in a long ponytail frowned at hearing her name and stepped forward nervously. "Quinn, seriously? I'm a junior. I've been here for three seasons already..."

"So that means you should be three times better than everyone else," she said simply and waved for her to go.

Feeling like she was done for, Rebecca sighed and took her turn. When she walked back over to Quinn, she had her hands clasped tightly behind her back, eyes cast down, as she waited to be ripped to shreds like every one of the other girls before her.

Instead, Quinn nodded approvingly, marking the clipboard.

"And that's why you're still here. Take a seat on the bench."

Rebecca stared at her in shock before breaking into a huge smile and ran over to the bench as fast as she could.
"NEXT!" Quinn called out.

Santana's venomous gaze was fading now and instead she watched Quinn with curiosity, not to mention confusion, as time went by.

Soon, the bench had more girls added to it, but there was still a group on the field. Every time they had to perform another skill, the more pressure there was to perform, and the more they started screwing up. Whenever Kitty stepped up to take her turn, Quinn's knuckles turned white with how tightly she gripped the clipboard, but still her face remained expressionless. She would simply tell Kitty it was subpar and order her back on the field. With each skill test, Kitty started to get angrier and angrier as she was sent back to the dwindling group instead of the bench.

When Quinn called a halt, there were three girls left, two freshman and one sophmore. Kitty was so angry and embarrassed, her face was bright red and her nostrils flared out like a bull's. Of course, it was no coincidence that the other two girls had also been present at Kitty's little locker pow-wow. Quinn remembered them giggling and chiming in with eagerness.

"Walk off this field and hand over your uniforms to Coach Sylvester immediately. You are no longer a Cheerio. You never should have been one."

Quinn leveled her gaze at Kitty before turning her back to her and walked towards what was left of the squad sitting anxiously a little further away.

"That's not fair!" Kitty cried.

Quinn looked over her shoulder, raising her eyebrow, and smirked. She never said a word. The other two girls had already started back towards the locker room in tears.

"You bitch!" Kitty shrieked. "You can't do this to me! I'll go to Coach! I'll tell her-"

Santana came out of nowhere, stepping right into Kitty's personal space.

"You're gonna tell her what?" she mocked. "Sue gave us her stamp of approval for this decision. You were tested, you flunked. You're out. It's that simple. Now get your pathetic mess of an existence off my damn field before I have you tossed off it!"

Kitty looked like she was gearing up to say something, but the look in Santana's eyes made her second guess that decision. After a few moments of turning purple and getting flustered, she finally relented and stormed off the field.

Watching her go gave Quinn the most relief she'd felt since rejoining the Cheerios, not to mention the immense satisfaction about her revenge. She had just congratulated the rest of the squad for earning their spots again and dismissed them for the day when Santana came up behind her.

"You gonna tell me what the hell that was all about?"

Quinn sighed, sitting down on the cold metal, letting the fury she'd been keeping bottled up for hours finally dissipate. She relayed everything she'd heard earlier in the locker room, only when she got to what Kitty said about Brittany, the taller blonde was shaking her head no behind Santana imploringly. Quinn understood why; Brittany didn't want Santana to get in trouble. If she knew what Kitty had called Brittany, the only result was going to be a guaranteed suspension, if not expulsion, for Santana depending on how far she went. You never hurt Brittany Pierce without having to answer to Santana Lopez for it.

When Quinn was finished, Santana sat down next to her on the bench with a thump. She hunched
forward guiltily with her hands clasped between her legs. Brittany disappeared to return the clipboard to Becky and hopefully get them back on the girl's good side.

"I screwed up."

"Yes, you did."

"You're not trying to be solo Captain again?"

"No. I said we'd share it and that's what we're going to do from here on out. I'm going to respect your opinion and you're going to respect mine."

"That bitch..."

"Is gone," Quinn finished for her curtly. "It's over."

"I'm not so sure."

"What?"

"You saw her." Santana jerked her thumb back towards the building. "That girl was Carrie at the Prom psycho. I don't think she's going to let this go, especially not after you just ruined her social status for the next four years here."

Quinn's eyes narrowed. "You think she'll still try to come after me? Without the protection of the Cheerios?"

"I think she's crazy enough to try."

She shook her head with a sigh. "I can handle it."

"We will handle it."

"We?"

"Yeah, Quinn. I got your back." She shrugged sheepishly and added, "From here on out..."

Quinn nodded. "Does that mean you'll back me up when I go to Sue and tell her we have to hold tryouts to fill three spots?"

Her eyes widened. "You mean you didn't actually get permission from her?"

She shook her head laughingly and Santana groaned, muttering in Spanish.

"I hate you, Quinn Fabray."

"Is that a yes or a no?"

Santana sighed, stood up, and crossed her arms over her chest.

"Let's do this before I change my mind," she said, rolling her eyes. "We're gonna get reamed."

"It's worth it."

She shrugged noncommittally, but Quinn knew she agreed.

Brittany bounded over to them. "So did you guys kiss and make up?"
Quinn and Santana screwed up their faces in mirrored images of disgust.

"There was no kissing, Britt."

"Bummer. Kissing is the best part."
When the doorbell rang that evening, Rachel knew exactly who it was without even understanding how she knew exactly who it was.

"Hi! I mi-"

Quinn launched forward and lifted her off her feet in a deep kiss. When Rachel was standing again, it didn't really feel like standing. She had to lean against Quinn for support and curled her arms around her neck. Her head was spinning. It always did after one of Quinn's kisses.

All the pretty colors...

"B-best...best hello ever." Her voice was thick as she struggled to speak. "Puts my pitiful little 'hi' to shame."

Quinn's eyes twinkled happily and she kissed her again, just a sweet little chaste one this time, but Rachel felt it all the way down to her toes.

"You fixed things on the Cheerios today, didn't you?" she murmured knowingly and rested her forehead against Quinn's.

The tension she'd felt between them in the past few weeks was blissfully ebbing away with each passing moment, carried away with Quinn's reassuring touch. However inadvertent, her girlfriend's stress had become hers, just as Rachel's stress was Quinn's. They carried each other's burdens without meaning to. Their lives were beginning to entwine in ways they weren't fully cognizant of yet.

Quinn just hummed contentedly in response. She may have put Rachel down, but that didn't mean she let her go. Her arms were around Rachel's waist, hugging her tightly against her.

"I'm glad. I was planning to have you forcibly removed from the team if you didn't figure it out soon."

"What did you have in mind?" Quinn replied huskily. It came across as playful at first, but the shiver that went down Rachel's spine at the sound of her voice was undeniable. Quinn always knew just what to do to set her off.

"N-nothing concrete just yet, just some vague ideas that involved some rope, a blindfold, perhaps a brainwashing machine..."

"Uhuh..." Quinn smirked, "sounds like you really had a plan there. Shame you can't put it to use now."

"I could," Rachel swallowed thickly, "I could make some adjustments...perhaps..."

"Perhaps..." she echoed with a teasing nod and leaned in for another kiss.

"RACHEL!"

They broke apart with a start at the booming voice that echoed from somewhere inside the Berry
"While I appreciate that you have an absolutely sensational girlfriend that your father and I both adore beyond compare, it still doesn't mean that you get to make out with her in the doorway where we can both hear you. And you're letting all the heat out. Suck face on your own time and dime, little girl."

"Suck face? Really?" another voice replied faintly.

"What? That lingo's still in...isn't it?"

Rachel groaned and pulled Quinn into the house, shutting the door behind them.

"You are just the worst killjoy ever, Dad."

"It's what I do, sweetheart!"

She mouthed 'I'm sorry', but Quinn just smiled and kissed her on the cheek before going into the den to greet the Berry men.

They held tryouts the next week and filled the three open spots on the squad. Sue was livid when she found out what happened, but when Santana came clean about Kitty's behavior, she backed off...a little bit anyway. Sue may have hated the fact that she had to go through the extra work, but she hated dissension even more. It was better to be handled now rather than a month down the line during competition season when the squad's performance would suffer because of it. Winning was, and always would be, the most important thing.

So Quinn and Santana had to sit through an hour of verbal abuse, half of which was more disturbing and nonsensical than it was insulting, but they were relieved to be done with it at the end all the same. Two of the girls they recruited were decent and the other was a transfer that didn't even have the opportunity to try out the first time. It turned out that she was three times as good as the others they had kicked out so it ended up improving the squad all around.

Kitty was nowhere to be seen at school and Quinn expected as much. It wasn't easy to show your face when you've been publicly humiliated and cut from the school's most prestigious athletic organization. This wasn't the lame ass football team. The Cheerios were the ones who made the school money. The Cheerios had the largest average number of students recruited for major universities, and the Cheerios were the ones that had an alumni filled with Ivy League graduates, politicians, and CEO's of Fortune 500 companies. The only thing worse than trying out for the Cheerios and not making it was being cut from the Cheerios...twice the exposure, twice the humiliation, twice the harassment from the rest of the student body.

Quinn didn't feel the least bit sorry about any of it. Kitty deserved it.

Practices went back to normal; the rumblings of discontent disappeared. And Quinn was able to find more of a balance in leading the team alongside Santana. They even started to cover for each other so that instead of being there for every practice, they would alternate and be there every other day. With the extra days free, Quinn got to spend more time with Rachel after school. And she could finally say she knew what Rachel Berry looked like in a Cheerios uniform. It was an image she was going to blissfully carry with her for the rest of her life.

Things were finally looking up.
It happened so suddenly and it'd been so long, Rachel almost didn't realize what it was that had happened. But it came back quickly enough.

She'd been retrieving some books from her locker in between periods and when she turned...the next thing that registered was the icy slap against her face, the liquid dripping off her, slipping into her bra, staining her books and her clothes beyond repair.

She'd been slushied. Cherry red.

It hadn't happened in over a year, but the cruel taunting and laughter from the jocks as they strode off propelled her back to that time in the blink of an eye. She wasn't Rachel Berry, the senior that led the Glee club, the inevitable lead in the school musical, and was dating Quinn Fabray. She was Rachel Berry, the sophomore diva loser that got a slushie treatment at least once a week from various sports teams that thought it was their turn to put her in her social place that day.

She wiped the slushie out of her eyes carefully and took a deep breath to make sure she didn't cry. It took her so off guard, she didn't have her usual wall up to prepare for this.

Then it all changed again.

She barely had a chance to move before she heard a fight break out behind her, cutting off the mocking laughter of the guys who had just thrown the slushies in her face. Spinning around, she stared in disbelief at Santana who was verbally assaulting one of the boys while Sam standing toe to toe with the other. It all happened so fast, she just blinked and suddenly it was a giant brawl happening before her with more and more people jumping in from both sides. Rachel could only stand there, stupefied, until Kurt and Tina came running up and ushered her away into the bathroom to clean up (and for her own safety since the fight was getting out of hand). Mike, Puck, and Finn all jumped in to help Sam and Santana, while Brittany and Mercedes were caught off on the side, helpless.

"What just happened?" Rachel asked in disbelief as Kurt wiped some of the sticky red ice out of her hair.

"Quinn mandated last year that you were off limits. When Santana saw that you got hit, she went ballistic."

"And not just her usual, angry Spanish-speaking way, but like, serious rage," Tina added, patting a damp paper towel at Rachel's shirt.

"Sam got right into Azimio's face. He took one look at you and lost it just like Santana. Didn't take long for the Cro-Magnons to start swinging."

"When Rick 'The Stick' Nelson actually pushed Santana, Mike lunged for him. There's no way he was gonna let those guys put their hands on her like that."

"When Mike jumped in, so did the others. I don't know what's happening now-"

"I heard Beiste just as we were leaving," Tina interjected. "She probably broke it up quickly."

"I'm just glad Blaine was on the other side of school. I don't need him going home with a black eye. His parents would blame it on the perils of public school and try to put him back into Dalton."

"I can't believe they defended me like that..."

"Of course they did, Rachel," Tina said softly. "We're family, we look out for each other now."
Rachel glanced up at her in the mirror before staring down at the sink again. "I've just never...had that..." she said shyly and with a hint of awe in her voice.

"Well, you need to come up with a plan and fast," Kurt said, bursting her little bubble of a moment. "The second Quinn gets wind of this, Santana Lopez's Lima Heights smack down will look like child's play."

"Oh my God! Quinn!" Rachel exclaimed, her eyes going wide at the realization, and she sprang to life. She reached for the towel dispenser and started ripping out as many as she could, leaving more than a few on the floor, and frantically started wiping herself off.

"She's so going to lose it when she sees you..." Tina muttered.

Rachel knew just how right she was, probably more than Tina even realized. There was no way to hide the stains on her shirt. She could sneak her books away and wash the rest of it out of her hair, but she had no change of clothes in school. Her previously white blouse was now soaked through with a sticky red substance. It's not like she would lie to Quinn about what happened, but having her see the aftermath would only make her angrier.

"She can't get herself in trouble over this! Santana might very well be suspended for her part in that fight and if Quinn gets herself suspended too, she could be risking her chances of getting into college!"

"You'll have to talk her down, explain that they already got what they deserved from the other guys."

Rachel swung around on him. "Have you even met Quinn Fabray?"

He winced. "Ah, yeah..."

"But Quinn has a cooler head than Santana. She's not exactly gonna go start a schoolyard rumble," Tina reasoned.

"I didn't say she was going to start a fistfight," Kurt replied with a raise of his eyebrow. "Quinn is more than capable of getting revenge without the use of physicality, as we three well know..."

"He's right," Rachel said, frenetically trying to get the sticky red syrup out of her hair by ducking her head under the faucet. "I have to stop her before she does something she'll regret."

"It's just because she wants to protect you now, Rachel. She's trying to make up for the past. You can't be mad at her for wanting to do that."

"I realize that, Kurt," she replied through gritted teeth.

Who was he to tell her about Quinn and what they've been through?

"But it doesn't change the fact that if she gets in trouble and Coach Sylvester can't help her out of it, then she's risking our future together for just some stupid jocks dumping an ice drink on me!"

"I don't get it." Tina shook her head. "Quinn is Captain of the Cheerios again. The only other person who could have gotten away with doing that is Santana, and from the way she reacted in the hall, I'm pretty convinced it wasn't her. Why did those guys risk Quinn and Santana's wrath? They're idiots, but they're idiots who take orders."
"I've never known Azimio to go against the Cheerios and the hockey team worships Quinn..." Kurt agreed with a nod. "I don't get it either."

"Well, it doesn't matter why! I just need to clean the rest of this off and find Quinn before she gets herself into trouble."

Kurt and Tina helped her as quickly as they could, still patting Rachel down as she ran out the bathroom door to find her girlfriend.

The halls were abuzz when Quinn left her meeting with the student adviser about what schools she would be applying to. He seemed pretty confident about her chances of leaving Lima and going to practically any school in the country. He even seemed optimistic about the possibility for an academic scholarship! All she had to do was talk to Miss Pillsbury next and get some forms signed before she started filling out her applications.

She'd walked out of the meeting with a smile on her face, excited to tell Rachel, but the odd tension in the halls and furious chatter from the rest of the student body was suspicious. Something had gone down, but she had no idea what. When she spotted one of the older Cheerios, Rebecca, down the row of lockers, she called out to her. Rebecca turned around from her group of friends and her eyes widened to see Quinn. Quickly, she jogged over to her, looking more nervous than usual.

"Quinn, I had nothing to do with it, I swear! I don't know how it happened..."

"What are you talking about?" she snapped, growing more worried by the second. "What happened?"

"Y-you don't know?"

She raised her eyebrows to show that, no, obviously she did not know.

Rebecca nodded sheepishly and scrambled to explain. "Well, I didn't see it happen myself, but the whole school has heard about it by now. I heard it from one of the sophomore girls on the squad, Avery...wait, is her name Avery or is Gabrielle? I can never remember. She's like this tall and-"

"Seriously? Quinn snapped in disbelief.

"Right, sorry, her name doesn't matter. Avery...or Gabrielle...whatever...told me that she saw Rachel Berry get slushied by two jocks."

Quinn's jaw went rigid, but she didn't say a word. Rebecca kept going.

"And when Santana saw it happen, she went ballistic. They broke a Cheerio mandate and she called the boys out on it. Then all of a sudden they got into a huge fight! Fists flying and everything! Coach Beiste broke it up eventually, but hauled everyone that was involved in the fight into Principal Figgins' office. Word is that they'll all be suspended for fighting on school grounds, possibly expelled after the pressure from the board about the 'zero tolerance' policy."

"You're telling me that Santana Lopez got into a fistfight with the boys?" Quinn asked slowly in disbelief.

"It wasn't just her. A bunch of those guys from Glee club got into it. Gabrielle, er, Avery, whatever, said she saw Sam Evans take Azimio down with one hit."

"Sam was fighting?" she echoed dully.
"Yeah! The captain of the hockey team, one of the guys who had the slushie, shoved Santana and that's when it went off the rails."

"Okay." Quinn took a deep breath, looking around at the whispering masses in the hall before turning back to Rebecca. "Listen to me carefully. You need to get the rest of the squad, round up everyone that saw the guy put his hands on Santana first, and then send them straight to Principal Figgins' office. We can't have Santana suspended and if he hit her first, then it's self-defense. Got it?"

Rebecca nodded quickly.

"So go. Now! We need as many witnesses as possible so Figgins can't do anything about it. Coach will handle things from her end, but we take care of our Captain, right?"

"Right!" She nodded vigorously. "I'm on it, Quinn!"

Rebecca ran off, grabbing every Cheerio in the hall and whispered orders in their ears. Quinn took another deep breath and walked off to find Rachel.

She passed the waiting room to Principal Figgins' office first and saw the crowd that was jammed inside. Nearly half the Glee club was in there in various states of dishevelment. Walking in without a word, she went up to Santana who was sitting in between Puckerman and Sam. Santana was holding an ice pack to her cheek. Sam had his head back with tissues wadding his bloody nose and a bag of ice on top – there was dried blood on his shirt. Puck looked a little roughed up, but nothing serious. Mike was on the end with an ice pack on his head and his lip split open.

"Where is she?" she asked tersely.

None of them knew.

Santana chuckled derisively. "You definitely missed a good time though."

"Yeah, I'll catch the next one," she replied with a roll of her eyes. "What happened?"

"They slushi-fied Rachel," Puck answered. "Ain't no way that shit was going down without an answer to it. Not anymore."

"You used to be one of the guys who did it!" Quinn shot at him bitterly.

"'zi wund crady ader dad," Sam mumbled, nearly indecipherable.

"I wasn't going to let them have their asses handed to them by those losers so I jumped in," Puck added. "Finn got his head slammed against the water fountain so he's still in the nurse's office while they decide if he needs stitches. Good thing Azimio is already guaranteed a concussion courtesy of my boy, Trouty Mouth!"

Sam pumped his fist in the air wearily.

"Hockey players fight like a girl. Nelson went for my weave!" Santana waved at her usually flawless
hair that was in total disarray. "You should have heard his little weepy screech when I came out of it with a handful of his stank ass mullet. You're a better hair puller than him, Q, and that's not saying much."

"High 'fid, dude," Sam said proudly, holding his hand up.

Pleased with herself, Santana slapped his hand with a laugh.

Quinn scoffed, stared at them for a moment, and then walked out without so much as a word, leaving behind a baffled and beaten up group.

"What was that?" Mike asked, bewildered. "I thought she'd be thanking us. We were defending Rachel. Why isn't she grateful?"

"Don't ask, man," Puck sighed. "If high school's taught me anything, it's that no one is ever gonna figure out Quinn Fabray."

Sam nodded in agreement, but it wasn't that noticeable because he still had his head tilted back so he didn't drip any more blood on his shirt.

"That bitch..." Santana muttered and rolled her eyes, sitting back in her chair.

Rachel saw her as just a flash of red, white, and blonde as she passed down the opposite end of the hallway, but the way she walked, the way she held herself, she knew it was Quinn even with only a half-second glance at her.

"QUINN!"

She started running to catch her and Quinn reappeared quickly, obviously anxious to see her. When they met, Quinn grabbed her by the forearms and looked her up and down, scrutinizing every inch to assess the damage. Rachel prayed that she had gotten most of the syrup out of her hair because her top was beyond salvation. She looked like she'd escaped a massacre.

Quinn was breathing heavily and her eyes were darker than usual, but her voice was as calm as could be. It was actually very confusing for Rachel to hear that in contrast to the rigidity of Quinn's body language which screamed a raging Quinn Fabray.

"Are you all right?"

"I'm fine. It's not about me. They got into this huge fight-!"

"I know," she said quickly, cutting her off. "I saw them. I have the girls on the squad working on a way to get them out of trouble; don't worry."

"I need you to promise me that you wo-"

Quinn took her hand and started walking. "Come on. We need to get you a change of clothes."

"I don't have a spare outfit today," she admitted forlornly. "I stopped bringing them when..."

Quinn turned her head to flash her a smile that didn't quite reach her eyes, but it was something at least. "I told you not to worry. I have clothes you can borrow. They're in the locker room. Forget about class; it's almost lunch time anyway."

"We had plans to go eat in the park today," Rachel said disappointedly.
"We'll do that tomorrow."

"It's going to rain tomorrow."

"Then we'll do it on Friday."

"Promise?"

"Of course."

"Are you also going to promise-"

"It might be a good idea to take this time to shower in there if you want, get all of the syrup out of your hair. No one will be in there so you'll have all the privacy you need."

Rachel huffed in exasperation. "You're not even going to let me talk about it, are you?"

Quinn just continued to lead her quickly through the halls and across the school to the locker rooms. She refused to meet Rachel's eyes.

"Are you sure no one is going to come in?" Rachel said over the sound of the running water from the shower. "It would be suspicious to find me in here naked and you just...there."

Quinn stuck her head around the corner of a row of lockers. "I locked the door. We're safe. Finish up."

She disappeared again and Rachel frowned.

"Where did you get a key to the locker room?"

"Santana, Sue, and I are the only three with keys," Quinn answered from somewhere deeper in the room.

"Another Cheerio perk," she nodded thoughtfully, "I could get used to this, dating someone in a position of power."

"Don't let it go to your head."

"Well, if we're so safe...why don't you join me?" Rachel tried hopefully.

"Not that safe."

Sighing, Rachel let the hot water rinse away what was left of her slushie encounter. She wasn't even really bothered by the whole thing except that it had ruined one of her new shirts she'd bought over the summer. A slushie facial was nothing new to her, and she could easily brush it off by now. It wasn't always so easy, of course, but now she had friends. She had Quinn and she had the Glee club, people whom she could truly call her friends. It made all the difference in the world. So who cared if some idiot boys felt like trying to hurt her feelings today? They didn't mean anything to her, not anymore. She was going somewhere and they were going to be Lima Losers.

Honestly, she could forgive them for brashly acting out, because she couldn't imagine how terrible it would be to face the prospect of living your entire life in Lima, Ohio. She'd never worried about that. Leaving this town was always a given. Her voice would take her away from here as long as she worked hard enough and wanted it enough. Lima was too small for one Rachel Berry.
Quinn was right last year. It'd taken some time for her to accept it, but she had. Rachel was going to win, those boys were going to lose. It was just a shame her poor top had to be a casualty of the actions of sore losers.

As she turned off the water and wrapped a towel around her waist, exiting the showers, Rachel only had one concern on her mind: Quinn.

Her girlfriend hadn't gone completely off the rails as she had expected, but there was still something very off about Quinn's behavior. She wasn't freaking out, but she wasn't exactly 'Quinn' either. Rachel really needed to fix this and fast because the sooner they could put this behind them, the closer New York would be, with nothing to threaten either of their chances.

For the first time in her life, Rachel Berry wanted absolutely no drama. She'd rather be bored to tears this year than have anything get in the way of her leaving this town with the only person she wanted to leave with. If anyone from Glee heard her say that out loud, she was certain she would be witnessing a jaw hit the floor. But people change!

And the drama would only be tamped down until they were free and she could go back to living her life to the fullest with every intention of being the biggest, unselfish, fabulous diva she was!

"All clean?" Quinn asked, looking up from her book from where she sat on the bench.

"I admit I do feel properly rejuvenated now. The showers are far more effective than having to wash my hair in the sink in the girl's bathroom."

Quinn didn't respond. She just set her book aside and stood up, opening her locker to retrieve the dress she had brought today to change into for their, now postponed, lunch-in-the-park date.

"It's a little small on me so it won't be that bad for you. I'll tighten the waist with this belt." She held up the belt that Rachel wore to school today. It was wiped clean of any slushie remains.

"Are you really just going to ignore me every time I try to bring it up?"

"I'm not ignoring you," Quinn replied half-heartedly and took the dress off the hanger, motioning for Rachel to take the towel off.

"No."

"What?"

Rachel folded her arms across her chest and leaned against the lockers.

"I'm not making another move until you stop avoiding the subject and being...unQuinn-like."

"Rachel, just get dressed," she said exasperatedly.

"Nope."

"Fine." Quinn shrugged and stepped towards her. "I'll just dress you myself then."

Rachel squealed and darted away from Quinn's grasp, leaping over the bench to put a barrier between them.

"I am a grown woman and I can certainly dress myself!"

Quinn jumped over the bench as well.
"Apparently not," she shot back, "since you're refusing to do it!"

Rachel's demeanor grew subdued and she held out her hands firmly to make Quinn stop lunging for her.

"I just want to talk about this once and then we don't have to revisit the subject again."

Quinn stopped with a heavy sigh and ran her hands through her hair. She wouldn't meet Rachel's eyes.

"Don't get me wrong, I'm very relieved that you're not completely freaking out and keeping your composure instead of going off half-cocked and getting yourself in trouble, but you're also not exactly yourself...you're worrying me. I don't like it. I don't know what's going on inside your head. I don't know what you're thinking or planning. I just...I really need you to talk to me."

Quinn stared at her for a long moment, bunching up the dress in her fists. She seemed to be waging a battle inside her head and Rachel was waiting to see which side would win out.

But apparently she didn't have a clue who was participating in this battle inside Quinn's head because the next thing she knew, she was shoved against the lockers with Quinn grasping her naked ass and hoisting her up so she would wrap her legs around her waist. She never got to say a word because Quinn's lips were pressed against hers insistently and instinct won out over reason.

Warning bells went off in her head when Quinn ripped away her towel, leaving her utterly exposed in the school locker room. The door may have been locked but the risk of exposure was far too high for Rachel to ignore, even with how much her body fought reason.

"Wait," she gasped between kisses, "we can't."

"Can."

That was all she got in return before Quinn's hand was between her legs.

Groaning, Rachel tossed her head back and banged it against the lockers a little too hard. Quinn was a woman on a mission and if she didn't do something soon, she was going to lose what little sense she had left and forget that they were supposed to stop this.

"S-someone could walk in!"

Quinn didn't care.

"We're in public even if it's," she gasped as Quinn bit her throat while rubbing her fingers expertly against Rachel's core, "not s-so public!"

Quinn still didn't care.

She wanted to fuck Rachel right there and then and it didn't seem like anything was going to stop her.

By now, Rachel usually would have been long gone, having happily, inevitably, excitedly given in despite her better judgment about their location, but there was still one thing that kept her from falling away completely...one thing that was just off...one thing that didn't feel normal.

Quinn.

It wasn't that she was being too aggressive or that she wanted to have sex at school or even how she
refused to answer Rachel. That wasn't different. Quinn got that way sometimes and Rachel loved it. It was an incredible turn on whenever Quinn decided she had to have her and it felt like they'd both go crazy if they didn't have sex right then and there. She loved her Lion Quinn.

But this wasn't her Lion Quinn. This was someone else.

Every touch was just a little too hard. Every kiss was a little too bruising. Every grunt, groan, or gasp was just a little too foreign. This wasn't just Quinn wanting her; this was Quinn trying to escape into her, and there was something in the air around them that just made it all feel too strange for Rachel to truly let go under Quinn's ministrations.

"No," she said more firmly this time and reached between them to still Quinn's hand. The blonde looked at her with a mixture of confusion and desperation which made Rachel all the more certain that she was right. "Not here, Quinn. Not now."

Swallowing thickly, Quinn nodded, relenting. She couldn't seem to bring herself to let go of Rachel yet though, still holding her there against the lockers, Rachel's legs wrapped securely around her waist. She exhaled shakily, her head down so that she didn't have to look Rachel in the eye.

But, of course, Rachel wasn't having any of that. She slipped her finger underneath Quinn's chin and lifted up until she could kiss her sweetly. Quinn sighed when Rachel pulled away, some of the tension in her shoulders leaving. She hesitated for a moment, eyes closed, and then pressed her lips to Rachel's again. It wasn't demanding or passionate; it didn't have a single trace of what was there only moments ago. Instead it was just soft, loving, and a little bit remorseful.

When they finally broke apart, Rachel was smiling and Quinn rested her forehead against hers, seeking comfort.

"I'm so sorry," she whispered.

"It's okay," she shook her head reassuringly, "I know this upset you."

"Not that," Quinn said brusquely and removed Rachel's legs from her waist so that her feet were touching the floor again.

She pulled out of her embrace to go pick up the towel she had tossed a few feet away. When she came back, Rachel had her arms wrapped around herself a little self-consciously, and Quinn quickly put the towel around her so that she was modestly covered up again.

"What are you sorry for then?"

"For what happened to you today."

Rachel reached out, but Quinn evaded her, and sat down on the bench. Rachel just stayed where she was.

"It wasn't your fault, Quinn. You didn't make that happen," she said reflexively with a roll of her eyes and then she stopped herself. "Wait...did you?"

"I did," she replied unflinchingly with a nod. "It's because of me that they went after you."

"What are you talking about? Like you ordered the hit on me or...?"

"I might as well have."
"Quinn!" She slid next to her on the bench and grabbed the blonde's hand, refusing to let her pull away this time. "Stop it! Tell me exactly what happened because I know you didn't do this."

"I did. But it's okay. I'm going to handle it. I'll make it up to you, I promise."

"Wait. Handle what? What are yo-"

Quinn reached for the forgotten dress on the floor and handed it to Rachel before standing up suddenly.

"You should get dressed. Lunch is almost over."

"What...?"

Quinn walked away without another word.

"Wait!" Rachel scrambled to pull the dress over her head as she followed after her. "What are you talking about? What happened? Get away from that door and tell me everything right now, Quinn Fabray!"

A week later, everyone was in the clear. Everyone from the Glee club, that is. Azimio and Rick 'The Stick' were suspended for three days. Principal Figgins was forced to let the others off due to the overwhelming number of witnesses that testified that they saw Azimio and Rick throw the first punches. The conclusion was unavoidable; the Glee club kids acted in self-defense, and there was no way around it, no matter how much the school board protested. Sue was also on their side because she refused to allow half of her Cheerio Captain team get a black mark on her record like that. It would have prevented Santana from participating in any cheerleading competition for the rest of the season. Figgins was overwhelmed, outnumbered, and just plain bullied by the end of it, to let the others go without reprimand.

Quinn was surprised he put up a fight at all considering what the general student body got away with on a daily basis. He really did like to pick and choose his battles for his own convenience...

Either way, they were all in the clear. Now it was just a matter of making sure the person behind it all got what was coming to her as well.

"Phase one is in the bag!" Santana announced happily as she plopped down in the chair next to Quinn in the cafeteria. Brittany joined them as well, grabbing Santana's juice for herself without a word. Santana didn't bat an eye.

"What's phase one?" Rachel asked with a hint of wariness.

A happy Santana meant either a freshman was crying in a bathroom somewhere or that she'd just spent some "special" time alone with Brittany... With the way Brittany was disinterestedly moving her food around and the evil glint in Santana's eyes, she was willing to bet it was the former.

"Nothing you need to concern yourself with," she shot back.

Sighing, Rachel turned to the one person she knew would give her answers. "Quinn?"

The blonde shifted in her seat uncomfortably and Rachel knew this wasn't going to be an answer she liked.

"We..." Quinn started, then huffed and sat up straight in her seat so she could face Rachel with as
much confidence as possible. "I told you I wasn't going to do anything to get myself in trouble, but I'm not letting Kitty get away with what she did to you, Rachel."

"It was just a slushie, Quinn! One stupid time. I've endured more than my fair share, so one measly ice slap is hardly worth-"

"She broke the rules," Santana interjected fiercely. "Quinn said you were off limits so you're off limits! No one gets to break that. So they're paying the price. It's not just about you; it's about respect and keeping the status quo. So get over yourself. Quinn may have a personal stake in this, but for me, this is about maintaining order."

"And what exactly have you done to 'maintain order' this time?"

"Let's just say the rumor mill is doing God's good work right now and by the end of the day, not a single member of the male species will allow their precious One-Eyed-Wonder-Weasel within ten feet of her..."

"You didn't..." Rachel covered her mouth in horror.

She chuckled. "Oh, I did."

"She really did," Brittany chimed in, nodding her head, and stuffed a cookie in her mouth.

"Now, let's discuss phase two." Santana jabbed the plastic fork she was using at Quinn. "My cousin Pedro knows a guy from the Lima Tire Factory who knows a guy from the floor who can break into her house during school hours and put Nair into her shampoo. It's perfect! She'll have to wear a wig for the next two years. And before you say anything! I've already worked out a deal. He doesn't want money. I'm just gonna give him a good show of the Wonder Twins," she gestured to her chest, "for 20 seconds."

Quinn shrugged noncommittally while Rachel was becoming increasingly more horrified and disgusted with every word that exited Santana's mouth.

"Oh, please. Save me the sanctimonious attitude, Berry. I've got a luscious, bouncy set, and no reason not to show them off, unlike your little mosquito bites that Quinn is sickeningly obsessed with. Besides, it's for a good cause! I never would have said yes if he asked to see Brittany's."

Rachel scoffed incredulously. "Well, it's nice to know you at least have some moral boundaries left?"

"I don't know why you'd be so worried about it, San. I don't mind. And my boobs are totally awesome to look at too."

"Of course they are, Britt," she replied. "They're better than mine and no one knows that better than me. We'd be overpaying him if he ever got to see you."

Brittany flashed her the biggest smile and bumped their shoulders lightly before going back to her lunch, but Santana couldn't tear her gaze away and watched her adoringly.

"Quinn," Rachel turned back to her girlfriend imploringly, "stop this. You don't need to ruin this girl's life! Especially not in this underhanded...despicable...harpy-like way! This year was supposed to be about change. You both have the power to do things differently instead of adhering to the old traditions and humiliating our peers just because you can. You have nothing to prove!"

"She attacked you, Rachel. And when she did that, she knew she was declaring war against me. She wanted to hurt me and she used you to do it. How can you expect me to just let it go?"
"Is this really about me or is it about your pride, like it is for Santana?"

Quinn narrowed her eyes, but said nothing.

Disappointed and fed up, Rachel shoved her food away and got to her feet. "Fine. Do whatever you want, but I won't be a part of this. I don't believe in hurting others...especially not when I was hurt the same way."

She walked away from the table and Quinn's shoulders slumped in defeat.

"Are you really gonna let her go like that?" Brittany asked, watching Rachel exit the cafeteria.

"I'm not going to chase after her every time she storms out," she replied dispassionately, flicking some invisible crumb off the table. "Besides, there's nothing I can do about it right now."

"Wow."

"What?"

"I thought you were supposed to be a good liar, Q, but you suck at it."

Quinn's gaze grew hard and she clenched her jaw before turning to look at Santana. "Well?" she snapped. "Keep going!"

"We spread the word that Kitty is a walking infestation of STD's guaranteed to turn their wangs black and fall off." She laughed. "And that's the best case scenario."

"The guys are buying it?"

"Duh! They're guys." Santana snorted. "They're running to the locker rooms to get their jockstraps as we speak. They think that'll save them."

"What about the Mullet and Azimio?"

"Every single girl at McKinley High has been put on high alert. As far as they know, 'Zi and Hockey Puck Pervert both slept with the leper herself and unless they're wearing CDC approved gear...no girl is going near them. I saw Rick 'The Stick' crying when his, now ex-, girlfriend ran away from him. He was blubbering about going to live in Canada and build a beaver hut."

"Good."

Unfortunately, her voice was too shaky for it to sound convincing and Santana raised an eyebrow in suspicion.

"Problem?"

Quinn sighed and sat back in her chair. "Maybe this isn't the right thing to do. There could be...a different way to handle it?"

Santana slapped her hands on the table in disbelief. "Don't tell me all that crap Rachel was spouting got to you! I get that you're with her, Quinn, but that doesn't mean you have to bow and scrape to her!"

"It's not that. It's just...we always say how wrong it is that girls get slut shamed for sleeping around while guys are practically crowned kings for it. Spreading these kinds of rumors...we're pandering to the same patriarchal school domination that all three of us have been victims of at one point or
another."

"Quinn's using big words. That means she's super serious, San."

"We're using it to our advantage this time," she countered determinedly. "Don't we deserve it? Besides, Kitty was the one who started it all anyway! It's only fair that we return the favor."

"But this is where Rachel's right."

Santana threw her head back with a groan, rolling her eyes.

"I mean it! Look at what we're doing, the same thing every other Cheerio Captain before us has done. Isn't it about time someone came in and changed it?"

"So you're just gonna let it go? Let her get away with what she did?"

Quinn sighed and rubbed the back of her neck tiredly. "I don't know."

"Well, you can do whatever you want, but I'm not helping you anymore if this is the thanks I get. It's already started. You wanna stop it, be my guest, but you're an idiot if you let that chick get away with hurting Rachel AND tarnishing the Cheerios reputation. You'll ruin it for everyone. This isn't just The Quinn Fabray Show, other people are involved here."

She gave Quinn a hard look before picking up her tray with one hand and taking Brittany's with the other.

"Come on, Britt."

They walked off together to sit at another table, leaving Quinn alone.

When Quinn pulled into the parking lot, she was convinced Puck was playing some kind of practical joke on her, though she couldn't understand how the idiot had the balls to try it on her after everything else they'd been through. He knew Quinn wouldn't stand for this. Yet, there she was, standing in front of a dilapidated bar 20 miles outside of Lima, and by the looks of it, 20 miles from civilization as well. But the parking lot was full and the raucous noise coming from inside made her feel less like she was in an early scene from *Deliverance* and more like some country version of *Coyote Ugly*. Why the hell would Sam be in here? There were more than enough bars in or near Lima that would look past his faker-than-fake ID or even just serve him without ever asking. Why did he have to be at this place?

The Honkey Donkey.

Seriously? SERIOUSLY? It's no wonder Puck claimed he didn't remember the name of it, just that he knew how to get there. She would never have driven all this way for a place called...

*Okay, joke's over. She was not going in. Sam was definitely not there.*

Quinn was digging around in her pocket for her cellphone so that she could call Puckerman to give him a good head start before she ripped him limb from limb when she spotted a familiar truck.

*No...*

Refusing to believe it still, she walked over and inspected the license plate.
It was Sam's.

With a groan, she leaned against the back of the truck and stared at the neon lights that lit up the bar's name. She was going to have to go in there.

Why did she want friends again? They surely weren't worth this!

But she took a deep breath, squared her shoulders, and marched towards the entrance.

The smell overwhelmed her at first: stale beer, cigarette smoke, and sweat, with the putrid undertone of despair. Grimacing, she made her way through crowds of older men who were halfway into oblivion for the night, and made sure she didn't touch anything in this place that would surely fail a health inspection with one glance. Looking around the tiny, but jam packed bar, she didn't see the crown of fair hair she was looking for. Maybe Sam was working here? It was the only plausible explanation she'd come up with so far. His family wasn't doing so well with money right now and she knew he was looking for a job, but why did it have to be here? There were many places closer to Lima that would hire him and weren't quite as disgusting.

And why was Puck the only one who knew about it? She'd had to resort to asking him when no one else in Glee was able to give her Sam's whereabouts after school hours. Getting him alone during the day was nearly impossible with how hard he worked to avoid her and it'd been a week now. She was determined not to let this go, but he was never home after school or after practice – he just seemed to disappear off the face of the planet. Looking around her, she realized she hadn't been too far off in thinking that.

She seated herself at the bar, ignoring the leering men that had noticed her presence, and waved for the bartender's attention. Maybe he would know something.

"Yeah, what do you want?" he said gruffly, not at all interested in the pretty young girl sitting in front of him. If anything, he acted like her presence was a stain on his bar.

"Do you know a guy named Sam Evans? Does he work here?"

"Girly, either buy a drink or get the hell out."

Quinn narrowed her eyes at him, pulled out some money from her pocket and slapped it on the counter. "A shot of Patrón."

He rolled his eyes, but took the money.

"Damn, fucking, uptight kids think they can walk in like they own the fucking place..." she heard him muttering under his breath as he reached for the bottle to pour her a glass.

"Look, I don't want to be in this foul pit any more than you want me here so answer my question and I'll leave you alone to 'cuddle' with your hillbilly buddies as long as you want."

The men sitting next to her scoffed and chuckled. There was one woman at the end of the bar who heard as well and she let out a screeching laugh that let Quinn know just how into the bottle she was. The bartender slammed the shot glass in front of Quinn angrily, causing the liquid to slosh over onto the counter. She didn't so much as flinch.

"Do you or do you not know a guy named Sam Evans?" she asked again, evenly.

He spat on the floor, much to her disgust, and glared at Quinn before finally waving his hand vaguely towards something behind her. Then he walked off to serve the other customers, many of
them focusing on Quinn now as well. Before long, the whole bar would be staring at this very out of place young girl... She tried not to let it show how uncomfortable she was feeling with the scrutiny and increasingly unstable situation she was in. If she didn't find Sam soon, she was going to have to make a fast exit. Slamming back the shot, she grimaced fleetingly, and spun around on the stool to look where the bartender had gestured. But Sam wasn't anywhere to be found. There was some guy standing behind the microphone on a small platform with a stool behind him.

He was talking about a bunch of things that Quinn didn't care about, but apparently the crowd did because they were getting excited and cheering.

"...now ya'll ready for some more music up in here?"

The crowd answered with a loud roar.

"Amateur hour is well under way, but next up is a kid we've all seen before and have no idea why he's here, but hey! We don't judge!"

The crowd laughed and a few women whistled.

"Here he is, whores and boars! Sam Evans!"

Quinn's eyes widened into saucers when Sam seemingly appeared out of nowhere and jumped up onto the platform with his guitar. He was wearing just his usual jeans and a faded, wrinkled, button-down blue plaid shirt. She bit her lip, remembering that it was the same shirt he was wearing when he had gotten down on one knee in the science classroom and offered her a promise ring. The crowd was going wild for him; beer was flying everywhere from enthusiastic hands in the air. Sam calmly settled onto the stool with his guitar in his lap and the microphone at his mouth.

"Sing it, Sammy, baby!" some woman shouted from a dark corner and a few others fell into catcalls with her.

Sam didn't really pay attention; he kept his eyes down.

As he started to play, nearly everyone recognized the tune and cheered before settling down to listen. Quinn couldn't believe what she was seeing. This was more than just a random night; these people knew Sam. They recognized him. They listened to him. Most of them even stopped talking to pay attention and listen to him sing.

You give your hand to me,
And then you say, "Hello."
And I can hardly speak,
My heart is beating so.
And anyone can tell
You think you know me well.
Well, you don't know me.

Stupefied, Quinn absently tapped on the counter until the surly bartender grudgingly came over again. She didn't take her eyes off Sam, but gestured for another shot. He complied without a word and Quinn didn't even wince this time when it went down. He sounded amazing; his voice was deep and silky smooth. All that work with Rachel had paid off ten-fold. Sam had always been a good singer, but the true extent of his talent was showing now.

No you don't know the one,
Who dreams of you at night;
And longs to kiss your lips,
And longs to hold you tight.
Oh, I'm just a friend.
That's all I've ever been.
'Cause you don't know me.

There were soft cheers and applause, but the patrons had grown subdued, captivated by the voice washing over them. Quinn's heart ached for that boy on stage. He couldn't look into the crowd. He couldn't look at anything but his guitar and the fingers that played the strings. The song struck her too close and she could feel the tears fighting their way out, but she wouldn't let them. Was there any way to mend the damage she had caused to this boy's heart?

For I never knew the art of making love,
Though my heart aches with love for you.
Afraid and shy, I let my chance go by.
A chance that you might love me too.

In another life...would she have loved him? Would she have loved him the way she loved Rachel? Even as she asked herself the question, she already knew the answer.

You give your hand to me,
And then you say, "Goodbye."
I watched you walk away,
Beside the lucky guy.
Oh, oh, you'll never know, oh,
The one who loved you so.

She was pushing her way through the crowd towards Sam before her head even had time to process the fact that she'd gotten up off the bar stool.

Well, you don't know me.

As his voice faded away under the crowd roaring and his fingers stopped moving over the strings, Sam lifted his head and, to his surprise, stared straight into Quinn's hazel eyes.

"You have a mattress pad in the back of your truck?"
"It's more like a futon," he replied with a shrug as they settled in. "It's not exactly comfortable hanging out in a flatbed."

"You mean the girls you bring back here don't think it's comfortable," Quinn shot back teasingly.

He chuckled. "Okay, yeah. The ladies really didn't like it. So I made it nicer. I'm good like that."

"Yes...you are."

The underlying seriousness of her tone didn't go unnoticed and they fell into silence. Sam had immediately walked off the stage, with Quinn's hand in his, and led them out of the bar. They both knew they needed to talk and they both knew neither of them wanted to go back to Lima until they did. So there they were, in the parking lot of The Honkey Donkey, sitting in the back of Sam's truck underneath the stars.

"You never had me back here with you," she said softly.
He shifted uncomfortably. "You never wanted to be back here with me."

Quinn sighed and rested her head against the back of the cab. The sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach that appeared when Sam started singing had only grown worse with every minute that passed. They were silent again.

Neither of them knew what to say.

Strike that.

They both knew exactly what to say.

But neither could bring themselves to do it.

So she tried something else.

"What did you argue about with Puck? You know, that night at my house...the party over the summer?"

Sam glanced at her in confusion and then recognition dawned on him after a moment.

"Oh, that." He nodded with a grimace. "Yeah...I...what does that matter?"

"You're friends with him. Puck's been your new BFF ever since he and Finn stopped hanging out as often. But you tried to hit him that night. You would have succeeded if Mike hadn't pulled you back."

"He was being an ass." Sam shrugged.

"Puck's always an ass," she countered determinedly. "What made that night any different?"

He groaned and shifted uncomfortably. "I didn't like what he was trying with Rachel, funneling her drinks all night like that. It was just a game to him and I know his plays, what he's done before...what he did to you..."

Quinn sucked in a breath.

"Look, I just know he's got history with that kind of stupid crap and I wasn't going to let him mess with Rachel. Like I told you, she's my friend too. I look out for the people I care about."

"I know you do."

Quinn reached out to take his hand, but thought twice about it, and pulled back awkwardly before she touched him.

"You came out here to thank me...again...but you don't have to. In fact, I really don't want you to. That night and what happened in the hallway, I didn't do either of those things for you. I did them for Rachel. So, you can just leave it alone."

"I respect that," she nodded, "but I'm still going to thank you. I don't care if you did it for me or for Rachel. You were looking out for someone I love and I'm grateful to you...whether you like it or not."

Sam chuckled softly at that and bounced his knee. After a beat, he asked, "You gonna go after Kitty?"
She grimaced. "Santana wants me to unleash the fires of hell on her."

"After that fight, I kind of agree with her. It got pretty nasty there and if that girl was behind it all..."

"I don't know what I'm going to do. Rachel doesn't want me to retaliate. She thinks I should take the high road."

"And also keep you out of trouble."

Quinn chuckled. "That too."

"It's not as if Kitty doesn't deserve to be taken down after declaring war."

"I know." She nodded. "But I might have a chance to change something here. Something big. If I break the cycle..."

"...you could change the tone for how everyone gets treated this year and maybe even in the next few years," he finished for her in understanding.

"Do you really think I could do it? Change things?"

He shrugged. "You're Quinn Fabray. You make sure you get what you want. Haven't you always?"

She shifted uncomfortably. His words rang too close to a different time and a different person she'd rather leave behind.

"I don't always get what I want," she said quietly.

He sighed knowingly. "No one gets everything they want. I just meant...you can make anything happen once you set your mind to it. You don't let anyone get in your way. And...I really do think you have a good shot at actually changing something at that school. If anyone had a chance in hell of doing it...it's you."

She wasn't sure if she believed him, but the fact that he believed that just cemented what she already knew about Sam Evans.

"W-what you sang tonight..." Quinn took a deep breath, clutching her hands together tightly in her lap as she stared up at the stars. "Sam, I do want to know you."

He lifted his head and looked at her just as she turned to face him.

"I want to really know you. As my friend. As my best friend. As the incredible guy I know you are. I wasn't listening before. I wasn't...seeing...you. And I'm so sorry for that."

Sam's throat visibly constricted as she spoke and he turned his gaze down to the floor of the truck. It was like he couldn't bear to face her. To face what this was.

"I want to know you. And it can't be what you want. I can't be who you want. But, if you'll let me, I'd like to be something different. I care about you so much, Sam, and to not have you in my life?"

Her voice cracked. "It hurts to even imagine."

"You don't know what you're asking."

"I do." She nodded. "I always do. I knew what I was asking you then and I know what I'm asking now."
"You really hurt me."

A tear spilled over before Quinn could stop it and she quickly brushed it away. His soft words had pierced her heart so swiftly, she didn't even know how badly until after the tear had fallen.

"I don't know how to do it."

"Do what?"

"Be your friend. Think of you as just a friend. I don't know how to...make the feelings go away. I don't think I can, Quinn. What if they're always there? I thought I could deal with it before, but it just made everything worse. It hurts just to be around you, just seeing you. I don't want to lose us either, but I don't..." He trailed off, at a loss for anything else to say that would explain it better.

"So that's it?"

He looked up at the stars. "No...that's not it."

"Then what-"

"I need time, Quinn. Real time. I should have done that when you broke up with me the first time, but it got all messed up. Maybe with some space...I can do it. I can get over you."

"I'm okay with that."

"Yeah? You'll wait?"

She smiled. "You're worth waiting for."

Quinn walked into the gymnasium with her head held high. It was time to end this and she was more than ready for it to be over. Kitty was on the bleachers with her lunch, doing homework. She looked up when the doors opened and scrambled to her feet when she saw it was Quinn that walked in. Immediately, her game face was on. That was okay. Quinn had hers on too and hers was far more perfected than Kitty's wannabe tough-bitch routine.

"Wow. You're one pathetic step from hiding in a bathroom stall for your lunch hour."

"I'm not hiding," she insisted. "It's not a crime to want some peace and quiet from the rest of those losers."

"You mean the losers that say you're a leper and would rather chew off their own arm than be seen with you?"

Kitty clenched her jaw tightly, trying not to let it show how much that hurt her, how embarrassed she was, but she was transparent to Quinn. Maybe that was because she knew her too well.

"It doesn't matter. That won't last long. Not after I've gotten through with you."

"Oh?" Quinn replied dispassionately. "And what is it that you think you're going to do, sweetie?"

"Nothing much." Kitty shrugged, but the smug little grin on her face said it all. "Just one click of a button and you won't only be run out of this school, you'll be run out of town."

She pulled out her phone from her jacket pocket and held it up for Quinn to see.
It was a photo of her with Rachel from the week before in the locker room. Rachel was naked and shoved up against the lockers, locked in a passionate embrace with Quinn.

"What is that word the Bible uses to describe it...?" Kitty pretended to think. "Oh, right, an abomination. I think that's a pretty good word for what's happening here. Now, should I use that one or..."

She thumbed over the phone and held it up to Quinn again showing another photo with Quinn's hand between Rachel's thighs and their lips locked together.

"I simply just can't decide," Kitty sighed, feigning distress.

Quinn was so tired. She was so tired, so bone-weary, so wholly, thoroughly exhausted. All of the hiding and the lies and the secrets and trying to keep her head above the water just so she could make it out unscathed. Maybe that was why she didn't give a flying rat's ass how Kitty managed to get into the locker room that day or that she'd been there watching them. She didn't care, not one goddamn bit.

So she just shrugged.

"Why haven't you sent it to the entire student body yet?"

That wasn't the reaction Kitty was expecting. Quinn's utterly blasé attitude made her grow a bit flustered and she stumbled over her words for a moment, not sure how to counter this. She expected anger and threats and maybe even actual fear where she would get to experience the Quinn Fabray begging her for mercy. But she didn't get an ounce of that as Quinn stared back at her with an unreadable expression. It just infuriated her all the more. She wasn't backing down from this yet!

"I've been waiting for the right moment," Kitty replied easily. "Want to make sure I can savor every moment of your inevitable fall from grace and seeing the Legend that was Quinn Fabray destroyed once and for all."

"Or maybe you don't have the guts to do it."

"You're calling me a coward?" She stared at her incredulously. "Look, I don't really think you understand what's happening right now, so let me spell it out for you. I won! I'm going to ruin you. I have all the evidence I need and once people see you for who you really are, they're going to run away from you ten times further than you had them running from me. So you might want to think about showing me a little more respect right now. You never know...you might be able to convince me not to send this out. That is, if you do what I tell you to do."

"Shut up."

"Excuse me?"

"Just shut up." Quinn scoffed and grabbed Kitty's phone, tossing it away onto the floor with a clatter.

"What the he-!"

Quinn stepped forward. "You haven't won anything. You think those pictures are going to erase the black stain that is your reputation? No. It'll get the school talking about me, sure, but Coach doesn't care about that. She cares about results...results that I get. So I'll still be the Captain of the Cheerios. You'll still be the worthless nobody that got kicked off not even a month into the season. The boys will still think you're a leper. The girls will still think you're a whore. You think telling people about Rachel and me is going to ruin me?"
She chuckled derisively.

"No, sweetheart. I have my reasons for wanting to keep my relationship with her private, but it has absolutely nothing to do with what the idiots in this school think of me. So go ahead. Send your little pictures. It means nothing to me and it will do nothing to help you."

Kitty stared at her hard for a moment and then a glimmer of recognition sparked behind her eyes as she realized that Quinn wasn't bluffing. She visibly deflated. The smirk disappeared, the shoulders fell, and the self-righteous aura dimmed. Swallowing hard, Kitty stalked over to her phone and slipped it into her jacket pocket before turning on Quinn again with her arms folded tightly over her chest in an almost protective measure. She was right to feel the need to be protected because she had just lost every little inch of control she thought she had with Quinn. Now she was helpless and Quinn was about to ride her down, teeth bared, jaw wide open.

"Why are you here then?" she asked hesitantly.

Quinn took a moment to relish the knowledge that she'd gained the upper hand once more and sat down on the bleachers.

"The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away," she said casually.

Not paying much attention to Kitty, she took a small bag out of her purse, along with a hand held mirror, and began to touch up her make up.

"Comparing yourself to God now?" she muttered bitterly. "Impressive. Who knew you had the ego for such blasphemy?"

"Hardly." Quinn scoffed. "You see, I have the power to make you someone in this school, but I also have the power to destroy you."

"I think you've demonstrated that well enough already," Kitty replied thickly and her eyes glistened with tears for a moment before she held them back again.

"You're kidding, right?" Quinn glanced at her out of the corner of her eye before looking back in the mirror to touch up her make up. "Santana and I have barely even started. You have no idea...no idea...what we could and probably will do to you."

She heard Kitty's shaky, fearful, intake of breath at that revelation and felt a pang of sympathy for her...for a few seconds anyway.

"But like I said, I'm the one with the power here. Today you're a social pariah, but maybe tomorrow...well, all that could change in the blink of an eye."

"What are you saying?"

Quinn set aside her makeup case snapped the mirror shut. "Just as easily as I can destroy you, I can raise you up again."

"A-and...and you would make the rumors stop?" she asked tremulously. "Make everyone like me again?"

"No one ever liked you."

Kitty slumped against the risers with a fresh set of tears.
Seemingly bored, Quinn drummed her fingers along the wood. A harsh silence fell in the gym before she spoke again. "However...yes, I can make the rumors stop. I can make it all go away. I could even make it so that you get a guaranteed spot on the squad next year. It would be your chance to start over."

Kitty eyed her nervously. "What do I have to do?"

"First, you'd have to apologize."

"Quinn, I-I know really messed up, I'm so-"

"Not to me."

Kitty stopped suddenly and blinked in surprise. "Then who... Rachel? You want me to apologize to Rachel Berry?"

"You attacked her just to get to me. She was innocent and she didn't deserve that. So, yes, you're going to apologize to her."

"O-okay. I can do that. Of course, I can do that."

"You're also going to swear that you'll never order a slushie hit on anyone else ever again. Even as a Cheerio... if you do actually follow through with all this, anyway."

She nodded. "I swear."

For a moment, Quinn actually believed her.

"If I ever hear you question the nature of my relationship with Rachel again, I will see to it that you get so deeply crushed into the ground, no one will ever find the body. You won't be able to show your face over three counties without running into ridicule and humiliation. Forget McKinley High, I will rip your life apart so badly, you'll never be able to escape, no matter where you run. My name, Rachel's name, Santana's name, Brittany's name... they'll never be uttered out of your mouth again unless your speaking to us directly and I don't really foresee many situations where the need for that would arise."

"I..."

"Do we have an understanding here?"

"You're giving me a second chance," Kitty said quietly, blown away by what was happening. "Why... why are you doing this?"

Quinn scowled at her for a moment before taking a deep breath. "Because everyone deserves a second chance. Even you."

"I promise, Quinn. I promise, I'll do everything you said."

"Good."

"For what it's worth... I really am sorry."

"I know you're sorry," she replied easily. "You're sorry you lost. You're sorry you picked a battle you couldn't win. You're sorry your reputation got so trashed that your own teachers look at you like you're a disgusting bug infesting their classroom, but maybe there are some that just pity you. You're sorry you have to apologize to someone you think you're better than. But those are your choices and
those are your mistakes. And I hope you'll learn from them someday. If not, you won't need someone like me or Santana around to ruin your life. You'll do it all on your own."

Kitty stood alone in the gym as Quinn's words echoed off the walls long after she had gone.

Chapter End Notes

"You Don't Know Me" by Ray Charles
"Quinn. Hello? Quinn? Are you even listening to me?"

"No. I stopped when you actually let the name 'Sarah Lawrence' come out of your mouth."

"Oh, come on. I said I was sorry. You can't hold that against me for the rest of the day. We'll never get anything accomplished."

"You know, just because I'm gay doesn't mean I'm going to the biggest lezzie school in the country!"

"It's a good school!" she cried exasperatedly. "That's all I was thinking about: a good school within a reasonable commuting distance to Manhattan."

Quinn muttered something under her breath that Rachel didn't understand, but knew if she did hear it correctly, would offend her.

Pursing her lips, she watched Quinn shifting through brochures with a sour look on her face, and made her decision. She carefully set aside all the applications on her lap and then hurled herself at Quinn without warning so that they both went sprawling backwards onto the floor.

"Rachel!"

"I'm sorry, Quinn," she said without sounding sorry at all, and straddled her. "But this isn't going anywhere until you stop giving me an attitude for one tiny suggestion you didn't agree with. And if this isn't going anywhere, then you are not going anywhere. Understood?"

"Are you using physical force against me to get what you want?"

"I'm not against taking extreme measures to accomplish goals."

Quinn sighed, staring up at her pensively for a moment before she reached out to the side to search for some of the brochures that had gone flying when Rachel attacked her. After a few moments of groping around, she found the ones she was looking for and handed them to Rachel who was still perched unapologetically on top of her.

"Here."

"What are these?"

"The schools I like."

Surprised, Rachel settled back, resting on top of Quinn's thighs. She looked at the cover of each one.

"Isn't that what we were supposed to be doing this afternoon? You found out about NYADA which somehow, in your mind, meant that I had to rush to catch up to you by deciding on my school. We had this conversation yesterday. Or is it a conversation when one person just talks at you and tells you what to do without allowing a response?" she said dryly.

Rachel wasn't listening as she read through them out loud. "Yale, NYU, Princeton, Wesleyan, Penn, Harvard, Columbia, Vassar..."

"I know they're big names, but I think I can do it. With my grades, my SAT scores, and a stunning admissions essay about my life changing event as a teen mother...I have a chance."
"You have more than a chance. All of these schools are amazing, Quinn, and one of them will be extremely lucky to have you."

"Then why do you still have that look on your face?"

"What look?"

"The worried one."

Rachel scooted back until she was off of Quinn and sitting on the floor again. She sucked her bottom lip between her teeth.

"Oh, I just...no...it's fine. This is wonderful; I'm glad you made a decision. You'll be applying to them all then?"

Quinn sat up, now that she was released, and reached out to squeeze Rachel's leg. "Yeah, all of them. Just as a precaution. There's only three that I'm seriously considering, but I need to make sure I try for the others in case those three fall through."

"W-which three?" she tried to ask casually, failing miserably.

"Rachel, seriously, what's going on with you?"

"I'm sorry." She shook her head. "I don't mean to be... I just thought... When-when you said you wanted to leave Lima together, I thought that meant you wanted to go to New York with me. I-I thought that was the whole point. That we would live together and see each other every day. Some of these schools are hours away from the city. I mean, we can make long distance work, of course. I'd never let that stop us, but I just need some time to adjust to the idea because I've been picturing it in my head, fantasizing about so many different things we would do, that we-"

"The three schools are Yale, NYU, and Columbia," Quinn cut her off purposefully and took both her hands, causing the brochures to flutter to the floor. "And Yale is just because I really like their campus, the drama program and their stellar record for turning out business and political luminaries. But, Columbia is an amazing school. It's right in the city, Ivy League, and their theater program is incredible. I don't know what I want to do yet, but I do know that I like to perform. So I have to start with that, right? And NYU is also a good school, not as good as Columbia or Yale, obviously, but it's a backup. All three have amazing opportunities for students to study abroad too. I've always wanted a chance to travel."

"So, you...you still want to go to New York with me?" she tried uncertainly.

"Of course, I do. I just have to make sure I tried everything in case something falls through. In case you didn't notice, while, yes, some of the schools on that list are further away, all of them are within a reasonable traveling distance for weekend visits. It wouldn't be ideal, but with how my life tends to fall apart at the seams at the worst of times, I'm not leaving anything up to-"

Rachel kissed her.

It threw her. It really did. For Quinn to even be contemplating the idea of not living with Rachel, going to school in a different state, making their relationship long distance, and, when did she ever talk about studying abroad? Not only was she going to push them hours apart, live apart, but then she was planning to leave the country too? The thoughts coursing through her head were all too much, too much for her head – her heart – to handle so when Quinn left after dinner, Rachel went up to her room, put her well-crafted "DO NOT DISTURB THE ARTIST" sign on the door, changed into her
workout clothes and hopped onto the elliptical for as long as her body could hold out for.


Long distance. No Quinn.

Quinn. New York.


No Quinn.

When Rachel finally stumbled off the exercise machine, her legs trembling, her heart pounding, her hair falling out of its ponytail and sticking to her face, which was covered in sweat, she reached for a towel and caught herself in the mirror. That was how she knew she'd been crying.

Quinn had been so reassuring, so logical, calm and thoughtful, as she always was. She thought things through; she planned everything she could. Rachel liked organization and planning because it felt cathartic, an escape for her to plan out all these things in her life ahead of time so that when bad things happened, she always had something to look forward to, a goal to strive for. It gave her a purpose she desperately needed in her everyday life.

Quinn, however, planned things for control. If she could prepare ahead of time, with all the necessary back-ups, plan A, plan B, plan C, and so on, then she would never find herself lost again like she had two years ago, 16 years old, pregnant and homeless with no job, no money, no house, no family, and no choice.

So, yes, Rachel understood all too well why Quinn was contemplating having to go to school somewhere else than New York City. What she didn't like and couldn't stand, was that she didn't know that Quinn was having those thoughts until now. Quinn never brought up the possibility of them being separated. She always talked about going to New York with Rachel like it was inevitable. And that there would be nothing to stop that from happening. She never told Rachel that she was making all these additional contingency plans when all Rachel was thinking about was their life together. Had she really been so naïve all this time? Did she let herself fall in love with these fantasies rather than focusing on reality? Apparently she had, because while she was dreaming, Quinn was planning on moving to Connecticut!

And why hadn't she ever mentioned anything about wanting to travel?

Okay, yes, she has mentioned that, but it was in such a far off realm of possibilities that it made her think of it as something they would do when they were much older. But, no, Quinn was planning all of that now. She was already starting her life out of Lima and Rachel was being left behind. How was that even possible? They hadn't even graduated yet and Quinn was already leaving her behind?

The door knob jiggled as someone tried to open it from the other side. "Rachel?"

She snapped up in surprise to hear Quinn's voice. Glancing at the clock, she saw that it was already past 11. Her fathers would be in bed already and Quinn was supposed to be home with her mother. That's why she left instead of staying over, because Judy insisted on Quinn staying home during the weeknight.
She unlocked the door and flung it open.

Quinn was still dressed in the same clothes she wore when she was there earlier, not a hair out of place, while Rachel knew she looked sweaty and gross. As always, Quinn was beautiful and Rachel was a mess.

She raised a single eyebrow. "I've never seen that sign before. What were you working on so hard that has you sweating like this, *artiste*?"

Rachel didn't bother to answer, instead she just blurted out, "What are you doing back here?"

Quinn stepped past her and closed the door behind them. When she turned around to see Rachel again, there was worry written all over her face.

"What's going on?" she asked softly.

Rachel shook her head and went into the bathroom without another word.

She needed to shower. That was all she could process right now...all she *wanted* to process. The water was running. She had her robe hanging on the back of the door and there were clean towels by the sink. She started to strip.

Quinn's voice behind her startled her. Of course she would have followed. But Rachel wasn't thinking about that. She was thinking about how beautiful Quinn was, how unattractive Rachel looked at the moment, and that she was going to leave. Quinn was leaving...not today, not tomorrow, but she *was* leaving. And she might not leave with Rachel. For the first time since she'd let herself believe that Quinn loved her, wanted her, wanted to leave Lima with her...the possibility of that *not* happening was hitting her. And it was hitting her hard.

"I called you and texted you probably a dozen times since I left this afternoon. When I finally called the house, your Dad said you locked yourself in your room with your signature sign, which, according to him, means that you're so stuck in your head about something, you wouldn't be coming out for a while. So I snuck out after my Mom went to bed. I wanted to make sure you were all right. What happened?"

"I'm sweaty, Quinn. I have to shower."

That was all Rachel said before pulling off her shorts so she was left only her underwear.

There was some rustling behind her and then she saw a jacket being tossed onto the floor in front of her. She turned around to see Quinn removing her shoes and unbuttoning her shirt.

"What are you doing?"

"Taking my clothes off."

"I can see that," she huffed. "*Why* are you taking your clothes off?"

"Because I'm getting in the shower with you."

"Oh."

"Is that a problem?"

"No," she answered too quickly.
"Okay then."

Quinn held her gaze evenly as she removed the rest of her clothes. There was some kind of war happening between them, one that Quinn was determined to win as she stared Rachel down. Steam filled the bathroom from the hot water in the shower, but there was something even more electric in the air between them as they faced off. Quinn wanted to break her.

Well, as it just so happened, Rachel wasn't in the mood for that tonight. She pushed off her underwear, finally breaking eye contact with Quinn, and stepped into the shower, ducking under the water to let her hair soak. Quinn quickly followed and instead of allowing Rachel her turn under the spray, she pushed forward, wrapping her arms around her, letting their wet bodies slide against each other in a way that made Rachel gasp involuntarily. Quinn never took that fierce gaze off of her. Rachel was forced to step back so she could get her hair wet too.

She wanted to ask her what the game was...why she was acting like this.

But she knew the answers already. It was Quinn who wanted the answers, and that was the game, but Rachel wasn't backing down, not yet.

Quinn stepped back a bit, releasing her, to pick up Rachel's shampoo bottle. She squeezed some into the palm of her hand.

"Come here."

It was instinct. She couldn't help it! Her body was so used to complying with Quinn's demands, she had no control over herself when she took that small step forward. Rachel stared into those deep hazel eyes as Quinn raised her arms and applied the shampoo to her Rachel's hair, working it in slowly.

Her eyes slipped shut at the delicious feeling of Quinn's hands massaging her scalp, but then she remembered her determination not to break tonight. Quinn was going to have to do better than that if she wanted to win. However, her hands did find their way to Quinn's naked waist so that she could have something to hold on to. That's all it was...steadying herself in a very dangerous, slippery shower. The incredible friction the water provided between their bodies didn't matter. Quinn was just a handicap rail.

A very warm, firm, wet, sexy rail...

"Close your eyes," Quinn said huskily.

Rachel did, allowing herself to be led back under the water. Quinn ran her fingers through her hair to rinse the shampoo away.

Rachel's eyes were still closed when she felt Quinn's hands fall away from her hair and slowly slide down her sides, moving over her back and hips until they stopped exploring and rested on the small of her back. Quinn had pulled her in again and they were pressed against each other so intimately, Rachel could feel every glorious, wet, slippery, inch of Quinn's body. Her breasts slipping against hers, the hardened nipples, her trim belly, and even the bare flesh at her core was pressed against her. This time she let out a tiny gasp that was barely heard over the sound of the running water.

Quinn kissed her shoulder and then her neck before caressing each spot her lips touched with her fingertips, as if she wanted to mark each place to know where to return. Rachel's breathing was harsh and unsteady as Quinn made her way up to her mouth. But before their lips touched, she backed away, and picked up another bottle. Rachel bit her lower lip so hard she nearly drew blood.
Quinn was making this way too hard. It wasn't fair!

Couldn't she just leave her be? Was it really so hard for Quinn to just allow her to have vigorous workout histrionics and crying jags in the shower? It's what she always used to do before their relationship progressed to a point where it was acceptable for Quinn to follow her into the shower! Acceptable and...oh-so-very-welcomed...

Rachel could feel her body giving way under Quinn's talented ministrations. And she didn't do a thing to stop it. No, she was encouraging it now.

Yep, that was definitely her that just moaned.

She couldn't help it! Quinn was doing that damnably glorious thing with her tongue against her throat while her hand had slipped between Rachel's legs.

Quinn had won the battle, but Rachel wasn't giving up the war just yet.

"You're leaving?"

"I have to be there in the morning when my Mom wakes up," Quinn sighed, finishing the last buttons on her shirt.

Rachel was still completely bare under the sheets. She always hated it when she was the naked one while Quinn was clothed. There was a striking vulnerability in the contrast. Why did clothes have so much power?

"Stay."

Quinn looked back at her over her shoulder with a frown. "You won't talk to me. Why should I stay?"

"So that's why you're leaving? Not because of your Mom, but because I'm not ready to discuss my feelings?"

Quinn huffed incredulously and flipped her wet hair back as she toed her shoes on.

"How about 'I'm just leaving', okay? Is that good enough for you?" she replied and the edge in her voice only cut Rachel deeper than she already had.

Fighting back the tears, Rachel turned on her side so that Quinn couldn't see how her words had affected her.

Leaving.

That's exactly what the problem was.

Quinn was leaving her.

Rachel bunched up the sheets in her hands, pulling them close to her chest, and burrowed down into her pillow. She didn't trust herself to speak right now, so Quinn was just going to have to walk out without a goodnight. Then Rachel could cry.

But the bed shifted under another's weight and Quinn's fingers were gently drawing a line down Rachel's naked back. The simple touch raised goose bumps on her flesh and she could feel her heart
skip a beat. Quinn's touch never failed to spark something inside of her. No matter how hard she tried to resist it, no matter how much she sometimes wished it didn't affect her like this, it did. She almost felt helpless because of it.

"I didn't mean that," Quinn said softly.

Her voice was low and close to Rachel's ear.

*Don't cry. Don't cry.*

"I'm sorry. I'm just frustrated. I don't understand what's going on inside your head right now." She brushed back some of Rachel's wet hair and dragged her fingertips along her temple and down her cheek. "I know something is really bothering you, but you're keeping it from me. I thought we promised not to do that anymore?"

Rachel stayed silent. She couldn't respond. If she did, the floodgates would open, and there would be no hiding it from Quinn. She had to stay in control. This wasn't the kind of girlfriend she was going to be; she wasn't going to be clingy and needy. She wasn't going to demand that Quinn follow her wherever she wanted to go just because of her own selfishness. If Quinn had to go to a different school that was further away than she'd hoped, then Rachel would just have to deal with that. If Quinn decided that long distance was too difficult and wanted to pursue other girls, then Rachel would have to deal with that as well. She would not beg. She would not plead. She would not make ultimatums.

Quinn had every right to desire those things so Rachel would be mature and accept that.

Well...mature and accepting with a permanently broken heart, but she would cross that bridge when she got to it. All Quinn needed to do right now was walk out the door and let Rachel cry herself to sleep tonight. Tomorrow, she could pull herself together enough to be the strong, not-clingy, not-needy, girlfriend Quinn deserved.

She just couldn't be that person tonight.

"You're really not going to say anything?"

Rachel apologized to her over and over again in her head, but still couldn't say a word out loud. She wished Quinn could feel her apology somehow...anything to make the tinge of hurt and sadness in her voice go away. She hated hurting her. But what else was she going to do?

"Fine," Quinn's voice wavered ever so slightly, but it was resolute all the same. Rachel almost breathed a sigh of relief. She knew by that tone that Quinn was definitely throwing in the towel for now. "Goodnight, Rachel."

The touch on her skin vanished and the weight on the bed lifted. There were some shuffling noises before footsteps and then the door closed. She waited until the front door closed and then, finally letting go of everything she'd been so desperately holding in, Rachel buried her face in her pillow and sobbed.

She didn't know how long she'd been crying for, but it was long enough that her throat hurt and she'd soaked her spot on the pillow. She never heard the footsteps hurrying back up the stairs or the sound of the door opening or the small, pained sigh in her doorway.

It wasn't until Quinn had swept her into her arms, cradling her so tightly against her body, that Rachel knew she'd come back. By then, she couldn't stop herself. She clung to Quinn and cried out everything she had.
"Rachel..." Quinn whispered pleadingly against her ear, shushing her gently, "please, Rach. Just talk to me. I'll fix it. Whatever it is, I'll fix it."

"Why did you come back?" she asked hoarsely, sniffing.

"You didn't think I would give up that easily, did you? You should know me better than that by now."

"I didn't want you to see me like this."

"Why?"

"Because I don't want you to have the pathetic, whiny, needy, girlfriend!" She burst into a fresh set of tears and it took a few more minutes before she could calm down again.

"You have to tell me what's going on." Quinn was on the verge of begging with her tightly controlled voice. "I can't do anything if you won't tell me what's making you feel like this. You're not pathetic or whiny or needy."

She kissed her forehead and then her lips. When she pulled back, she wiped away some of the tears on Rachel's cheeks.

"You're not any of that. You're mine."

Rachel looked up at her with a quick intake of air. Quinn never blinked. She just held Rachel and stroked her cheek and waited. The way she had said that... "mine"...it stirred something so deep and primal in her that she couldn't shake it. It made her heart race out of control. It made her want to take Quinn just to prove her claim as well. It made her want to cry more.

"I don't want you to leave me."

"I don't want to leave you either," she replied, confused.

"It's the college thing." Rachel sighed and shifted up in Quinn's arms so they were in a better sitting position, but Quinn wasn't letting go for the life of her and Rachel was grateful for that. "I-I was being naïve and expected too much from you. This afternoon...caught me off guard."

"Why? I don't understand. I told you, no matter what happens, I still want to be with you. Even if it's long distance for a little while-"

Recognition sparked.

"Oh..." she trailed off in a whisper.

She tore her gaze away from Rachel, swallowing painfully. It was a few long moments before she was able to find her voice again. "Is that it? Is that not something you'd be willing to... You wouldn't want to try to make that work?"

It took all Rachel had not to burst into another round of tears at just hearing how vulnerable and heartbroken Quinn was at the prospect of Rachel not wanting her enough to try a long distance relationship. She reached up to grab Quinn's face, forcing her to meet her eyes.

"I would do anything to keep you. Even if it's long distance. Even if it means mostly phone calls, texts, and Skype dates for four years. I'll do anything because I know that it would be worth it in the end. No matter what. I just didn't expect it. You have all these plans for yourself already, Quinn, and
you didn't tell me. I-I thought it was a done deal. You, me, and New York. But the way you told me about the other schools you've been thinking about...like it was nothing that you'd go somewhere that was 3 hours away... It made me feel like I don't know anything about us or where we're going. Or where you are going."

"Rach..." she murmured softly, running her fingers through the ends of Rachel's hair, "my plan hasn't changed. Not one bit. You, me, and New York. That's what I want. That's what is going to happen eventually. The other schools...they're just...insurance...my back up plan in case something goes wrong. With them, I can still go to a great school, still leave Lima, and still be with you. Can't you understand that? I'm trying everything I can to make sure that I get to stay with you."

"You didn't tell me about the other things though!" Rachel shot back. "You were so certain. So convincing. You never told me you were worried about not getting into a school in New York or that there was possibility that we'd have to wait until after college to live together. Do you see? You made it sound like it was set in stone, Quinn! Now I find out that you're thinking all these other things: Plan B, long distance, going abroad, all of it! Why didn't you tell me sooner? I feel so stupid."

Frustrated, she wiped away her remaining tears with the back of her hand with more effort than necessary.

"I was just dreaming the days away about our tiny but cozy hole in the wall apartment in the city: having to deal with crazy neighbors, a pervert landlord, finding our favorite place to get coffee, our favorite place for Chinese delivery... I had so many plans for us, Quinn. If you'd just told me that it wasn't as certain as that, I could have...I could have been planning other things too! I would have been preparing all the ways to make long distance easier on us, how to manage being without you for long periods of time. The outfits I would wear for our Skype dates because it still means you're seeing me and I can't slack off simply because of a computer."

"Rachel!" Quinn interrupted her laughingly. "I get it. I do. And I'm sorry. I should have told you about my concerns and what I was planning to do sooner. I still believe that I'm going to New York with you, but the possibility of that not happening...exists...no matter how small." She exhaled sharply. "We should have had that discussion too."

Rachel nodded lightly, clutching Quinn's shirt. "Yes, we should have."

"Do you want to have it now?"

"We kind of already did." She frowned slightly.

"True..." Quinn nodded. "Is there anything else though?"

"I'll let you know tomorrow...or by the end of the week at least. I need time to formulate better questions. I'm not really up to the task tonight..."

"I'm here."

Rachel nodded in acknowledgment, stronger this time.

"We're okay?"

She sighed. "We'll find a way to make it work...no matter what, right? Is that what we're agreeing to?"

Quinn squeezed her arm lightly. "I thought that was what we'd always agreed to."
She shook her head. "I'm an idiot."

"No, you're not. Don't say things like that."

"I am though!" She protested. "I shouldn't have freaked out like that. I just...couldn't get it out of my head that you were planning to leave me."

"Okay, you're an idiot."

"I kno- wait, what?" She looked up at her in disbelief, not to mention offense.

Quinn chuckled. "I take it back; you are an idiot if you ever thought for a moment that I would want to leave you."

"Then I'm a gigantic idiot."

"It's okay." Quinn shrugged. "I still love you...even when you have those moments."

"Thank you." She snuffled and burrowed down more comfortably into Quinn's embrace. "I have a feeling they might happen more than a few times. Are you going to be an idiot too sometimes?"

"Uh, no. I'm actually a highly intelligent being and could never be placed in that category."

"Shut up, Fabray," she mumbled halfheartedly.

Quinn could only smile. "Will you go to sleep now, my Berry?"

"Only if you stay."

"I was going to stay whether or not you wanted me to."

"Good."

Okay, so she had managed to win the battle and the war after all.

Her name wasn't Quinn Fabray for nothing.

"Eyes forward, sandbags!" Becky said as she walked by them, glaring at Quinn and Santana who had mirrored images of disbelief on their faces at her attitude. "You're not ready for this jelly."

"Keep moving demon minion," Santana snapped, "before I decide to punt you across the football field!"

"Like you'd even have the guts to try, Mexi-Not!" Becky snorted and went to her locker.

Santana scowled, turning back to Quinn. "I'mma destroy that little blonde gherkin one of these days..."

"Is it really worth the effort?"

"Yes! When peoples needs to be taken down, I'm gonna take 'em down. She better start showing us some respect around here. I don't care if she's got chromosomal issues; I don't do affirmative action."

"Becky knows where the bodies are buried," Quinn warned. "Don't go shaking that tree unless it's a last resort."
"So I let her get away with it?"

"Yo, dummies!" Becky interrupted their conversation again from a few feet away. "Coach says you need to meet her next period and if you're late, you'll be picking up trash along the highway. I'm going to take pictures of it. Orange makes you look fat." She spun around and snickered as she walked off.

"You see?" Santana exclaimed, waving her hands angrily. "You hear the way she talks to us?"

"Pick your battles," Quinn said sagely.

"She'll get what's comin' to her...one of these days..." she muttered darkly.

"So how's Brittany doing as the new Senior Class President?" Quinn tried, moving them to a safer topic.

Santana instantly latched onto it. Anything to do with Becky was forgotten and she lit up being able to talk about her girlfriend.

"Oh, she loves it. It's amazing. She keeps telling the lunch lady that the cafeteria meals are not up to White House standards and she'll be fired if she doesn't start making chocolate pudding that has actual chocolate in it." She laughed proudly.

It lightened Quinn's heart to see Santana's happiness, but there was still something missing. There was still a dark shadow looming that Santana never wanted to acknowledge. They had yet to come out in any sort of "official" way. Of course, everyone knew about them, but Santana still shied away from any public displays of affection beyond what would be okay for friends. She refused to admit to anyone but Quinn (and Rachel...sort of) that she was actually dating Brittany. She even admitted to Quinn that when they went out to Breadstix one night, she ended up holding hands with Brittany under a napkin. It was still too scary for her to let other people see her with Brittany because that meant letting other people in. Santana Lopez didn't let anyone in - unless their name was Brittany S. Pierce.

It wasn't that she didn't want to let people know about them or that she was ashamed. She was simply terrified of what it meant for her life, what would change, what people would think about her. Santana's reputation, though not nearly as important to her as Quinn's had been, was still very much something she clung to. Her reputation, as it had been for Quinn, was protection. It was the wall she could put between herself and the rest of the world so that way she would never have to let people really see her. She would never have to let anyone get too close, and that way she would never truly be hurt, never completely rejected.

It made it easier to feel less, but it also made her lonelier.

It would be an understatement to say that Quinn knew exactly what Santana was feeling.

"How about you?"

"What about me?"

"How are you doing...with Brittany and all that...?" she tried gently.

Santana shrugged, trying to feign indifference. "Fine. I guess. I mean, whatever, we're cool."

"You're not fooling anyone."
She huffed. "Lay off, Quinn."

"You're still hiding."

"You really wanna go down this road?" she shot back with a fierce glare.

Quinn wasn't so easily deterred. "It's not like the whole school doesn't already know about you two."

"It's not that easy. I mean...yeah, people can guess all they want. It's not a secret, but I'm not flaunting it either. So, no one gets to really say anything. It's better like that. It's no one's business."

"Meanwhile you're content to keep pretending like you and Brittany are just best friends."

"She is my best friend!" Santana insisted.

"She's more than that."

"What do you want from me?" she almost yelled and reined herself back in before people started to take notice.

"It's not about what I want. What do you want, Santana? Do you want to be happy?"

"I'm happy, okay! Just drop it."

Quinn sighed. "Whatever you say."

They fell into an uncomfortable silence, but neither walked away just yet because they knew the conversation wasn't over. It was just a question of what they would say next...how far were they going to take it this time?

Santana eyed Quinn a little nervously, leaning against the lockers and scuffing her tennis shoe on the floor.

"Do you think she's mad at me for not being more...open?" she asked quietly.

"Did she say she was mad?"

"Not exactly. We don't talk about it. But, I dunno," Santana shrugged, "I think she might be disappointed... She's really cool and supportive and all, that's just who she is, but I think it makes her a little sad. I can't stand that..." she admitted forlornly.

"She's proud to be with you, Santana. It's hard when you don't seem to feel the same."

Immediately, she went on the defensive, pushing herself off the lockers to square off with Quinn. "That's not true! Of course, I'm proud!"

"I didn't say you weren't," she replied calmly. "I said it seems like it. You're hiding so how else is she supposed to feel?"

"You're one to talk! Where do you get off standing there judging me? Look at all the things you've done to Rachel!"

"It's different with us and you know it," Quinn said darkly.

Santana sighed and backed down at once. She was like a cat, digging her claws in, with all her fur on end, hissing and scratching, but she also came down just as quickly when the threat disappeared.
"Yeah. I know it is." She waved her hand apologetically. "Sorry, I shouldn't have said that. It's just...gets scary...thinking about it..."

Quinn took a deep breath, pushing forward. "If the only thing standing in my way of being public with Rachel was just some vapid school gossip, I wouldn't be standing here with you right now. I'd be over there at her locker, holding her hand, kissing her, and walking with her to class. It's not like it was easy to even wrap my head around wanting to do that. Like you said...look at what I did to her just to try to avoid it."

Santana nodded sympathetically.

She lowered her voice even more, taking extra precaution that no one around them would hear. "But the longer I'm with Rachel, the more she makes me see that what other people think doesn't matter. It's just stupid talk from stupid people, strangers that don't even deserve to be talking about us to begin with. Who cares what they think? And your parents... Santana, you know they love you. They'll support you. Do what you need to do to make you happy. Do what I can't. Be with her."

"Quinn..."

"Be strong for her. Brittany deserves that."

"I'm not ready," she stammered, looking around the hall fearfully as it started to get more crowded with people bustling towards their next class. "Not yet."

Quinn exhaled heavily in disappointment. This wasn't the first time they had a conversation like this and, unfortunately, it looked like it wasn't going to be the last. She'd have to lose this battle again today.

Brittany came around the corner just then and Santana locked eyes on her. The blonde didn't see her as she walked to her locker, chatting with another Cheerio.

"What if she...what if I'm wrong?" she asked, her gaze still fixated on Brittany.

The other Cheerio had walked away by then and Brittany was alone at her locker, exchanging some books, oblivious to Santana's presence a few rows down.

"Wrong about what?"

"Wrong about her wanting us public."

Quinn tugged on her arm so that Santana would look away from Brittany for a moment and face her. She looked her straight in the eyes so there was no mistaking how serious she was. The best thing she could possibly do for her friend was to make sure that Santana learned from Quinn's mistakes, so that she didn't have to go through the same roller coaster of fear and doubt.

"You are not wrong," she said as clearly and as firmly as she could.

Santana shook her head nervously, seeming to lose whatever courage she had begun to muster in those few seconds, and looked like she was going to take off in the opposite direction. She even went as far as to step away from Quinn and away from Brittany.

Then she stopped, screwed up her face in determination, and said, "Screw it."

To Quinn's utter shock, Santana turned around and purposefully strode down the hall towards Brittany who smiled when she saw her.
"Hey!" she chirped happily. "I was just thinking we could-"

Santana took her face in her hands, leaned up on the tips of her toes, and kissed her.

There were some catcalls and about half of the people around them did a double take. But Santana didn't let go and Brittany instantly stepped into the kiss, wrapping her arms around the other girl's waist instinctively. It wasn't just a peck on the lips, this was a real kiss. The kind that made your heart race, your stomach flutter, and your cheeks flush. It was the kind you felt all the way to the very tips of your toes. It was sweet and loving, but passion burned beneath it, driving it further each time their lips met again and their tongues just barely grazed the other.

Both were breathing hard when they broke apart. They hadn't just started making out obscenely in the middle of the hallway, but it was a proper, full on kiss through and through. No denying it. No room for interpretation. The final line had been crossed and the remains of Santana's wall crumbled. She'd passed the point of no return.

Brittany was slow to open her eyes again, but when she did, she gazed at Santana in pure wonder and adoration. "Wow," she said dreamily. "That was like a supersonic kiss. I mean, of course all our sweet lady kisses are totally amazing, but that was different... Good different! Did you feel it?"

Santana gulped anxiously and gave a slight nod. "Yeah. I felt it."

As happy as Brittany was to receive that hello, she was still confused by the other girl's actions. She took a quick glance at the other students milling around; many of the guys were already leering at them and nudging each other with crude comments.

"But, um, there are people around us, San. They saw. I thought you didn't want-"

"I know they saw," she replied tightly, not letting herself look anywhere else but Brittany. "I meant for them to."

"Really? What about the gossip and the golf club and the boy comments and the slushie bombs you were worried about?"

"I can handle it," she replied, trying to sound more certain than she really was. "I've got you, right? We're...in it together?"

Santana could feel the gazes fixated on them; the echoing whispers in the hall. She gulped and just stayed focused on the girl in front of her. The girl she loved...her girl...the one who made every moment of this worth it. Brittany saw how hard Santana was trying, how nervous she was about everyone looking. But she was so happy and so proud.

"Duh!"

She grabbed both of Santana's hands and squeezed them tightly. The touch grounded them; it gave Santana renewed strength to keep her attention on Brittany instead of worrying about the hallway full of people.

"Of course we are. You always have me, Santana, and you always will. You're my best friend."

"I really love you," she whispered.

Brittany's smile lit up her face, stretching from ear to ear. "I really love you too," she replied, bouncing on the balls of her feet. "So...does this mean we can do this in front of people from now on? Like, whenever I feel like it? Or you feel like it? Or when I want to make other people jealous of
how hot and awesome we are because they can never be like us?"

Santana laughed softly and nodded. "If that's what you want..."

Brittany grinned and leaned back in to kiss her again.

Quinn watched them with a sad smile. She was happy for her friends and proud of Santana for conquering her fears much faster than she had ever been able to, but seeing them like that was still a bitter reminder of what she was so unfairly deprived of. Rachel was among the rest of the student body that had stopped to see Santana and Brittany, but she was on the other end of the hallway.

Their eyes met and they gave each other the same bittersweet smile.

Quinn couldn't deny that it hurt when Rachel turned away from the scene and walked off without ever approaching her or saying anything at all. But what were they going to say? What were they going to do?

Nothing.

As always, nothing.

Watching Santana and Brittany so wrapped up in their own little world, not paying attention to the eyes on them, or afraid to have eyes on them, had pangs of longing squeezing Quinn's chest. She was so close...and still so far from what they deserved. Quinn knew she would have that someday with Rachel, have the freedom that Santana finally claimed with Brittany. It would only be a little while longer...and for Rachel...the wait was worth it hundred times over.

That was one thing she never doubted.

When you live in a world where doubt is sometimes all that exists...having that certainty was better than having a life raft. It gave her life rather than forcing her to cling to it. It was all she could hope for that Rachel would feel the same.

"What are you up to?" Quinn coughed, waving her hand in front of her to dispel the dust cloud Rachel had just created.

"Spring cleaning!" she chirped. "Or, since it's November, we can just call it 'the basement is getting too crowded and it's time to start collecting things to donate' cleaning."

"What exactly are you donating?"

Quinn sat down on the couch, a safe distance away from Rachel and the cartons covered with a thick layer of dust she was sorting through.

"My clothes from when I was younger. I don't even know why they kept some of these things so long. Although, I did have a unique and fabulous taste for a ten-year-old."

"Unique..." Quinn raised an eyebrow. "That's one way of putting it."

Rachel tossed her a dirty look before continuing to pull out clothes and fold them neatly into separate piles.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, holding up a small, worn, but still cheerful, yellow sweater with a small green flower on the front. "This was my favorite! I wore this all through fourth grade. My grandmother and I bought it on one of our outings. I wanted to wear it every day, but Daddy convinced me to cut it
down to once a week so that my other outfits wouldn't feel left out.”

"And you bought that?"

"I was ten."

"That's my point. You were ten."

"I don't think we can have an argument over who was more naive at that age, Quinn. You were the one who had just kissed me the year before and then declared war."

She sighed. "I'm sorry I brought it up."

Rachel looked to her apologetically and got off her knees, brushing off the dust, before going over to Quinn. She leaned over her, bracing her hands on the back of the couch.

"I was teasing," she said softly and gave her a reassuring smile. "It's all in the past now, okay? We promised each other we weren't going to let it dictate us or our relationship anymore. We should be able to joke about it a little bit at least."

"I know."

But even as she said that, her gaze was cast downward, unwilling to meet Rachel's eye.

"Kiss me."

She had to smile at that. Rachel was getting very, very good at verbalizing exactly what she wanted, when she wanted it. So Quinn raised her chin and let Rachel's lips find hers. It wasn't but a few moments before Leroy interrupted by calling down the stairs, asking Rachel for help with something.

"Hold that thought," she said with a mischievous grin. "We're picking up where we left off when I get back."

"We'll see," Quinn retorted cheekily, which earned her a warning look.

Okay, they would definitely be picking up where they left off...and more.

She heard Rachel's footsteps go up the stairs and then some creaking as she walked through the house. Then it was quiet.

Quinn took a deep breath and let herself look over at the piles of clothes Rachel was sorting. The yellow sweater laid haphazardly strewn on top. She took a cautionary look up the stairs to make sure no one was there to see her before getting up and kneeling before the mess like Rachel had been doing previously. She picked up the sweater with a fond smile and held it out in front of her as the memories came flooding back.

"My grandma gave me this pretty sweater yesterday," Quinn overheard Rachel Berry telling another girl behind her.

It was hard to not hear Rachel. She was so loud all the time. Quinn hated it. Her voice was always in her ears and she never, ever went away!

Sighing, she turned back to her painting project and tried to block it out, but it didn't work. Rachel's voice was still just as loud and annoying as ever.

"It's my new favorite thing in the whole world! I'm going to wear it all the time. Yellow is a good
color on me. It suits my complexion."

"What's that?" The other girl asked, confused.

"Your skin tone," she answered matter-of-factly. "Based on my understanding, you're probably an autumn, but I look best in royals."

"Like a princess?"

Quinn groaned and tried to cover her ears to block out the unwanted noises. They were in art class and were supposed to be painting their latest project, but Rachel was too busy chattering away to pay attention to the class work and Quinn couldn't concentrate with Rachel yapping so loudly. She was torn between telling her to shut up and risk getting in trouble or just try to finish her painting regardless.

While she was pondering her options, she noticed a couple boys whispering to each other with a look on their faces that anyone could tell meant they were up to something. Both of them were holding a cup filled with paint, one purple, one green. She wasn't sure what those two idiots were up to, but when they kept snickering and nodding towards something behind Quinn, she realized what they were up to.

"Psst, Finn! Watch Mrs. Marino for us. Make sure she doesn't see," one of them said to the chubby kid at their table who nodded in agreement and kept look out on their teacher who was busy helping other students clean their paintbrushes.

"She's not looking," Finn said.

"Go!" One of the boys whispered to the other and they started towards the back of the room.

Quinn knew exactly who their target was and the visual filled her head with horror. She could see Rachel staring at them with those big brown eyes tearing up, covered in paint, her silly sweater ruined, and the boys laughing at her cruelly.

Who cares? Rachel was stupid and annoying. Let them do whatever dumb thing they had in mind.

Quinn watched out of the corner of her eye as they crept up the side of the classroom, about to pass her, and she didn't know what she was doing until she did it.

She stood up suddenly and they walked right into her. The paint spilled all over her dress and Quinn screamed, causing the teacher to look up. The boys looked scared out of their wits.

"Mrs. Marino! They spilled paint all over me!" she cried.

"It was an accident!"

"I didn't mean it!"

But their teacher wasn't convinced and took the guilty boys aside to discuss why they had been carrying cups filled with that much paint in the first place. The teacher's aide came up to Quinn and led her out of the room to the nurse's office to see if they could find a change of clothes for her.

"Stupid boys," she grumbled. "My dress is ruined."

Just before she left the room, she caught Rachel's eye. The girl looked sympathetic to Quinn. She didn't know why Rachel would care. They hated each other.
Quinn smiled to herself, folding the sweater neatly, and put it aside. Rachel didn't need to donate that one.

"I'm back!" she chirped happily as she bounced down the stairs. "You didn't forget, did you?"

"Completely. I don't remember, what were we doing?"

"You were helping me with my not-spring cleaning."

Quinn made a face. "That's not true."

She grinned victoriously. "But you said you forgot..."

"I lied."

Rachel was still giggling even after she pounced on Quinn.

They walked out of school together and Quinn glanced over at the football field where Santana was running the day's practice. Everything seemed to be running smoothly from what she could see. Sue was yelling. Santana was biting at the heels of anyone falling behind. And Brittany was dancing on the side with a few others while the worked out a new piece of choreography. All was right in Cheerios land.

She didn't know when Rachel had walked up next to her, but her voice came as a slight surprise, reminding Quinn that she had other things to do today...way better...

"Everything okay?"

"Looks like it." She nodded and smiled at her. "You ready to go?"

Rachel looked over at the Cheerios and watched wistfully when Brittany jogged by Santana but not before pausing to kiss her on the cheek before she kept on going. Santana looked sheepish, but melted all the same, until she snapped back into her role as Captain.

"Yeah," she replied, tilting her head knowingly at Quinn who had witnessed the same thing. "Let's go."

"I'm really happy for them," Quinn said as they turned around and headed towards her car together.

"Me too."

"But..."

"I know," Rachel said quickly.

"Is it bad that I feel that way? That a part of me hates them for getting to have that?"

"I don't think you hate them."

"It's a pretty strong feeling."

"Envy has a way of doing that to a person. I learned a long time ago how to differentiate the two."

"So we're just jealous of them?"

"I think it's more than that. But we don't hate them."
Quinn frowned deeply. "Sometimes I feel like it's never going to be our turn."

"189 days," Rachel replied simply.

"What?"

"There's 189 days left until we graduate," she explained. "I started keeping track. It helps."

"189 days?" Quinn echoed, not liking the way it sounded.

"Tomorrow it will be 188 days."

"That's a lot of days."

"Less than a year."

"Yeah..." she nodded slowly, "it is less than a year."

"176 days less than a year."

"Counting has been helping?"

"A little. Enough to make me feel better about seeing Brittany and Santana displaying affection like that in the halls and during Glee club. I have the day circled in pink. It reminds me that there is a day when it will all change. It's not some abstract idea or casual timing tossed out there. It's marked clearly on my calendar. It's a specific day that exists, a Thursday. Once we graduate, we can leave. We'll be free."

Quinn sighed deeply. "Okay. Then I guess I'll start counting too." She was quiet for a beat. "Did you gold star the date too?"

"Of course!" she chirruped in reply. "Additionally, I outlined our initials with glitter and added some hearts around them for balance. Who do you think you're talking to?"

That made Quinn smile. "You're right. What was I thinking?"

Just then, Kitty and her new boyfriend, some freshman named Jake who was actually pretty cute, passed by them. Jake gave them both an appreciative once-over, but Kitty quickly averted her gaze and kept her head down while she grabbed the boy by the arm and hurried away.

"So she's still terrified of you, hm?"

"She should be."

Rachel tightened her hold around her books to keep herself from falling prey to instinct. She would have reached for Quinn's hand right then if they weren't on school grounds, surrounded by their peers. Instead she settled for a light bump of her hip against Quinn and grinned at her.

"You know I'm proud of you? For what you did with her."

"So you've said." She turned to her with a mischievous glint in her eyes. "And showed..."

Rachel lifted her chin in the air, not ashamed in the least.

"I just wanted to make sure you knew."
"The sentiment was well-received."

She grinned. "Oh, I know. I was there too, remember? There were many wonderfully positive things you said about me, or rather, moaned...and occasionally even screamed..."

Quinn ducked her head slightly, blushing, and Rachel beamed.
"Excuse me? But I'm the perfect Maria! There shouldn't even be a question about it! Why are we holding open auditions when we all obviously know that-"

Quinn hooked her finger in the back of Rachel's skirt and pulled her back down into her seat.

She'd known this was coming. Rachel had been laser focused on the upcoming school musical since they confirmed it would be *West Side Story*. By now, she knew her girlfriend well enough to be prepared for these moments and have her own emotions in check so she could keep Rachel from flying off the handle.

As well as she could, anyway...

Leaning over, Quinn whispered against her ear, "If Mercedes wants to audition, then have an audition. It's just another opportunity for you to prove yourself as the best. Why let it be handed to you when you can win it fairly and show everyone?"

Rachel frowned, looking a bit nervous, which surprised Quinn. It wasn't the reaction she expected, but Rachel nodded anyway and looked to Mr. Schuester apologetically.

"O-of course. Holding an audition is the absolute best way to determine who's right for the part without any second guessing. When I win, it will be crystal clear that I was the one made for the role."

"We'll see about that." Mercedes flipped her hair back superciliously. "I'm feeling particularly 'pretty' this year..."

Rachel swallowed thickly and crossed her arms, slumping down in her seat a little. Quinn didn't know what to make of it. Why was Rachel acting so strangely? So what if there was an audition? Rachel knew better than anyone else that she would beat out any competition Mercedes would bring. She was the best. She *knew* she was the best. So why was she acting like she was...worried?

Quinn confronted her later that day in the car as she drove them back to the Berry house. Rachel had taken to waiting for her after school by doing her homework in the library during the afternoons when it was Quinn's turn to lead the Cheerios practice just so they could go home together.

Even then, hours after that outburst in Glee, Rachel was still acting odd. She was quiet. *Quiet!* Rachel Berry! Quinn was really starting to get concerned.

"What's going on with you?"

The brunette looked up in shock, as if she just remembered Quinn was in the car with her too.

"Oh," she shrugged halfheartedly, "it's nothing. I'm fine. Just a little tired."

That was an obvious lie. She couldn't even look in Quinn's direction.

"No secrets, Rachel."

At that, she blew out a breath and gave in, resting her head against the window.

"I really want that part, Quinn," she said in a small voice...too small.
"And you'll get it," she replied easily. "Mercedes is good, but you're better."

"What if..." she swallowed hard, "w-what if I'm not?"

Alarm bells went off in Quinn's head and she immediately pulled off the road, making Rachel gasp at the sharp turn as she had to hold on.

"QUINN! What did you do th-"

She flung off her seatbelt and turned to her in disbelief. "Did I really just hear those words come out of your mouth? What is going on here, Rachel? Since when have you ever doubted your talent?"

"Mercedes and Kurt have improved significantly over the last two years!" she cried in frustration. "I mean, Kurt is really good, and Mercedes..." She put her head in her hands. "Mercedes is real competition for me now, Quinn. Now that she's had more practice, a little training, she's..."

"Still not as incredible as you!" Quinn finished for her sternly.

"But she could be! It doesn't come down to pure vocal talent anymore. It's about passion, an emotional connection, stage presence, so many other smaller, but far from insignificant factors. I don't have the lead on them, on Mercedes, that I used to with my training because now they're...they're so good. I-If I mess up even the slightest bit...if I'm off by just a little, she could beat me. I..." She trailed off, utterly lost. "I don't know how to handle that," she finished quietly.

"Look at me." Quinn cupped her cheek gently and guided the brunette to meet her eyes. "You're right, Kurt and Mercedes are getting better. Guess what? So are you. We've all improved these past couple years. It's a good thing that they're better, it's good for you. You should be hoping for it!"

She was confused. "What are you talking about?"

"Aside from wanting the best for your friends, you need to be challenged," Quinn explained. "What do you think you're going to go up against in New York? These parts aren't going to be handed to you, you're going to have to fight like hell to get them. It's going to be brutal. You'll be competing against girls like Sunshine, hundreds of them! They're all going to have amazing voices. But I know you're ready for it, I know you have what it takes. What makes you better, what makes you different, and sets you apart, will not just be how talented you are, but who you are. If you make that known, if you make everyone see that, then you will succeed. Rachel Berry is a star and no one is ever going to take that away from you. You won't let them. Understand?"

She nodded speechlessly.

"Mercedes is going to bring everything she has to this audition and so will you. Having someone there to push you and challenge you to be better, to reach new heights, is exactly what you need, Rachel. It is not in your nature to back down from a challenge and I'll be damned if you start now."

Rachel looked at her silently for a moment, tears brimming, then without a word, she crawled across the divider, straddled Quinn, and hugged her so tightly, she lost her breath. Quinn stroked the smaller girl's back soothingly and when Rachel buried her face in the crook of her neck, Quinn pressed her lips to her hair. They stayed there like that for awhile.

Rachel refused to let go.

Quinn wouldn't have dreamed of making her.
Quinn heard them before she saw them as they came down the hall towards her where she was standing at her locker.

"We spend so much time sublimatin', thinkin' about, 'What am I going to have for lunch, dinner?' We gotta chill out on all that stuff, man," he drawled.

Mike groaned, shaking his head. "Dude, just stop."

"You can't tell me that wasn't totally on point!"

He sighed. "Okay, so you kind of sounded like him..."

"YES!"

"I said 'kind of!'"

Sam pumped his fists in the air. "KING OF IMPRESSIONS, RIGHT HERE! THAT'S RIGHT FOLKS! ME!"

"And I'm leaving." Mike shook his head in exasperation and ran off to find Tina before their next class.

"What happened to you promising never to sound like Matthew McConaughey?" Quinn joked as Sam got closer.

He made a face. "That was all the stuff I promised to do when I was dating you. I'm not dating you anymore."

It could have sounded mean if he meant for it to hurt, but there was only sweetness in his voice and a teasing glint in his eyes.

She chuckled with a nod. "And how is that working out for you?"

Sam was quiet for a moment, fiddling with the straps of his backpack before replying quietly, "I met someone."

Quinn looked up at him from her locker curiously before turning back to concentrate on which books she was taking out.

"And?"

"Her name is Alex. She's a freshman here."

Quinn hugged her books to her chest with one arm as she closed her locker.

"I'm still waiting for the point."

He looked sheepish as he ducked his head and scuffed his sneaker against the tiled floor. "I really like her..."

"You've liked a lot of girls."

Sam snapped up and shook his head in all seriousness. "No! Not like this. I mean, I had fun hanging out with those girls last year from Trinity, but none of them were really... Maybe it was me. I wasn't really looking for anything. But, I don't know, this one... I can't get her off my mind. She's beautiful, wicked smart, watches action flicks, and she's on the varsity soccer team already even though it's
only her first year. My brain just goes," he made an electrical shorting out noise and waved his hands wildly, "around her. I don't know what to do!"

Quinn softened and the corners of her mouth turned up in a small smile. Sam was talking to her again. Not only that, he was talking about his feelings for someone else. Real feelings. She couldn't remember the last time she saw him so happy, nervous, and dazed at the same time.

The bell rang and they both looked around them, slightly startled at the reminder they were still in school.

"Have you asked her out yet?"

"No. I can't...I can't even get two words out without stuttering and making a complete ass of myself. I get all gross and sweaty every time I try to talk to her so I'm sure she thinks I have, like, a sweating disorder by now."

"How did you meet her?"

He shook his head slightly, staring at the lockers. "She volunteers after school helping some of the kids with academic problems. Her little brother is dyslexic too, so she's really good at, like, understanding what I see and what I get messed up. My grades are the best they've ever been this year because she's helping me with my homework and studying."

Quinn bit her lip hard to keep her smile from getting any wider and freaking Sam out. This girl was sounding more and more perfect for him by the second.

The second warning bell rung and Quinn knew she had to act fast. It was her turn to be the friend. Sam was giving her the chance and she was not going to mess it up.

"Meet me at the Lima Bean after practice, okay?" She squeezed his arm reassuringly. "We'll talk and come up with the perfect plan for you to sweep this Alex off her feet."

"Yeah?" His face lit up hopefully. "You think so? What about the fact that I can't even, like, say real words when she's around?"

Quinn had started walking away to get to her class, but she turned back with a smirk.

"Then I'll give you lessons on how to speak English again."

"Wait! What? No! You can't cancel my musical! My New York dreams depend on this musical! You already put me in jeopardy by having three extremely unqualified people directing it, though that could have been rectified by putting me in charge. I know Barbra was 40 when she directed herself in Yentl and it might perhaps be too soon for me to undertake such an endeavor-"

"I hate you," Brittany said from the back.

Quinn flung a notebook at her.

"I take personal offense to that," Artie said. "I've already made several short films in my short tenure here at McKinley. I'm the only person here who has a clue about directing."

"Uh..."

"Except for Mr. Schue, of course," he amended, indicating their teacher who looked put off.
"This is all completely pointless since the musical was canceled," Tina said.

"Stop saying that!" Rachel cried

"It's true. Sue cut the funding. We can't do it," Puck said.

"WHAT?"

"Who said it was your musical anyway?" Mercedes snapped. "We haven't even held the auditions yet!"

Rachel was intensely shaking her head while Quinn just closed her eyes and looked liked she was trying to find some inner zen.

"Chill out guys! We can make this work," Blaine interjected. "I can only speak from my experience with the Warbler's, but no show choir is just one person, it's a team. If we keep our heads and work together, we can figure out a way around this."

"How are we supposed to do anything about it?" Puck asked. "No money means no show. Pretty easy math there.. I know that because I can do it."

"We could raise the mon-"

Finn stood up suddenly, exasperated. "Dude, I know you were a big deal at Dalton or whatever, but here we don't wear blazers. So have a seat and let the actual club members that have been here for more than five minutes talk this out."

"That's not fair, Finn," Mr. Schuester interjected chidingly. "Blaine is one of us now and he has experience. We could use a fresh pair of eyes and new voice coming from the outside. He has a chance to see things that the rest of us haven't."

"Thank you, Mr. Schue," Blaine muttered, but still sat down anyway, looking dejected. "I was just trying to help."

"Seriously, guys. We have to work as a team and ostracizing people for being new is not going to get us anywhere."

Brittany perked up, looking around eagerly. "Ooh, where's the ostrich?"

"I totally agree," Sam said, looking to Blaine. "You're part of the team now. For the New Directions, through and through?"

Kurt gave his boyfriend an encouraging nudge with his elbow and Blaine nodded eagerly. "Of course! I'm here to do everything I can to help us win."

Finn still didn't like it. "He's a turnjacket from our rival team. We have to be careful."

"...turncoat..." Quinn muttered.

"Yeah!" Finn pointed at her enthusiastically, mistaking Quinn's weary correction as support. "We all know who we gotta watch out-"

"Stop shutting people down, man! There's a reason you're not co-captain anymore."

"You said the same thing about Jesse when he came back and he only did everything he could to help us," Tina pointed out reasonably.
"It's not like it was Jesse's fault that you tripped over your own oafish clown feet and gave Brittany a black eye, costing us Nationals!" Santana said bitterly.

"No, no, no!" Rachel jumped back in, oblivious to the exchange that was taking place. "You can't cancel my musical, okay? I was considering changing my name to Maria!"

"The musical is not canceled!" Mr. Schue tried to explain to no avail.

Rachel groaned, and grabbed Quinn's arm, knocking her forehead against the blonde's shoulder.

"Finn, sit down and be quiet. Enough with the spy theories!" Kurt's voice had risen a few octaves to match his frustration with his step-brother.

"You're not exactly in the neutral zone right now, dude. You're in bed with the enemy!"

Everyone looked at him in surprise and bewilderment, including Kurt and Blaine.

Finn realized what he said and got flustered, turning red and stammering to cover himself. "I mean, metaphorically or whatever. Not like actually. Cause I don't know what you guys are...like...cause it's not my business and all that. I don't know. Not actually IN bed...cause I wouldn't know...even you are...which I don't know anything about."

"STOP. TALKING. Dios mio..."

He immediately clamped his mouth shut and sighed in relief that someone put him out of his misery. For once, he was actually thankful for Santana's intervening.

"So we need money," Quinn said, ignoring Finn's rambling entirely and steered the conversation back on track. "Does anyone have an idea for fundraising?"

"I do!" Mr. Schue interjected proudly, waving a stack of papers. He seemed relieved to finally have the room's attention again. "We'll sell ads in the program! I figure we can get maybe ten, twenty bucks apiece for them."

"Great," Quinn deadpanned. "So we'll only have to sell about 200 of them," she said, rolling her eyes.

"Well I think it's a brilliant idea!" Kurt said, slapping his hands on his legs enthusiastically. "And I volunteer myself to spearhead the charge."

"Of course you do," Santana said from behind him.

"It'll give me a chance to exercise my political muscles what with my campaign for student class president in full swing."

"You know Britt's already miles ahead of you after her killer flash mob performance in the gym, right? You don't have a chance Lady Hummel."

"We'll just see about that!"

"All right, that's enough," Mr. Schue said loudly, interrupting them. "I want to you to break off into smaller groups and figure out who's going to canvass which parts of town. And guys? I don't care what your personal issues are, you need to find a way to put them aside so we can work together. It doesn't matter what Sue does to us or what our issues are with each other, we're in this as one, and everyone's dreams in this group are going to come true this year. Let's do it!" He clapped his hands
and dismissed them.

Everyone got up and started walking around, moving chairs, as they huddled into their groups. When Quinn and Rachel stood up, Rachel had a death grip on her arm, holding her close.

"They can't cancel my musical, Quinn!" she said in a hushed, but still very loud, panicked voice.

"He seriously thinks we're going to sell 200 ads for a 4 page program? Is he smoking crack? We're going to have make up pages of gibberish just to fit everything even if we manage to sell 50..."

"Maybe Kurt's got something up his sleeve?" Sam suggested, overhearing them.

"He better or we're screwed," she sighed.

"You can't say that! You can't! My musical, Quinn!" Rachel cried wildly.

"Stop and breathe," Quinn ordered calmly and waited with a pointed gaze until Rachel managed to gather some semblance of her bearings again.

"It's going to be fine. Go talk to Kurt about his ideas and I'll try to talk Coach Sylvester down...again..."

"You said she kicked you out of her office last time though."

"Yeah..." Quinn winced at the memory. "But one more time can't hurt. I'll bring Brittany and Santana with me as back up."

"This musical has to happen."

"And it will," she replied reassuringly with a nod. "But no hysteria. Like Blaine said, we keep our heads."

"Yes, yes, right." Rachel took another deep, calming breath. "I'll start brainstorming with Kurt."

She turned on her heel to join the group that was already discussing strategies and Quinn waved Brittany and Santana over so they could go find Sue.

"I'm nearly deaf in my left ear from the last time when she brought out the megaphone," Santana grumbled. "This is pointless."

"We have to try," Brittany said. "Besides, it wouldn't look good for me, someone running for student council president, to back down from a fight." She slapped her fist into her palm for good measure. "I have to show the people I can get things done."

"I know," Santana nodded, "I'm here for you, Britt, but I'm just saying...we're gonna get a beat down for this."

"As long as we tried," Quinn said determinedly.

Fortunately, the show did go on. The club raised enough money thanks to Burt Hummel and at her three top Cheerio's insistence, Sue eventually backed down. She didn't want to risk them defecting again when she needed them for Nationals and her platform for cutting the art programs wasn't getting the polling numbers she needed anyway so the Glee club was free to breathe easy again.

Rachel won the part of Maria fair and square as Quinn said she would, but she insisted that she share it with Mercedes who worked incredibly hard and was every bit as deserving. So they did a double-
casting. When she told Quinn what she did, it was Quinn's turn to show Rachel how proud she was of her.

"Okay, guys! Listen up! New assignment on the board for this week."

"Getting tough with your intimate aisles?"

"Mercedes, just admit you need glasses already!"

"You best not be starting with me right now," she snapped at Kurt who only rolled his eyes.

"Get in touch with your inner child?" Rachel read correctly with a frown.

"Mr. Schue, that's really inappropriate to say as our teacher and a responsible adult in a position of authority. I'm going to have to report you to Principal Figgins. Nothing personal though. They just had an assembly about this."

"Not that kind of touching, Britt." Santana elbowed her gently.

"Oh. I don't have to file charges then. Awesome. That would have been, like, a total pain in the butt, and you would've been in prison doing 10 to 20 as some guy named Ice's bitch. It probably wouldn't be as fun as it sounds."

"All right!" He cried to quiet the chattering group and shook his head to clear his mind. "This week's assignment is about going back to your childhood, a time when you were innocent, completely unaware of everything you were going to face as you grew up. I think it would do us all some good to think back to lighter, happier times."

"You mean when we were naive and ignorant?"

"Actually, yes. I want you guys to dig deep and think hard about what your childhood means to you and find a song to express that."

"Wait..." Mike sat forward eagerly, "is this going where I think it's going?"

"No way, dude. He's not gonna make us do that."

"Oh my gosh!" Kurt squealed and turned around to Blaine who looked equally exuberant. "This is it!"

Rachel's eyes lit up and she instinctively latched on to Quinn's thigh.

"I don't get it," Sam said, shaking his head.

"Wait, that's not exactly what I was-" Mr. Schue started to protest, but the rest of the club was being whipping into an frenzy.

"IT'S DISNEY WEEK!" Rachel, Kurt, Mike, Mercedes, Artie, and Blaine all shouted out in unison.

Santana was just as excited as the rest of them, whispering happily with Brittany as they already started to plan their songs.

"Oh, seriously?" Sam cried, rubbing his hands together. "This is gonna be wicked awesome! I call "Go The Distance". It's like Hercules' own Rocky theme. 'Yo, Adrian!'"
Mercedes smacked him over the head for the terrible Stallone impersonation.

"Wait, do you mean like, *The Lion King* kind of stuff?" Finn asked, frowning.

"No one is doing *The Lion King*!" Quinn said shrilly, causing the club to look at her oddly and Rachel buried her face in Quinn's shoulder to hide her giggles.

"Uh, you don't get to say-"

"No one means no one!"

"You're one weird chick, Fabray."

Quinn's cheeks were flaming and Rachel was still giggling.

"Again, that really wasn't what I was referring to." Mr. Schue tried lamely. "Sure, Disney was a part of your childhood as well as mine but, it's not..." He trailed off helplessly when he realized his words were falling on deaf ears.

So he went back to the dry erase board and wiped it clean before writing something new.

*Disney!*

"I could go the Aguilera route or I could try a little lesser known choice..." Kurt mused.

"You could hit the high 'E' in your sleep." Blaine nodded encouragingly.

"Back off!" Santana shook her finger at him. "'Reflection' is all mine. Go find another gay movie! It's Disney, you have a party platter of them."

"How is *Mulan* a gay movie?" Blaine asked in bewilderment.

"It's about a chick cross dressing and giving the other dudes boners and gay panics. What would you call it?"

"Boy, did I underestimate your ability to boil down the complexity of a story about family, gender roles, and the dynamics of Chinese cultural traditions into one completely horrific off base sentence," Tina said irritably.


"I'm Korean!"

"What's your point?"

"Mulan is Chinese?"

"Still not seeing the point."

"I have to do *Beauty and the Beast*. I don't care if Rachel worships at the altar of Celine. I'm doing it! That is my movie!" Mercedes slapped her knees firmly.

"Oh! Oh!" Artie waved his hand at her. "I can be the Peabo Bryson to your Celine!"

"YES!" she cried and they bumped fists excitedly.

"You two can have it," Rachel said curtly. "I've already picked my song."
"It can't be better than Celine," Mercedes said proudly.

"While not better than Celine, it is close to my heart: Lea Salonga," she answered. "A certified Tony award winning Broadway star who rose to new heights of stardom while securing a personal piece of history as the singing voice of Jasmine in the 1992 Disney classic, Aladdin."

"I'm so doing the naughty crab song," Brittany said.

"What naughty crab song?"

"Darling, it's better, way down where it's wetter, take it from me!" she sang, tongue in cheek with a mischievous glint in her eyes.

Santana didn’t know whether to be wildly turned on or to pass out laughing. So she just stared at Brittany with wide eyes.

"What do you think you want to do, Quinn?" Rachel asked excitedly. "You're going to sing with me, right? A Whole New World is an amazing duet for us!"

"No," she said bluntly.

"No?" Rachel repeated in disbelief, hurt.

"You should sing with Blaine."

"What? Why? I want to sing with you!"

"You have to practice for the musical and Blaine is your new leading man. You guys should be singing together every chance you have."

Rachel looked woefully confused for a few moments, staring at Quinn as she tried to puzzle together her behavior and then her brow became smooth as recognition washed over her.

"You already have a song you want to sing," she said accusingly.

"Maybe."

"And it's a song you want to sing for me and that's why you're pushing me towards Blaine."

"It's possible."

Rachel rolled her eyes good-naturedly and went along with it. "All right, Quinn. I'll ask him, but you'll have to tell me what song you want to sing first."

"Not a chance."

She grinned and settled back in her seat. "Yeah, I know. It was worth a try though."

Quinn finally let the facade crack and a tiny smile danced on her lips.

Rachel would end up with tears in her eyes, an absolute puddle of emotions, when Quinn sang So This Is Love for her in front of everyone a couple days later.

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They were relaxing on the couch in the den at the Berry house. Rachel was on her laptop looking through songs for their holiday music assignment in Glee with her feet in Quinn's lap while Quinn
had her nose in a book. They were enjoying the silence together for a while until Quinn broke it.

"So what do you want for Hanukkah?"

The brunette looked up in bewilderment. "I beg your pardon?"

"I think I'm going to need a more helpful clue than that." Quinn set her book aside, giving Rachel her full attention.

"What are you talking about?" she asked, still baffled. "You don't celebrate Hanukkah."

"I'm well aware of that, thank you, but someone else I know does, so...what do you want for your Hanukkah present?"

"You want to get me something for...?" Rachel repeated, her eyes going wide.

Quinn huffed impatiently. "This conversation is taking far longer than I anticipated."

"Well, I didn't expect..."

Rachel shook her head in disbelief. Finn had never talked about celebrating Hanukkah with her. He didn't even want to come over for dinner because he thought it meant he would be lying or betraying his religion somehow. At least, that was his excuse. Rachel always gave him a free pass and pretended not to mind that instead of spending the evening with her and her family celebrating their holiday, he was at home playing Call Of Duty. The fact that she was Jewish never really meant anything to him. Christmas was his favorite holiday so it was always about Christmas.

At the time, Rachel didn't really mind so much. She tried not to think about it. It wasn't that she didn't love Christmas too, because she did. She loved the atmosphere, the music, the omnipresent scent of pine needles and cinnamon, the warm glow everything seemed to have once the lights went up and the decorations... She loved that and she loved the exchange of gifts, but it didn't mean that her faith was any less important or significant. She loved what holiday season meant in general: a wondrous and magical time to bring in good cheers, joyful tidings and goodwill to all.

For Rachel, the holidays wasn't about the specificity of faith and who believed what, it was about the goodwill of mankind and everyone coming together, family, friends, even strangers to be happy, share joy, and appreciate what you have, give thanks to the life you have and the time you have on this earth.

So, no, Finn never cared about Hanukkah or Judaism in general, but he liked the feeling of Christmas. That's what made it his favorite holiday and Rachel didn't think that was such a bad thing. So she didn't talk to him about all of the holidays and traditions she participated in with her fathers. She just told him she couldn't go out with him on those nights because they were just "family nights". He never questioned it. He never cared enough to.

But here was Quinn...a still rather devout Christian even with her grievances...far more observant of her faith than Finn ever was...asking her about celebrating their holidays together. Not just hers. Theirs.

It never once crossed Rachel's mind that it would have been any different than it had been in the past.

"I mean...I thought we would just celebrate Christmas and exchange gifts then," she explained in bewilderment. "Besides, Christmas is more about gift giving, not Hanukkah. It's a tradition for children, really, and the gifts only came about with the Christmas influence so Jewish kids didn't feel left out when it came to presents. And, I'll say it again, you're not Jewish."
"And you're not Christian. So does that mean you don't want a present?"

"I didn't say that!" she replied quickly.

Quinn laughed.

"You're right." Rachel said, a small smile appearing on her lips. "We should set a tradition for ourselves, seeing as how we celebrate different religious holidays. What if you give me a gift for Hanukkah, but I give you a gift on Christmas? That way we both acknowledge each other's beliefs in a respectful way."

"Okay." Quinn nodded slowly, "we could do that. I guess I could just give you your Christmas present another time then..."

Rachel's eyes widened. "You already bought me a Christmas gift?"

"Yeah," she shrugged innocently, "but I mean, since you only wanted us to exchange presents once..."

She waved her hands wildly. "I changed my mind! Forget I said that!"

Quinn laughed again. "Look, Rachel, I'd really like us to celebrate both of these holidays together. If that's okay with you, I mean. I want to understand what it is you believe in, what you grew up with, just like I want you to know the same about me. We should be able to do this together."

Rachel pushed her laptop away and crawled over to Quinn. She took her face in her hands and kissed her deeply. When she pulled back, Quinn was grinning knowingly.

"Kiss-worthy, hm?"

She laughed softly, running her fingers lightly over Quinn's lips. "You're almost always kiss-worthy."

"Almost always?" she cried indignantly.

Rachel squealed and broke into a run as her girlfriend chased her through the house.

"You have to help me."

Sam sighed, looking around full hallway of students pushing past them, before turning back to Quinn who had just walked up to him.

"I think I've fulfilled my 'help Quinn' duties for a lifetime," he replied with a raised eyebrow and went past her, heading for his next class.

Quinn wasn't letting him go that easily and kept pace with him.

"I helped you with Alex! You guys have been happy little lovebirds for over two months now. I got you to cut your hair properly again and saved you from doing endless impressions of Matthew McConaughey. You'd still be single right now if I hadn't. I even Cheerio-cleaned that problem you had with the girl who kept hitting on you so Alex didn't get the wrong idea."

He snorted incredulously. "You're actually trying to keep score? Well, if that's the case, I'm pretty sure I have you beat...for life."
Quinn sighed impatiently. "This is an emergency."

He gave her a look. "I doubt that."

She rolled her eyes. "I need you to help me find a novelty sweater with a lion on it for me to give Rachel for Hanukkah. I've looked everywhere I can think of, but I can't- Why are you laughing?"

Sam had stopped walking and rubbed his forehead in disbelief, still chuckling. "You ever have those moments where you feel like your life is so surreal it should be like a wack dream or some kind of old-time musical?"

"Please don't sing."

"This is definitely one of those moments."

"Are you going to help me or not?"

"Relax. I actually went sweater shopping with Artie once and he's got the lowdown on the good stuff, so I'm sure we'll find something. There are sweaters out there like you wouldn't even believe! One of them had a-"

"We'll go after Glee club," Quinn cut him off unapologetically. "You're driving. Meet you in the parking lot. Don't be late."

She turned on her heel and started off as quickly as she had approached him.

"Hey!" he called after her, making her stop. "Why a lion?"

Quinn's cheeks turned red, but she didn't give much else away. "It's none of your business. Just help me find it and keep your mouth shut."

"You really need to work on your people skills."

"I'm leaving now."

Sam was unperturbed. "You're going to have to say please if you want my help."

"This is-"

"Uh-uh!" He wagged his finger. "You gotta say it."

"I'm not-"

"You want to find Rachel's present? Gonna have to work for it."

She glared at him. "Sam, will you please help me find a sweater for Rachel?"

"Why, certainly, Quinn! Anything I can do to help my very, very, extremely, ex-girlfriend out!"

"If you don't come through on this, I swear to God, I will make you pay."

"I think there are classes you can take to work on this."

"Get over yourself."

As she walked away, she heard him call after her.
"I'm glad we're friends again too!"

She had to smile. Who knew being happy could feel so good?

"RACHEL!" Quinn yelled as she tore into the Berry house on a mission. "RACHEL, YOU COME OUT HERE RIGHT NOW!"

Hiram came out of the den, looking at her oddly.

"Quinn..I know I told you to treat this home as your own, but it's still my house and we don't yell-"

She folded her arms across her chest. "Your daughter tried to bribe one of the Glee club members to stop asking for a solo."

He stared at her for a moment, then turned to go up the stairs, with Quinn hot on his heels. He knocked on the pink door and tried the handle, but it was locked.

"Rachel Babra Berry, you open this door and explain yourself right now!"

"No!" she cried petulantly. She was loud enough to understand, though muffled slightly through the door.

"How could you do that to Tina?"

"Tina?" Hiram replied in surprise, glancing at Quinn and then back to the pink door. "You tried to bribe that sweet girl?"

"I did what I had to and I'm not sorry!"

"And what are you going to do when you go to New York?" Quinn shot back. "I don't think any of those girls will be so easily bought off, Rachel!"

"It's not like that! Tina was merely an obstacle in the way of my last chance at high school stardom and I just wanted to remove a nuisance! That's all!"

"You're talking about our friend like she's road kill," Quinn said flatly.

There was a quiet pause before Rachel flung the door open with a frown. "That's not fair," she said, then slammed it again before either of them had a chance to respond.

Hiram sighed. "You know your father and I encourage your ambition, sweetheart, but we also tried to teach you about where to draw the line." He looked at Quinn. "A lesson she never learned."

"Stop ganging up on me!"

Quinn could practically feel Rachel's indignant ire radiating through the pink door.

"This isn't your first offense, Rachel!" she replied. "I'm starting to see a pattern. First you send Sunshine to a crack house and now this?"

"Crack house?" Hiram echoed, alarmed.

"Oh, she didn't mention that?" Quinn rolled her eyes and raised her voice pointedly, looking at the door as if Rachel could see her. "Gee, I wonder why!"
"it wasn't an active crack house!" she protested. "And I told you I made amends with her."

"Doesn't change the fact that you did it in the first place."

"And you're such a stranger to these tactics, Quinn? You tried to bribe Finn into staying away from me by telling him he could get to second base with you!"

Now Hiram was staring at Quinn, but she refused to be embarrassed, though she was sure her cheeks were bright pink.

"That has nothing to do with this!" she insisted, then added, "And it was only going to be over the bra!"

"Could you ladies slow down for a moment?" Hiram pinched the bridge of his nose. "I'm still trying to process this 'crack house' incident."

"A girl tried out for Glee club last year," Quinn explained, "and Rachel was worried she was better than her so rather than take that chance, she lied to the girl about where the auditions were and gave her directions to a crack house to scare her off."

"I repeat, it was not an active crack house!" the voice behind the door cried.

"She ended up being recruited to Vocal Adrenaline and beat us at Nationals last year."

"No!" he gasped.

Quinn gave a curt nod, her lips pressed together tightly.

"I was extremely supportive of her during the competition and apologized for my rash actions," Rachel's voice piped in again. "What more do you want from me? She won anyway. I could have just let her run off to the Philippine diplomats and let her beg to be deported like she wanted!"

"What?" the two of them echoed in reply.

"It's not important. Look, Tina waited three years before jumping on the bandwagon to fight for a solo when I have already spent that crucial time battling Kurt, Mercedes, and now Santana! Why would she wait until Nationals to pull this stunt?"

"Maybe it's because she feels like she's waited long enough for her turn?" Quinn shot back.

"Then she should have spoken up earlier. That's not my fault!"

"When has Tina ever asked for anything from the club, Rachel?" Quinn replied quietly. "She's one of our most talented members and she's been swaying in the background for three years without a single solo to show for it. How many solos have you had?"

"I fight for mine!" she argued.

"You also hog them," Quinn retorted.

"I refuse to feel guilty for being more talented than everyone else."

"Rachel, sweetheart, I admit Tina could perhaps have had better timing with this, but your reaction is inexcusable. You don't treat your friends that way." Hiram said. "Nor your competition. It's beneath you."
"Besides, you know Tina deserves her turn in the spotlight," Quinn added.

"Not at Nationals!"

"Do you really believe that offering her money to shut up was the best way to handle the situation?" the blonde reasoned.

There was silence behind the door and Quinn exchanged a look with Hiram as they waited for a response. It came in a softer voice than before.

"Perhaps not..." Rachel said gloomily and cracked the door open to peer out at them.

Quinn gently pushed it open the rest of the way before taking Rachel's hand and met her in the doorway. "Then fix it." She sighed disappointedly, shaking her head, while she brushed back some hair from Rachel's pouting visage. She was the spitting image of a kicked puppy.

"Quinn's right," Hiram said with a nod. He looked between the two of them and knew it was time for him to leave them alone to finish the discussion. He started to retreat down the hall.

"But, honey?"

The two girls turned around to look at him.

"We're going to discuss this 'crack house' incident with your Dad later tonight."

Rachel groaned. "Yes, Daddy."

After months of agonizing, Rachel was finally a NYADA finalist and Quinn was actually more excited about it than Rachel was (if that was possible). She'd been put through the wringer with Rachel's mood swings and despairing over never getting the chance to achieve her dreams. It ended up that she was more anxious about Rachel's acceptance letter than her own! But once that was settled, the burden was lifted, and two days later her letters started to arrive as well.

When they found out that Quinn got into every school she had applied to, including Columbia, Yale, and NYU, all with an athletic scholarship, it was Quinn who made the hotel reservation for them this time. After all that she'd been through with Rachel, and the 'NYADA nightmare' as she would forever call it, they both desperately needed to get away, sans parental lurking. It was their celebration (and her well deserved vacation).

The next two months were a whirlwind. Everyone else was getting their letters too. Plans were being made, huge decisions happening, and it started to really set in that everyone was going in different directions. Their tight knit little Glee club was being ripped apart to all corners of the country.

Sam was a junior, but with nearly the entire Glee club leaving and so many of his friends around him getting ready for college, he started to look ahead too. With his girlfriend Alex's help, his grades were better than they'd ever been. He had a chance of getting into a decent school and was looking into Ohio State, Ball State University in Indiana, not to mention a few community colleges for back up. Quinn knew he would undoubtedly choose OSU. Sam could never be too far from his family. It was one reason of many why she loved him. His heart. He loved his family so much, he'd do anything in the world for him. In a way, she felt like she'd been accepted as a part of his family in Sam's mind because it really seemed like he would do anything in the world for her too.

Unfortunately, his parents didn't make a great deal of money and Sam wasn't good enough for an athletic scholarship nor did he have the grades to get an academic one. So it looked like he was going
to have to go to school part time while working to pay his tuition. Quinn wasn't worried about him. Sam always seemed to know how to make things work, no matter what life threw his way.

Kurt was a NYADA finalist as well so there was no question about what his plans were. Quinn was happy about that. She was grateful that Rachel would have one of her friends already there in school with her. What Rachel was facing with the career and goals she chose, she was in for a rough few years. Having a friend there for support, not just Quinn alone, would only help. It also helped that Blaine would be attending Tisch at NYU.

Finn signed up for the army and was going to be sent to training camp soon after graduation. She didn't think he would even make it out of training. Call it intuition, call it Rachel's psychic abilities rubbing off on her, call it plain ol' common sense, but five years from now Finn Hudson would be back in Lima running Burt Hummel's tire shop.

Mercedes was going to the University of Nevada in Las Vegas. That one threw people. She said it was because it was cheaper than going to school in California, but close enough so that she could still get to LA and make a recording deal happen somehow. She even said she might try out for one of those reality shows, like American Idol or The Voice. Besides, Las Vegas would offer the excitement and change the diva in in her needed after being stifled in Lima for so long.

Artie was also a junior, and like Sam, he wanted to get a head start as well. He was really interested in the UNC School of the Arts to major in film studies. It was a really great program and financially manageable. He had already started to film a documentary about his life, about them, the Glee club, and what it meant to be truly accepted for the first time by his peers as an equal. Quinn had only seen a little bit of it unedited, but it was enough to have her convinced that Artie was going to have some scholarship money coming his way.

Puck was going to go to a junior college nearby, and if he managed to get his Associate's degree, he said he would maybe give a four year school a shot. Quinn wasn't sure exactly what would happen with him, but Puck was a survivor. He may not ever make it out of Lima, but that didn't mean he was going be another Lima Loser either.

Mike was going to Berkley and Tina was going to Brown. They had made an agreement that both would go to the school that best suited them without taking into account where the other was going. When Tina fell in love with Brown and Mike was set on Berkeley's dance program, they resigned themselves for a bittersweet goodbye. Quinn was proud of them for being mature enough not to try a long distance relationship like that, making the inevitable break-up even messier and more hurtful than it had to be. Who knows? Maybe they would find each other again and Brittany would get to see if their children turned out be Asian after all. She was also pleased that Tina was going to Brown because that meant there would definitely be some visits in the future to see an old high school friend.

Santana got accepted to the University of Miami, her Mami's alma mater, and was screeching for a week about how she was getting the fucking hell out of Lima. That joy only lasted a week because then they found out that Brittany wouldn't be graduating with them. She was going to have to repeat the entire year.

Even Quinn made sure to stay out of Santana's way in the halls after that. A record number of freshman got shoved up against lockers in the following days. When Santana finally calmed down enough to see reason (just barely), Quinn sat down with them both to help figure out what they could do.

"How did this even happen? I thought you were handl-"
"Don't start with me, Quinn!" she snarled. "I did have it handled! I mean, I thought I did!"

"She helped me with all my homework and signed us up for the same classes so I could copy off her tests and stuff," Brittany explained.

Santana sighed. "But I had to take Physics this year while Britts was in Chem, so I paid this Asian chick a crapload of money to do all of her labwork and to give her the test answers, but she transferred a few months after the beginning of the year, back to Hong Kong or whatever. It's my own fault for paying that slanty eyed bitch upfront!"

"Watch it…"

"Why didn't you tell me?" Santana mumbled, her throat clogged with tears. "I would have found a way…you just didn't tell me…"

"I didn't want you to worry," she said sadly. "You were already working so hard to help me with my other stuff. I thought one class wouldn't be a big deal."

"It's not your fault."

"It is…I let you down, San. Now you're all sad and angry again, like you were last year because I was with Artie."

"It's totally different than that, Britt."

"You're still sad and angry though."

"Not with you."

They shared a look and Brittany reached out for Santana's hand, squeezing tightly.

"So..." Quinn tried tentatively. "Won't summer school give you a do-over?"

"No," Brittany sighed. "They told me my teachers wouldn't sign off on it 'cause my grades still suck so bad. I only got pushed through freshman year because of Sue and then San started helping me a lot."

"It's all going to work out," Quinn said reassuringly. "We'll figure it out, okay?"

"You don't know that!"

"It's you and Brittany…of course I know that."

Brittany pulled her into a tight hug for that and then they went on to try and map out what was going to happen next.

Santana broke down crying at one point, swearing that she wasn't leaving without Brittany. She even insisted on deferring for a year or going to community college. Brittany adamantly refused. Quinn had never seen the other girl so fired up before. She actually yelled at Santana for even considering it. It was the first time Quinn had ever heard Brittany yell before in all their years of friendship.

"It's just a year, Santana..." Quinn tried carefully.

"A year?" she snarled. "A whole freaking year, Q? No. There's no way in hell I'm leaving Brittany behind. Not ever."
"You're not leaving her behind, she'll finish here, and then move out to be with you."

"No."

"San…" Brittany said sadly.

Santana couldn't bring herself to look at her, but her voice softened. "I'm not doing it, Britt-Britt. I promised you." She glared at Quinn. "If you're not going to help figure out how to make this happen, then just leave!"

"What would you do if it was Rachel, Quinn?" Brittany asked.

"I'd make her leave without me," she replied easily. That was something she'd made her mind up about a long time ago. "I'd break up with her."

Brittany took that in and glanced nervously at Santana who was looking like she was about to tear Quinn's throat out.

"And if it was the hobbit stuck here with you getting out?" she shot back. "What would you do then?"

"I'd just…" Quinn started confidently and then faltered. Santana had her and she knew it. She sighed. "…I'd do whatever it takes make sure she came with me."

It took a lot of back and forth, replete with plenty of tears on both sides, before Brittany finally put her foot down. Santana was too stubborn to leave without her, so Brittany would just have to leave with her. She decided she was going to drop out, forget senior year, and go with her girlfriend to Miami. She'd get a job, they'd rent an apartment together, and that's how it was going to be. Santana was not allowed to refuse (no matter how hard she tried).

It was exactly 13 days before Santana finally agreed to the plan (without feeling like she was ruining Brittany's life) and that was only because Brittany promised to work on getting her GED when they got there. Besides, all Brittany wanted to do was dance anyway. She never had plans for college - high school was as far as she wanted to go, but she wasn't going to let that hold Santana back. They wanted to be together so this was the best compromise.

Quinn was hesitant. She hated the idea of Brittany not actually having a high school diploma. Everything she was taught about education, especially seeing the examples of what happens when you didn't have one in Lima, went against it. It was actually Rachel who was able to make her see reason.

Not everyone had to go the same route to end up on top. Brittany's goals didn't require a college education. Not everyone had to do things the same way. It didn't have to be high school, college, master's degree, career, family. Life doesn't require you to follow that streamline, they'd only been taught it had to go that way. In any case, Brittany had always done things differently, why would that change now?

Little did she know, Rachel was sneakily using Brittany's change of plans to prepare Quinn for the bomb she was about to drop herself.

"I'll take acting classes, dance classes, workshops, master classes, everything - all while getting into every audition I can find. While every other student at Tisch, NYADA, and other drama schools, will spend four years training in a safe, contained environment, I'll be out there getting real work experience, life experience, meeting the right people, finding the right places. When they graduate,
I'll be ahead of them by four years, and that could very well mean the difference between myself and them in an audition."

They were sitting on the edge of the stage in the empty auditorium after school. It was Santana's day to take the Cheerios practice so Quinn was supposed to be out enjoying herself with Rachel, but instead they had gotten themselves locked into a fierce debate when Rachel told her that she wouldn't be attending NYADA in the fall.

"Casting agents don't just look at what school you went to, they look at what you've done. I could spend my time at NYADA building a portfolio that, while likely impressive, will still be a school portfolio, not true theater experience. Attending NYADA will be impressive, but my performance will still be the only thing that matters. I don't need to spend thousands of dollars every semester, only to leave having already put myself deeply into debt with student loans."

Quinn was just shaking her head over and over, not liking a single word of it.

"Taking outside classes while going on auditions is a significantly cheaper option and my best bet. Being a NYADA graduate won't get me a role, Quinn. It's going to take much more than that. Think about how many of their students have gone on to fail in showbiz? How many, the actual statistics, people who graduate from NYADA went on to have extraordinary careers? The number is far too low to be taken seriously. It helps - I won't deny that - but being a NYADA graduate is not the be all, end all."

"Rachel...if this is about money, I can-"

"Don't even finish that sentence. It's not just about money, but about spending it a way that will prove to be the most conducive to my career."

"They'll teach you what you need to know rather than having to take the hard way and figure it out for yourself!"

"That's what the classes will be for and I'm a quick study. You know that. It's just not the same commitment. You don't need formal training from a performing arts school to succeed in this business! You need talent, ambition, and the drive to make things happen. I already have all of that!"

"This is absurd! You're telling me you went through that hell, that we went through that hell, to get you into NYADA and now you're going to turn them down? You need an education, Rachel! Everyone does!"

"Liza Minelli."

"What?"

"Julie Andrews."

"Rachel..."

"Kyra Sedgwick, Amanda Seyfried, Celine Dion, Patty Duke, Nicole Kidman, Demi Moore, Catherine Zeta-Jones, Uma Thurman, Kate Winslet, Hilary Swank, Bernadette Peters, and of course, lest we forget, the incomparable Barbra Streisand."

Quinn had a pretty good idea of what all the names meant: successful female actors, many with theater credentials as well as Hollywood fame, that never went to college or had any drama school training.
"Shall I continue? Because that's hardly even touching the list."

"Just because it worked for them-"

"I shouldn't consider myself in their league, is what you mean?"

"No! What I mean is that you need a fallback. Everyone does! Without NYADA, you won't have anything if-"

"If I don't make it?"

"No! That's not it! It's just..." She balled up her fists in frustration. "URGH! Why can't you just take the safety net? There's nothing wrong with that!"

"Because it's pointless. I don't need one. Planning for something to go wrong is just a surefire way to encourage doubt and undermine my dedication. Broadway is my all, Quinn. I won't fail. And this way? I'll have to make it because I won't have the safety of a back-up plan. I won't have any choice but to succeed."

"Do you have any idea how naïve you sound? Rachel, how many people go out there, just like you want to do, without a resume, without any real work experience, and succeed? It's extraordinarily rare. You know better than I do about how many starving artists are out there, desperate to hit the big time and yet never do. I'm not saying that's you; in fact, I know it won't be you. But I also know that you need to protect yourself, just in case."

"All this is just getting in the way of what you really think. You just don't have the guts to say it."

"What are you talking ab-?"

"You don't think I have what it takes. You don't really think I'll be a star. You encourage me because you know that's what you're supposed to do as my girlfriend, but you never actually believed it. That's why you're pushing school so hard. You think I'll fail and need my contacts and education at NYADA to pursue some other lesser career."

Quinn clenched her teeth as she glared at her. What was wrong with this girl? How could Rachel possibly say that Quinn didn't believe in her? If anything, Quinn was in competition with Rachel's fathers for who was more supportive and stalwart in their belief of Rachel's talent and star quality.

And she was furious.

Quinn wasn't sure why it angered her so much; maybe it was more about being hurt. She was angry that Rachel doubted her support and hurt that she would still accuse her of lying.

"You couldn't be more wrong," she said darkly.

"And I think I'm more right than you ever want to admit," Rachel shot back.

Before Quinn could say another word, the brunette grabbed her coat and bag before storming out of the auditorium.

"Damn," the blonde whispered to herself, her voice echoing in the large, empty room.

"So...arguing with the missis, already?"

"Why do you always have to imply that I have the masculine role in our relationship?"
"Ooooh." She winced. "That bad, huh?"

"Just leave it alone, Santana."

"RACHEL!"

The brunette looked up, startled, from the opposite end of the choir room.

"Santana, my hearing is more than adequate; why are you screaming at me?"

"I just wanted to make sure you could hear me across the giant chasm that's separating you and Quinn right now."

Rachel rolled her eyes and Quinn smacked the Latina's arm.

"I told you to leave it alone!"

"Look, you know me, I don't like to meddle..."

Everyone who heard that looked up at Santana in disbelief.

"...without a good reason for it," she finished pointedly, glowering at the rest of them. "But the fact of the matter is your little lovers' quarrel with Berry is affecting the mood of the club so why not just kiss and make up? Away from the general population because no one needs that horror inflicted upon them."

"That's not going to happen," Rachel snapped.

"Why not?" Brittany asked. "You're, like, totally obsessed with each other."

"Because, Brittany," she turned to face the blonde self-importantly, "Quinn refuses to support my dreams. She's being selfish."

"And you know nothing about that," Mercedes drawled loudly.

Rachel made a face at her.

"I'm not being unsupportive or selfish!" Quinn cried. "Just because you're too naïve to understand what it is you want to put yourself through doesn't make it my problem. When you come to your senses again, then we can talk."

"I'm being entirely pragmatic about the situation. It's you that can't look beyond your own narrow-mindedness!"

"You're not seeing the bigger picture! It's called 'higher education' for a reason, Rachel!"

"And I told you that I'm a quick study! I started walking at four."

"...years old?" Sam asked with a furrowed brow.

"No! Four months!" she huffed impatiently.

"That's actually impossible," Puck interjected. "Most babies don't walk before nine months because their leg muscles and bones need that time to develop. You'd be like a bowlegged freak or whatever if you did that."
The entire Glee club, including Mr. Schuester who had just walked in on the argument, stared up at Puck slack-jawed.

"What?" he cried defensively at all the looks and crossed his arms. "I read it somewhere! ...W-when I was surfing for porn. Major MILF action. Seriously!"

"Look," Rachel was the first to break out of the Puck-stupor, "I'm through discussing this. When you've decided to come to terms with my decision, then we can talk. Until then..." She flipped her hair back and settled into her seat with her arms crossed.

"I didn't even bring it up!" Quinn retorted. "Santana did. And thank you for that." She glared at the Latina who was unfazed.

"Hey, at least this isn't about who cheated on who!" Tina tried brightly. "That's a definite change for maturity around here."

"Why would it be about cheating?" Rachel and Quinn both turned on the girl in simultaneous indignation.

Tina shrank down in her seat fearfully, looking like she would make a run for it if she could. Mike really wasn't able to do anything to protect her from these girls.

"Yeah, Tina!" Santana chimed in mockingly. "What would you go and bring that up for? They're not cheaters. It's not like they've ever-"

Brittany sighed and shook her head at Santana disapprovingly. That simple action had her sitting back in the chair with her mouth shut in a matter of seconds, which was good because Quinn was seeing red like a bull in the arena about to charge.

"That's enough!" Their teacher held his hands up, one towards Rachel, the other towards Quinn. "I don't want to hear another word out of you two unless it's being sung for today's assignment. Got it?"

Rachel nodded grudgingly while Quinn just scoffed.

It wasn't exactly the most relaxing Glee club meeting they'd had. The tension between the two girls was palpable enough to affect them all.

"Rashida Jones, Natalie Portman, Claire Danes, Kristen Chenoweth, Julia Stiles, Maggie Gyllenhaal, Idina Menzel, Meryl Streep, Laura Linney, Ashley Judd, Jodie Foster, Brooke Shields, Angela Basset..." She stopped to take a breath. "All award winning actresses with a college education. Do you want me to keep going? This could take a few hours."

Rachel was unfazed. "More than half of those you just referred to are actresses who have never been on Broadway and only those that have been on stage, were in a musical. So your point isn't as well made as you'd like it to be. And Claire Danes dropped out. She doesn't count."

"Rachel..." Quinn sighed exasperatedly, but apparently her girlfriend wasn't done yet.

"I also just heard about a new girl performing on the West End in Les Mis. She has the titular role of Eponine in their new run and she didn't go to college! Not to mention, she's only two years older than I am. If I choose to go to NYADA then by the time I graduate, I'll be older than she is when she got her first break out role!"

"Most of the actresses that didn't go to college at least went to prestigious performing arts schools..."
instead of regular high school. You didn't have the opportunity to do that in Lima so take it now! If you have concerns about NYADA, then why not Juilliard? Or Tisch? If it's the school-

"It's not the school. I don't understand you! You always talk about how much faith you have in me and how talented you think I am! Was it really all just for show?"

"This isn't about me doubting you or your talent! I know you have what it takes, I just don't want you to have to go the hard way. The harder way... Why take outside classes when the best of the best are at NYADA? You could get recommendations from seasoned Broadway professionals. They're the ones with the connections. It would open up so many opportunities for you that you can't get from the outside."

"Those same teachers at NYADA are also doing open workshops on the side for half of what I would pay in tuition. I've done my homework, Quinn. I've researched it all to exhaustion. Look!" She scrambled over to her desk and gathered some papers before coming back to Quinn. She laid them out for her. "Let's say I chose to take this workshop being offered in the fall. Look at the name of the instructor."

Quinn played along grudgingly. "Cassandra July. So?"

"Now look at the list of dance courses I would have to take at NYADA," she said eagerly, pointing at another sheet of paper. "Who would be my professor in that class?"

Quinn's eyes widened ever so slightly, but she didn't want to give away her surprise. She wasn't ready to back down yet, even now. Though it did start to stir some doubts in her.

"...Cassandra July," she repeated reluctantly.

"You see? I would be taking a class with the same person who would be my professor in NYADA for half the price and without the commitment! The same level of quality!"

"I still don't-"

"I've already spoken with several professionals in New York about my concerns and they all say the same thing: there is no guarantee. But an overpriced education over four years for something that I could streamline in two doesn't make sense to me. Do you really think that I would treat my dream, my dream since I was old enough to dream, so carelessly? That I would go into it so blindly? I know the risk I'm taking, I'm aware of what could happen, but I'm still willing to take the chance. This is what I want."

"It's only four years. I just don't understand why you won't accept that."

"Four years in show business is practically a lifetime. A person's career can begin and end in that time span alone."

"I don't like it. I just...I'm afraid of what it will mean for you."

"I can take care of myself."

"I feel like you're just adding to the struggle you're going to go through because you think it'll add more dramatic flair to the whole journey. It's completely unnecessary!"

"I won't deny that it will make for some delightful stories to tell once I've made it, but please, Quinn, tell me that you think more of my intelligence than that."
"I don't doubt your intelligence, I worry that sometimes your vanity, your pride, gets in the way of it... When that happens, you can't see the reality sitting right in front of you – you just see the dream. Like you did with Finn."

Rachel's jaw dropped in horror and Quinn groaned, mentally berating herself for bringing up Finn. She regretted it the second his name left her mouth.

"I am NOT the same immature little girl who fawned over Finn Hudson! How...how can you still see me that way? How would you feel if I said you're no different than the first day of freshman year when you had the jocks slushie me the second I walked through the doors of McKinley High for the very first time?"

"That's a low blow," she said bitterly.

Rachel just shook her head, too angry, too frustrated, and too annoyed by all this to care.

Quinn pinched the bridge of her nose between her fingers and sighed. "Of course, I don't think that. I know you're not the same person, but we all have our faults, Rachel..."

"I don't think we're ever going to agree on this."

"I don't think so either."

"So what do we do?"

There was a distant, but loud cough from down the hall that sounded distinctly like, "COMPROMISE!"

Their heads snapped towards the door to Rachel's room that they had forgotten to close all the way because they were too busy arguing on the way in.

"DADDY, QUIT EAVESDROPPING ON US!"

"Can't help it when you're that loud, baby girl," Leroy replied.

"YOU TOO?"

Both Berry men stuck their heads in the door.

"Take it from us seasoned professionals who have been around this block...more than once," Hiram said, "compromise is the magical secret to any lasting relationship."

"But you always taught me never to compromise," Rachel retorted, "to never settle for less."

"In life, sweetheart," Leroy corrected her. "But compromise in a relationship between two strong-minded individuals is the only way you're ever going to make it through."

"With that said, we'll be heading out now. Be back with dinner in an hour. You two better have this worked out by then."

After they left, hearing the footsteps fade down the stairs, the girls turned back to each other awkwardly.

"I can't believe we're getting couples counseling from your fathers," Quinn muttered, resting her chin on her hand tiredly.
Rachel stared down at the comforter uncertainly while grasping the gold Q and R initials that lay on her chest. The necklace was one of the Hanukah gifts Quinn had gotten for her. She'd mentioned how difficult it was to find the letter Q pendant to go with the R she already had and Quinn managed to special order one for her. Rachel wore it every day since. Finally, she looked back up at Quinn with a slight frown.

"So...how do we compromise on this exactly?"

"I don't know."

"There has to be something."

"What if..." Quinn started hesitantly and then grew stronger, "could you just agree to go to NYADA for a year? One year. That's it. If you still feel you're not getting enough of what you need, not moving fast enough, then you drop out and do it on your own."

"I really don't want to do that, Quinn."

"It's a compromise," she said exasperatedly. "Neither of us are going to be completely satisfied."

"A whole year?" she replied uncertainly. "Two semesters?"

"And then you would have a better understanding of what it is you're getting yourself into. It's just...a completely different world out there, Rachel. Neither of us really know what we're getting into. I don't like the idea of you being left out in the cold when we get to New York."

"But I wouldn't be-"

Quinn exhaled in frustration while shaking her head and got off the bed.

"Where are you going?"

"To get something to drink," she snapped. "...And possibly drown myself..."

Rachel rolled her eyes.

Two hours later, they were still nowhere, while Hiram and Leroy had already returned with dinner. Quinn was downstairs helping them set the table while Rachel was in the shower.

"I am not reheating this again just because she's taking too long! Let's just go ahead and start without her."

"We're not starting dinner without our daughter."

"My stomach has been growling for the better part of an hour. She can eat the leftovers."

"It really is every man for himself when your stomach gets involved!"

"Don't worry," Quinn interjected before the bickering turned into an actual argument. "I'll go get her."

Hiram tsk'd disapprovingly at Leroy who looked slightly embarrassed while Quinn hurried up the stairs. Rachel had left the door to her bathroom open so Quinn just stuck her head in and was about
to call out for her to hurry up when she heard her singing.

And her heart dropped.

Rachel sang every time she was in the shower. She sang everywhere and anywhere she could. Quinn practically considered her voice to be the soundtrack to her life now. So it wasn't that she was singing, it was what she was singing.

Their song.

Rachel only sang their song when she was feeling insecure about their relationship. She said it helped her get through those moments. Yes, they were having a disagreement right now about Rachel's future, but that didn't mean that they weren't going to be together either way. Why would she feel like their relationship was in jeopardy just because they didn't agree on school? This was nothing compared to all that they had been through! This was normal! Normal couples had normal arguments without it meaning life and death for their relationship.

She waited until Rachel finished singing, until the water shut off, and the curtains were pushed aside to allow Rachel to step out. She saw Quinn and jumped a little in surprise.

"Oh, God! Really, Quinn. Try announcing yourself next time instead of attempting to give me a heart attack."

Shaking her head, Quinn closed the door behind them, locking it. Rachel watched in confusion as she wrapped a towel around herself.

"What are you doing? Dinner's ready-"

"Just because we can't agree on this, doesn't mean there's something wrong with us as a couple."

Rachel's eyes widened in pure shock. "What?"

"You can't do this. You can't freak out every time something doesn't happen perfectly or exactly according to plan." The more she spoke, the angrier she started to get. Or rather it was her frustration that started to boil over. "You need to trust me more. You need to trust us more! I'm sick of you doubting us after all this time and especially over something as normal as two people disagreeing on a career path! Why are you so determined-"

"Quinn! Shut up!" Rachel waved her hands for the other girl to stop. "What are you talking about? What did I do?"

"You were singing our song!"

"So?" Rachel was utterly baffled.

"You only do that when you get worried about us," she explained exasperatedly. "So I'm telling you, you have to-"

Rachel closed the space between them in a heartbeat and flung her arms around Quinn's neck. She didn't care that she wet and soaking Quinn's clothes. She needed to make her listen.

"Will you please be quiet and stop yelling at me?" she murmured against her ear.

Quinn heaved a sigh, still ticked off, but said nothing.

Rachel let go of her enough to drop her hands down to Quinn's waist and didn't move any further
away than that. "You're right. I used to sing our song to help me feel better when I was upset about where we were or where we were going. It encouraged me to have faith in us when I was feeling less than confident."

"That's not fair to me-"

"You're missing the point," Rachel cut her off purposefully. "I said 'used to', Quinn. As in, I don't anymore."

It was Quinn's turn to be confused and her brow furrowed. "Then why...?"

"Ever since we told the Glee club...our friends...my fathers... Ever since we started really planning for New York, our current stalemate notwithstanding, we are not the fantasy I always feared would vanish if I didn't hold on tight enough. It's real. It's so wonderfully real and happening. I don't feel like you're going to slip away from me at any given moment now, Quinn. Not anymore. You're with me. We're in this together. I believe in that wholeheartedly. I don't need to rely on our song anymore to remind me of that."

"But you were singing it," Quinn protested lamely.

"Because I'm happy." She shrugged with a smile. "I'm happy and I felt like singing and I sang our song."

"You're happy?"

She leaned up on her toes to brush her lips against Quinn's. "I'm happier than I've ever been in my life."

"Even though we're in the middle of an argument?"

She scrunched up her nose. "We'll figure that out eventually."

Quinn was still wary. This wasn't how she was accustomed to their conversations going. "So...you're not upset about us?"

"No," Rachel replied simply, then added with a frown. "Are you?"

"No."

"So we're okay."

Quinn nodded slowly, still surprised by how the whole thing had turned around on her. As it really started to sink in, she couldn't help but chuckle.

Rachel looked at her curiously. "And now you're laughing?"

"I'm relieved. And kind of in shock that we're here. Sometimes it felt like it would never happen."

"Here where?"

"Here." Quinn gestured between them. "No panicking. No running away. No doubting. No fear that the other one is going to leave. It took a while."

Rachel's smile grew wider and wider until it go no more and then she kissed her deeply. Quinn sighed and melted into her arms.
The Berry men were already cleaning up the kitchen by the time the two of them came back downstairs.

"My stomach wins out over both of you," Leroy said unapologetically.

Three days and countless discussions later, the stalemate broke.

They were cuddling on Rachel's bed in silence for a little while before Quinn had to go home when Quinn just said, "Okay."

"Okay, what?" Rachel yawned, not really paying attention.

"Okay, I'll support your decision to turn down NYADA."

Rachel was up like a shot, staring down at her with eyes like saucers. "Really? You have to mean it, Quinn. Because it you don't mean it, you'll just get bitter and resentful-"

"I mean it. But you have to promise me something."

Rachel bit her lip as she waited, mentally bracing herself.

"Promise me," she said slowly, "that you will not allow your pride to get in the way of you deciding to apply again next year if you feel like you're in over your head."

"I won't-" she started to reply automatically, but Quinn held up her finger.

"I will not say 'I told you so'. There will be no judgment. There will be nothing wrong with you trying it this way and it not working out. There will be nothing to be ashamed of if you think you made a mistake. I'm proud of you for wanting to do this your way and I will always support your pursuit of your dreams. But you have to promise me, Rachel, that you will not hesitate to change directions if it's not working."

"I promise," she breathed.

Quinn sighed, relieved, and laid back down, letting Rachel snuggle up against her.

"You're my favorite girlfriend ever."

"You're damn right I am," she grumbled.

Rachel's delighted giggling put a smile on her face nonetheless.
They took separate visits with their parents to scout out the city. Quinn went with her mother to tour Columbia's campus and go apartment hunting. It felt wrong to be choosing an apartment for both her and Rachel without Rachel there, but she had a list of all of Rachel's 'must have's' and she recorded a video tour of each place they saw and sent it to her immediately for feedback. Every place they saw, Quinn first thought of whether or not Rachel would approve and if the answer was yes, then she thought about whether or not she liked it herself. It took four days of apartment hunting after months of research back in Lima before Quinn finally found a place suitable enough. It wasn't perfect, but she had a feeling that the lack of "perfection" was only because it was missing one key element: Rachel.

And she was right.

They won Nationals. Of course they did. They had to. It wasn't without its drama because Brittany lost her mattress in the hotel pool, Santana nearly got arrested because of an altercation with a homeless woman, Mercedes got sick, Finn was lost for three hours in their hotel, and Kurt had to ask where Rachel was at one point during rehearsal to which Quinn jerked her thumb indicating behind her where Rachel was standing in the corner with her head against the wall.

It was hard. They worked like hell for it. And they won.

The feeling was incredible. None of them came down from the high for days. Rachel's lasted the longest of course.

And then school was over. The graduation ceremony came and went without much fuss at all. It was odd, Quinn always thought it would feel like a bigger deal than it did. Even when she gave her valedictorian speech, she wasn't nervous or even anxious. She was already so far ahead, it felt like all of it had already happened. Reality was the one who hadn't caught up to her. Quinn had already graduated, given her speech, and left town a year before any of it actually happened. It was the strangest feeling of deja vu.

They left exactly three days after graduation. Sam and Puck helped them move. They did need the help, but the guys really just wanted an excuse for a free trip to New York. Sam helped Quinn move all of her things into a rented U-Haul first. Kurt was staying with his Dad for the summer and would move into the NYADA dorms at the end of August. He and Rachel had spent weeks planning their calendars and mapping out places to go once he settled in. While Quinn was grateful to have a familiar face with them in a city full of strangers, she was also glad that Kurt wasn't coming with them right away. He was a welcome friend, but she wanted Rachel to herself for a while. This was their journey to start together...alone. No third wheels. No interruptions. Sam and Puck would be easy to get rid of. Kurt...not so much.

The whole living arrangement, move, furniture, truck, everything had to be carefully arranged and concealed from Judy. If any part of it fell through, if Quinn slipped up once, it would all be over. She was really in shock that it had worked, that she got away with it so easily. She supposed it had more to do with the power of denial than her skills at deceit.

It should have been harder to keep all her stories straight, but it wasn't. Growing up that way had
conditioned her, *trained* her even, for this kind of double life. Quinn told her mother that she wanted to drive to New York with Sam...*just* Sam. He would help her get her settled so that, *conveniently*, Judy wasn't needed. Why wouldn't her loving, loyal, high school sweetheart, help his girlfriend move to the big bad city? It was just too much for her to do all of that alone and it also gave them time alone to say goodbye to each other.

That's the way Quinn told it anyway. She didn't have to though...Judy told most of the lie for her.

After they packed up all of Quinn's things; they were standing on the front porch to say goodbye. Maybe it should have felt wrong to lie like this to her parents, at least to her Mom, but Quinn only felt the pangs of guilt once. It was right before she got into the truck, when Judy hugged her, sniffled, and whispered against her ear about how proud she was, about how much she was going to miss her.

It was just once. She knew what kind of 'endearing affection' she would receive if her mother knew the truth. She accepted it. So the lying, in Quinn's mind, was all a necessary means to an end. Getting her father to pay the rent for a one-bedroom apartment she would be living in with her Jewish girlfriend, Hiram Berry's daughter no less, seemed to be some kind of poetic justice – however small. Her parents thought she would be there alone. She had no qualms about deceiving them. They didn't have a right to know.

Sam and Quinn drove the same truck over to Rachel's house and they packed up the rest, this time with the help of the Berry men and Puck. Together, they had bought almost everything they needed to have a fully furnished apartment from day one. Judy paid for the U-Haul rental and the Berry's paid for Sam and Puck's gas, food, and other expenditures. They lingered longer at Rachel's, mostly because her fathers were still refusing to allow her to go without them, insisting they would need their help.

After a lot of reassurances and many tears, they started climbing into the cab of the truck, only to stop when Hiram came running out of the house shouting and waving a pink polka dotted piece of fabric, "WAIT!"

"Daddy, what's wrong?"

Quinn jumped down from the truck as well to stand next to her while Puck and Sam waited inside.

"You almost forgot this!"

He held it out for Rachel and she nearly keeled over from sheer mortification. Quinn was trying so hard not to laugh, but Puck and Sam had no such reservations and were howling from inside the truck. Quinn slammed the door shut, which muted the laughter, but not nearly enough.

Rachel, bless her heart, was trying so hard to be a gracious daughter and not admonish her father during this highly emotional moment for him. "D-Daddy, what are you-"

"It's your lucky training bra, sweetie! Remember? You wore it when you auditioned for Glee club, and whenever you had a solo audition in your recital every year, and your first Regionals! You can't leave this behind!"

Rachel was doing everything she could to avoid looking directly at the offending garment while Quinn couldn't take her eyes off it.

"I appreciate the thought, Daddy, but m-my *underclothing* choices have matured since then..."

"Oh, without question, sweetheart." He waved his hand, which included the bra, in the air. "Your taste in lingerie has dramatically improved since you started dating Quinn."
Leroy nodded solemnly in agreement. Rachel's jaw dropped.

"However, as your fathers, we remain blissfully and ignorantly convinced that the choices of lace and silk were for comfort and support – and absolutely nothing else at all."

Quinn had the decency to blush this time, but the giggles started bubbling up from behind her hand that she had clamped over her mouth now.

"Really, honey, you shouldn't leave such a lucky charm behind," Leroy interjected.

"Every little bit will count when you're going on an audition in New York!" Hiram insisted, shaking the scrap of polka dotted fabric in front of her.

Rachel just stared at her fathers, mouth agape, wishing that they could have just run her over with the stupid U-Haul instead of putting her through this kind of pain.

Instead of saying anything more though, she snatched the pink training bra out of Hiram's hands, and balled it up in her fist. Her fathers were on the verge of tears still and she didn't want this moment ruined by a petty argument about how humilitating they were being right now. So she took a deep breath and told them how much she loved them and hugged them goodbye one more time before getting in the truck with three teenagers that she knew were going to torment her for hundreds of miles about this.

Yet, Sam and Puck didn't say anything about it, despite their initial belly splitting laughter. Rachel was seated between Sam and Quinn. Quinn was resting comfortably against the door with the window rolled down. Puck put the truck into gear and they were off. As the truck rumbled loudly beneath them, Quinn shifted slightly, and made a subtle reach for the bra that Rachel still held in a tiny ball in her fist. She peeled back the other girl's fingers and took it out of her hand before slipping it into her pocket.

Rachel watched her silently, frowning at how incredibly strange everyone's behavior was right now. Where was the teasing? Where were the endless jabs about Rachel's cup size? Where was the laughter? When did they have their personalities snatched by pod people?

Quinn just urged her to lean back as they watched the Lima landscape rush past them. She couldn't think of a reason not to so she just followed her lead and looked around at all of them in bewilderment. Sam turned on the radio and argued with Puck for a few moments over what station they would listen to until finding a song all of them liked and turned it up to full blast.

"Let's go to the beach, each
Let's go get away
They say, what they gonna say?
Have a drink, clink, found the bud light
Bad bitches like me, is hard to come by
The patron on, let's go get it on
The zone on, yes, I'm in the zone
Is it two, three? Leave a good tip
I'mma blow off my money and don't give two shits"

Sam and Puck were rapping along as well as they could, both trying to outdo each other. It was a little disconcerting at first for Rachel and Quinn to hear them harmonizing with Nicki Minaj, but then it became downright hilarious, and they all sang along. Rachel's voice came out above all of them, including the radio, for the chorus.
"Starships were meant to fly
Hands up, and touch the sky
Can't stop, 'cause we're so high
Let's do this one more time!"

Quinn nuzzled Rachel's ear lovingly and said, "I don't think we'll need the extra luck, but your Dads are right, why not use everything we can?"

The lingering embarrassment finally faded and a small smile of understanding appeared as she fully relaxed into Quinn's embrace. These were her friends. This was the girl she loved. They knew just as much as she did how big of a moment this was. The moment where Rachel finally left Lima in pursuit of her big city dreams – just like she said she would do all this time. It was happening.

"Besides," Quinn smirked, "you never know when a pink training bra will come in handy in a city like New York."

Rachel laughed and swatted Quinn's arm ineffectually.

"Say goodbye to the Bean hellhole, ladies and gents!" Puck announced as they approached the highway that would take them out of Lima and towards their future.

"Starships were meant to fly
Hands up, and touch the sky
Can't stop, 'cause we're so high
Let's do this one more time!"

Rachel clambered over Quinn and stuck her head out of the window.

"YOU WERE WRONG, MRS. STRAKOSH!"

Quinn smiled up at her, glowing with pride, as as Rachel stared determined daggers at the town they left behind.

"Is there a teacher named Mrs. Strakosh?" Sam asked. "Does she teach shop class? Because I swear I saw that lady caressing the wood bird-feeders a few times..."

Quinn put her hand over Rachel's mouth and prayed with all her heart that Rachel would let it go. The sharp pain on her finger wasn't surprising and she yelped, but thankfully Rachel decided biting Quinn was enough. Sam didn't seem to notice anything amiss.

They pulled onto the highway and it was as though a new life had been breathed into all four of them.

Bring on New York City.

It was a long, cramped drive, and the next day was even more brutal when they had to lug all of their things up three flights. There was an inordinate amount of bickering and a few low blow comments (Quinn nearly threw Puck down the stairwell at one point), but it went well for the most part and what mattered was that they got through it.

The first night there, Sam slept on the couch with Puck next to him on the floor, while Rachel and Quinn slept on a mattress on the floor in their new bedroom, not having the energy to put together the frame yet.
Puck and Sam stayed a couple days helping them hook up everything, move furniture around, and then they went out exploring together. They couldn't stay any longer though because Puck needed to keep his pool cleaning business going during the height of the season and Sam was going to summer school to improve his grades.

They hugged the boys fiercely and kissed Sam goodbye for good measure, though not without Puck's indignant protests about unbalanced treatment. They thanked them both profusely for all the help and insisted that they come back and visit as often as they could - that was mostly meant for Sam though.

Standing in the hallway, they waved goodbye to the boys, and when they were gone, Quinn turned around to go back inside, but was suddenly snatched back.

"What?" She asked, looking at the grip Rachel had on her arm in confusion.

"You have to carry me across the threshold," Rachel stated matter of factly.

Quinn raised an eyebrow. "Yeah...no."

She shook her head and started to go back in again, but Rachel was adamant and refused to let go.

"Rachel! Get real. I am not carrying you into- Ooph!"

Quinn didn't really have a choice in the matter because Rachel had wrapped her arms around her shoulders and lifted herself up onto Quinn, securing her legs around her waist. Quinn's hands instinctively went underneath her butt to support her. Rachel looked down at her victoriously while Quinn just glared at her.

"Well...you're already carrying me. It would be silly not to just go in now."

She rolled her eyes and gave in, crossing the threshold at last and kicked the door closed behind them. "At least you didn't insist on being carried bridal style," she grumbled.

Rachel's eyes lit up mirthfully and she pecked Quinn on the lips before dropping down once they reached the couch. "Of course not," she said, "that wouldn't make sense. We'll do that after we're married."

Quinn's eyes widened. *Married.* To Rachel Berry. Quinn's head spun at the mere mention of it...and not unpleasantly. To Rachel, it didn't even sound as if there as was an "if". It was just a fact. They were going to be married someday.

Oh, God...they were actually going to be married someday, weren't they?

They stood there together, alone together for the first time in their new little apartment. *Little,* being the operative word – it wouldn't take more than 5 steps to get from one end to the other. Most of the furniture had already been arranged just the way they wanted it to be. They still needed to unpack the smaller things and clean more, but Quinn knew it wouldn't change much from the way it looked now other than a few framed photos, posters, and knickknacks.

They stood there silently, taking it all in, and that was the moment.

The moment when *suitable* became *perfect.*

The moment when a bare bones, cramped little space became their *home.*
Rachel turned to Quinn with a glowing smile and they burst out laughing for a moment before Rachel tackled her onto the couch.

"No, wait," Quinn protested, rather unconvincingly, "I have to unpack those last few boxes and we still have to clean-"

"Quinn."

"Yes?"

"I believe you're missing another crucial step that a couple must take after moving in together."

Of course, she knew what Rachel was talking about.

Of course, she was going to pretend she didn't.

"And what's that?"

"Christening the apartment, of course! It has to be made ours."

"You're absolutely right." Quinn nodded in mock seriousness and looked around, ignoring the obvious fact that they were tangled up on the couch. "So...where should we start?"

Before she could turn back to face her, Rachel shoved her down into the cushions again. Quinn didn't even get a breath in before Rachel was straddling her.

"Shut up and take my clothes off, Fabray."

"Take your own clothes off, Berry!" she shot back.

Rachel scoffed with an amused eyeroll and reached for the bottom of her own shirt, yanking it off over her head to let Quinn have a full view of her naked chest.

Shit. How did she not realize that Rachel was been bra-less today? That was shoddy girlfriend work on her part. She was falling down on the job already! Get it together, Quinn!

Rachel seemed extremely pleased with herself at Quinn's stupefied reaction and raked her hands over her girlfriend's body as she eagerly rolled her hips against her. Rachel was on a mission and Quinn was delighted to help her achieve it. She fisted her hands in Rachel's hair and brought her down to meet her lips.

"Why does it feel like it's been so long since we've done this?"

"It's been..." Quinn took one breast into her mouth, sucking on her nipple before letting it go with a wet pop, "two weeks and three days."

"Why did we let that happen?" Rachel asked breathlessly as she watched Quinn play with her breasts.

"Busy with moving," she answered succinctly, more focused on her other task right now.

"That's no excuse." Rachel popped the clasp of Quinn's bra.

"I absolutely agree." Quinn's hand dipped into Rachel's shorts.

"Never again." Rachel moaned as she shifted higher to give Quinn better access.
"Never..." Quinn panted, "never...again."

It didn't take very long for each and every inch of that apartment to be christened...twice.

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That night was the first time they were truly alone in the comfort of their shared bed - with no Sam on the couch outside their door or Puck snoring on the floor – and they stayed up the whole night just talking, laughing, and making love over and over again until sunlight streamed through the window.

When Quinn woke later that day, with Rachel in her arms, she had a moment of panic where she thought about who would catch them and where she had to be and what lies she would have to tell until she realized...there was no reason to panic.

There was no one around to barge in.

There was nowhere she had to be.

There were no lies she had to tell.

She curled back up against a naked, warm, slumbering Rachel in stunned amazement as her brain tried to come to grips with this extraordinary new freedom, the one she'd dreamed about for so long, but never really knew what it would feel like until it actually happened.

And then she started to cry.

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For as wonderful as it turned out, living together in their cozy and already loved little apartment, it almost didn't happen. It took a lot of talking, sleepless nights, and very...very angry words, before Rachel finally came around and accepted their living situation. The Berry men were another story entirely, they never agreed to it, but Rachel put her foot down regarding them. They were her parents, it was her choice what they were told, and Quinn respected that. It wasn't like she had any hope of getting them to accept the situation anyway, but she needed Rachel to agree to do this with her. Which she did.

Eventually.

Begrudgingly.

Murderously...

Seriously, if this didn't work out, Rachel was going to kill Quinn in her sleep.

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A few months before graduation, they were in Rachel's bedroom, leaning against the headboard while they sat side by side on her bed. Quinn was reading and Rachel was looking through Craigslist for apartments.

"I think we'll have to find a place in Brooklyn or maybe Queens...Long Island City...?" Rachel mumbled almost to herself while gnawing on her lower lip as she stared at the laptop screen. "It's not ideal, but with what my fathers can afford..."

This was it. This was the opening Quinn had been waiting for. She didn't want to do this, but Rachel had to know sooner or later. Sooner would be better since her mother was already on the phone with a realtor in New York.
"About that..." she said, and put down her book, scooting down on the bed. She turned around so she was facing Rachel. "I was thinking...what if you didn't worry about the rent?"

Rachel looked up from her laptop with a frown. "What are you talking about? How can I not worry about the rent? Looking at these prices-"

"I mean," Quinn cut her off and took a deep breath, steeling herself, "what if you just let me worry about it and you save your money for food and other expenses?"

"Let you worry about it?" Rachel echoed warily.

"Yeah."

"Meaning, your Mom pays for our apartment?"

Quinn winced. It would be so easy to just say yes...just let her believe that. Rachel would be far more reasonable if it was her mother, but she couldn't lie to her like that. No more secrets between them.

"Not exactly."

"Then from your trust fund? Quinn, you can't, that's supposed to get you through school, not support me-"

"My Dad is getting me an apartment," she blurted out all at once and then shut her eyes tightly.

God, she hated saying the words, the way they sounded out of her mouth...it left the most bitter taste.

It was dead silent in the room. It just hung there between them as Rachel watched her unblinkingly.

"Are you really suggesting what I think you're suggesting?" she asked quietly. Her voice was so strained.

"I can't think of a way out of it. And...to be completely honest..." Quinn swallowed painfully, "I don't think I should find a way out of it."

There was about fifteen seconds where time stopped, neither of them moved a muscle. They didn't so much as blink or even breathe – just staring at each other.

Quinn expected instantaneous shouting. Obscenities. A few good insults thrown her way. Just a general kind of rage really...but she was wrong.

Instead she watched as Rachel pushed her laptop aside, stood up, and walked into the bathroom without a word. That oddly calm reaction would have made Quinn think maybe she hadn't exactly understood what she said, but then Rachel slammed the door behind her so hard that it knocked off a frame on the wall and shook several items free from her desk, causing a loud crash and shattering on the floor. That's how Quinn knew she heard and understood every word.

It was quiet again. Not even a breath of a whisper in the room.

She had no idea what to do.

Fortunately, or unfortunately depending on how you look at it, Quinn didn't have to wonder for very long.

Because then it exploded.
Rachel came storming back out of the bathroom. "ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR MIND?" she yelled. "HOW CAN YOU EVEN THINK FOR ONE SECOND THAT I WOULD EVER ACCEPT SO MUCH AS A DIME FROM THAT DESPICABLE EXCUSE FOR A HUMAN BEING?"

Quinn couldn't stop her and she had no right to stop her, so all she could do at that moment was fall forward and rest her head against the bed while Rachel paced the room, shouting all the while. Quinn just let her get it out. She had her own time to process it, now Rachel deserved the same.

This was the reaction Quinn was waiting to face when she brought this up with Rachel, it was the same reaction she had herself at first. She spent over a week preparing to argue her case and would have taken longer to build up the nerve, but her mother had just sprung it on her that they would be going to New York over the weekend to tour Columbia and that she'd already begun booking appointments to see apartments in locations she deemed suitable and if Quinn didn't intervene soon on her own behalf, Judy would be signing a lease before Quinn even saw where she was going to live. If her plan to live with Rachel was going to work, she had to be quick about it, and she needed Rachel on board.

Rachel had mentioned before, in passing, that she was a bit concerned about how her fathers were going to be able to afford the kind of rent a decent apartment in Manhattan would go for. So this discussion about where they would live and how to afford it wasn't new, but Quinn couldn't feasibly see a way of making Brooklyn work, and especially not Queens. Brooklyn was a surprisingly long commute from Manhattan. According to what she read and the college advisers she spoke to, a commute to Columbia from Brooklyn, depending on where they found a place, could take from forty five minutes up to two hours!

Now, Quinn wasn't wholly opposed to it, but unfortunately when you have someone else paying your bills, you don't get much say in things. Especially when the people paying her bills were Russell and Judy Fabray. How was she going to come up with a plausible explanation for her mother as to why she wanted to live alone in Brooklyn, an hour away from her university, when Russell had already agreed to pay her rent for somewhere right on the Upper West Side? Her mother made it clear when her father offered, that Quinn was going to accept, no excuses. It didn't matter what he did in the past, he was her father, and he was obligated to support her financially. And her entire plan for the last two years hinged upon the fact that she knew she deserved her parents financial support. They couldn't give her what she really needed, so God help her, she was going to at least make sure they came through on this. Even now, Russell wasn't asking for the slightest bit of a relationship. This was about the same thing everything in the Fabrays life was about: appearances.

It didn't come as a surprise when he called the house a couple weeks ago and demanded that he be the one to pay for Quinn's living expenses. When the word got out in her parents social circle that Quinn had been accepted to several different Ivy League schools and was going to Columbia, Russell had people congratulating him left and right on what a fantastic daughter he raised – notably forgetting to mention the part where she got pregnant and gave her child up for adoption – and asked him constantly about how Quinn's life was going. Who she was dating. What was she studying. Where would she be living.

Well, with daily reminders of the success of his daughter he had sworn to disown, Russell wasn't going to allow anyone to look down on him for cutting her out of his life. He knew he had to do something before Judy got a chance to spread the word of his complete absence in Quinn's life - and she would do it, image be damned, just to spite him.

So before any of the other gossip could start, he proudly told all their friends that he would be supporting her with a fantastic apartment right next to her Ivy League university so his darling little girl didn't have to do something as low as live in the dorms with strangers. Everyone praised him for
being so generous! Including their pastor who told him that he was doing the right thing by forgiving Quinn of her trespasses and helping her on the path of righteousness again with the Lord at her side.

Quinn wanted to vomit when she overheard some of his friends talking about it at a cocktail party her mother insisted she attend. Just as Rachel was storming around the room, bellowing her absolute loathing and disgust for the idea, so had Quinn. She wanted no part of it, but after calming down, with time to think about it, she had to force herself to reconsider when she explored their options.

Manhattan was outrageously expensive. They'd barely manage to get a roach and bedbug infested hole in the wall there if they split the rent fairly on what Rachel's Dads could afford. Rachel had a little extra now since she wasn't using her college fund on NYADA anymore, but her outside classes still cost money, and there were a lot of smaller expenses that suck up the money when you crunched the numbers. But when Quinn turned to places outside of Manhattan, like Brooklyn, she found that it would involve a significant commute to her classes, and a very difficult, if not impossible, explanation to Russell and Judy about why she would choose such a location.

So what was left? One of the biggest reasons why Quinn had worked so hard to keep her secret from her mother was so that she would have the money to go to school and the only way she could explain to her Mom why she would be living in less than ideal conditions is because she wanted to live with her girlfriend. Now it wasn't even Judy who was paying her rent, it was Russell. Her mother had already decided that she wouldn't pay for Quinn's living expenses with Russell offering so...what was left? Do it on her own, no trust fund, no money for the inordinately expensive Ivy League school she'd worked her ass off to get into... Or keep lying.

Please...please, just let Rachel see it the way she was seeing it.

"I WOULD RATHER LIVE IN THE SEWER WITH THE RATS, QUINN FABRAY!"

This was not going to be easy.

It took Rachel a few days to calm down...understandably. When Quinn asked if she would just let her talk about what was going on with her parents, Rachel reluctantly agreed, but she refused to speak about it in her fathers' house. She felt like it was disrespectful to even allow such a topic of conversation to happen inside their home.

So they went to the park. Quinn brought lunch that she had made herself, but Rachel didn't touch any of it. They were sitting on a blanket on the grass, the sun shining down brightly on them. It was an unnerving contrast to the darkness that hung between them.

"Did you ever think about how it would make my father feel, Quinn?" she asked quietly and you could hear the tension in her voice, the amount of restraint she was using to stay calm when inside she was seething. "How foul it is?"

"It's all I've been thinking about since my Mom told me how I was getting an apartment."

"Then you know why I can't."

"I understand, Rachel. God, I really do!" Quinn turned to her, palms open. "I've been trying so hard to figure this out. There are...so...many lies. I can hardly stand it. Every time I'm with my Mom or my Dad...even when my sister calls...all I think about is that I could slip up. One mistake, one lie forgotten, and it falls apart. Sometimes they're big lies, but they're mostly small ones, and it's all I can do to remind myself that they are actually lies. I say things so often, so convincingly, that sometimes I wonder what the truth really is."
"But then I'm with you and it all makes sense again. I know what's right again. I can't do this for much longer, Rachel. I think I'll lose my mind or...maybe my soul. I don't know if I'm a good person or a bad person for doing it this way, but this is the path I chose. Now, all I want to do is get away. Go to school and get away. I've made choices that make me sick to my stomach, but then I think about the end game. The end game that you made me believe was possible."

"Don't you dare try to use me to—"

"I didn't mean it like that. I'm only trying to explain. Let me do that," she pleaded. "Let me tell you what I've worked out. If you still don't...if it's too..." Quinn sighed, unable to form the words, and tried again. "Just hear me out and if it's not possible for you then I will figure something else out. I have to...I will." The last part sounded like she was saying it to convince herself.

"There's nothing you can say that will make this any better, Quinn."

"Not better. This is god awful and disgusting. I hate it. I hate everything about it. But when you look past that part...the rest makes sense. For our future."

Rachel took a deep breath, clenched her jaw, steeled herself for what was to come, and then nodded tightly to allow Quinn to give her side.

It was a hard battle and Quinn didn't once feel like she won. There was nothing to be won here.

In the end, Rachel made a choice that she didn't like, but as much as she loathed the circumstances, she put herself in Quinn's place and thought with her head - not with her heart. Quinn was being smart, cunning even. It was distasteful, but the moral high-ground wasn't a luxury either of them could afford.

And there was a part of her that wanted to help Quinn with this final act of 'rebellion' against her parents. No, not rebellion. Forced reparations. Forced reparations for their hateful acts of cruelty towards their daughter. Russell Fabray would unknowingly help Rachel Berry achieve her lifelong dreams. He would pay through the nose for Hiram Berry's daughter to live in New York City while she searched for her Broadway spotlight. One day he would find out that's where his money went and while it was a paltry, if not poetic the way Quinn put it, form of justice...it was a little piece of it all the same.

Rachel made Quinn swear that as soon as she graduated and had her first job, they would cut all ties, but it was unnecessary. That was a condition Quinn would have insisted upon herself.

She made up a low rent number for her fathers to send her a check for every month and she put it towards all their living expenses. Quinn didn't want to lie to the Berry men, but this was something Rachel knew they would never be able to accept and they should never have to. This was pain that she could spare her fathers, and since she had so few chances to do that, she desperately wanted to save them from this one.

Life doesn't always give you the best choices, Quinn and Sam knew that, and Rachel was learning the same. But she was going to make the best of it – come hell or high water.

\textit{IWBSWD}.  

It's What Barbra Streisand Would Do.
Chapter End Notes

"Starships" by Nicki Minaj
Rachel liked walking Quinn to her Tuesday and Wednesday classes since they were so close to their apartment and, wonderfully enough, near a fabulous café that had the best coffee and pastries on the West Side.

The summer was blistering for New York, but neither of them minded much. Quinn was happy to start her classes during the summer session, just to get a head start, and Rachel was too enamored by the newness of the city to be put off by the steaming pavements and stifling air. Plus, they didn't know it, but they were spoiled rotten by having a functioning air conditioner in their apartment.

After they'd found the café, they established a routine of waking up early together on those mornings and stopping there for breakfast before Rachel kissed Quinn goodbye, sending her off to class, then heading to another workshop or perhaps an audition.

It was Quinn's first week of class when they walked there together for the first time. Quinn had her bag with her laptop and books slung over one shoulder and her cellphone in the other, holding it against her ear as they made their way down the stairwell of their apartment building.

"Sam told me that you said that Brown was not an Ivy League school!"

"That's not what I said."

"So-"

"I said it's barely an Ivy League school."

Rachel gave her a look. Quinn ignored her completely.

"How can-!"

"I don't have time to discuss this right now, seeing as how I'm going to class at a school that's an actual institution."

She hung up before Tina could reply and they exited the stairwell into the lobby, heading outside.

"I can't believe you."

"Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Columbia – those are the elite. Brown barely gets by with its self-obsessed, scruffy little liberal pack using a 'showers are for losers' motto with their second tier professors, B list celebrity alumni, and ridiculously overinflated tuition."

"You're such an elitist."

"I respect prestige and success, Rachel."

"Brown is a great school and Tina is our friend!"

"And I'm honest with her as friends should be."

"You're a snob. Need I remind you that you applied, and were accepted, to NYU?"

"As a last resort!" she snapped. "...And we will never speak of that dark time again."
Rachel rolled her eyes, exasperated, and walked through the door Quinn held open for her. The sun was already shining brightly, a clear blue sky, and the heat hit them at once, but it felt good. Quinn put on her sunglasses while Rachel left hers on top of her head for a while longer.

She told Quinn the very first day they arrived: "I'm not going to let dark lenses interfere with my New York experience, Quinn!"

It still held true.

They were dressed accordingly and Rachel was so very appreciative of the tighter thigh length skirts Quinn was wearing these days. It was such a change from her days of maxis, sundresses, and the brief, but still odd, bag lady phase. Quinn was beautiful in everything, infuriatingly so, but still...Rachel really loved this skirt. She thought about brushing against the bare skin of Quinn's thigh, just to see what she would do, but as they descended the stairs to the sidewalk together, Quinn took her hand.

Rachel's heart skipped a beat. They walked down the sidewalk together like that, hands linked loosely between them as city-goers passed them by without a glance, and it felt like the most natural thing in the world. Rachel stared down at their joined hands for a long moment and when she looked back up, it was with teary eyes. Her chest tightened in that oh-so-familiar-way. She was so caught up in the moment, that she didn't realize she wasn't paying attention to where they were walking until Quinn yanked her out of the way of a bike messenger.

"I told you, Rachel! You need to start paying more attention in this city. You're going to get yourself hit by a car...a bike...even a horse at this point."

Rachel could only smile at her. It seemed to be infectious because Quinn wet her lips before reluctantly smiling as well.

"What?"

She swallowed thickly. "You're holding my hand."

"And?" She shook her head, waiting for Rachel to explain further as they weaved their way through the throngs of New Yorkers pushing past them.

Quinn's cluelessness just made Rachel's heart squeeze even tighter.

"I have a hand to hold now...for everyone to see. Just like you always promised."

For a moment, Quinn was confused, but then it came back for her too. She looked down at their intertwined fingers and sucked in a breath. It'd been such a natural thing for her to do, she hadn't thought twice about it. What a long way they had come from the days when she couldn't even be seen talking to Rachel in public without facing scrutiny, without being afraid of retribution, without self-loathing.

"I..."

Quinn didn't get to finish because Rachel had stopped and was on her tiptoes kissing her.

She didn't have a clue what she was going to say anyway.

They'd been in New York for a few weeks when Quinn decided it was finally time to break in their new, tiny, absolutely perfect for them, kitchen and made up her mind to prepare a delicious dinner
for them both. Rachel decided to be lazy and watch her newly domesticated girlfriend do all the work. She was more than content to perch on the counter of their breakfast bar in nothing but her underwear and Quinn's sleepshirt. The bottle of white wine next to her made the experience all the more surreal. They had their own wine glasses now. Drinking wine...in their kitchen...while making dinner...while Quinn made them dinner...in their apartment...in New York.

"I feel like we're playing house. This is all so...grown up." She swirled the wine around in her glass.

Quinn was stirring the sauce and didn't look up, but Rachel could see her smile all the same.

"Maybe I'm the grownup here," she said teasingly, "seeing as how I'm the one cooking and you're being a bratty child just expecting me to serve you."

"So what if I happen to enjoy the view? I'm having a moment," Rachel countered.

"A moment that conveniently means doing nothing."

"Merely resting after our strenuous day and what promises to be a most strenuous night..."

At that, Quinn looked up at her and Rachel's mischievous, smoldering gaze went right through her – warmth exploded to every part of her body.

She shook her head, trying to refocus on the food sizzling on the stove. "You're right though. It doesn't feel real yet. It's like that time your Dads went to Michigan. For a few blissful days, we had your house all to ourselves, but it was just pretend. They came home and we had to go back to being kids."

"So you don't think we're kids now? It wasn't that long ago..."

"I don't really know what we are." Quinn tilted her head in thought. "We're not kids anymore, but I don't feel like an adult quite yet, either."

"Well, you're in college."

"And you refused to be."

"Yes, I did. And you're not going to make me feel guilty about it."

"I'm going to call Hiram tomorrow and thank him for the wine," Quinn mused, ignoring her. "It was really nice of him to pack that for us with everything else they did."

"Daddy thinks that if we're going to be responsible enough to have our own apartment, we have to be able to receive guests properly. And you need to be able to offer your guests a variety of beverages, most importantly wine."

"We're throwing a dinner party? You better stop drinking all of it then."

"Oh, hush! We have to actually make friends with some people here first in order to have a dinner party."

Quinn chuckled and Rachel shook her head.

"Now, are you sure you're still a vegetarian?"

Rachel rolled her eyes.
She made the decision broaden her diet mostly because they needed to save money and her Dads had pointed out that, scrimping and saving while trying to keep to a strict diet would likely prove to be unhealthy. New York was known for its food, even at the thriftier end of the spectrum, and Rachel would be depriving herself of that experience if she restricted herself to a vegan lifestyle.

They'd discussed it way too much - to the point of Quinn never wanting to hear the words 'meat', 'animals', 'vegan', or 'diet' ever again - and Rachel had stuck by her choice without wavering once...but Quinn still harbored some doubts. Rachel was Rachel after all.

"Yes, Quinn," she replied, exasperated. "I fully transitioned over a month ago without issue. You were there! Why do you keep asking me?"

Quinn stared at her for a moment. "So...you're still a vegetarian?"

Rachel threw a spoon at her.

Laughing, Quinn picked it up off the floor - after it bounced off her leg - and tossed it into the sink, moving on. "I just have this feeling that one night I'm going to make this elaborate meal, slave over it for hours, and then you'll just come out and say 'Oh, I'm so sorry, honey, but I saw an animal in need today and it's made me rethink my life choices, so I absolutely must go back to my vegan ways'!"

Rachel snorted. "I wouldn't do that to you."

"Good, because real milk is going in now and there's no turning back!"

She started to pour, still staring at Rachel pointedly, as if she were daring her to say something. Rachel could only giggle in amusement and refill her wine glass.

"Keep laughing and I'll have dinner by myself tonight."

"You would deprive me necessary sustenance? That's cruel, Quinn, even for you."

Quinn smirked and turned down the stove, before sauntering over to where Rachel was perched on the countertop. Without a word, just that wolfish grin Rachel knew so well, she gently pushed Rachel's knees apart with just two fingers, and stepped between her legs. Rachel's breath hitched at the sudden closeness and she leaned back, putting her wine glass aside. Her eyes stayed on Quinn the whole time, enraptured by this dance, no matter how many times they did it.

"You think I'm cruel?!" Quinn asked huskily, leaning in close enough that her lips barely brushed against Rachel's. She looked at her mouth before glancing up to meet her eyes again. "Do you think I wouldn't give you what you need?"

Rachel was nearly a puddle under Quinn's smoldering gaze and rakish voice. The way she looked at her as prey, the hunter circling, waiting to pounce, waiting for the perfect moment to swoop in and capture its prize. Her Lion Quinn, indeed. She always would be.

Rachel's breath grew quick at the smooth glide of Quinn's palms massaging the bare flesh of her inner thighs, drifting down over her knees and back up again, higher and further each time.

Rachel didn't even realize that she had opened her legs even wider, whimpering slightly. She tried to lean in and meet Quinn's lips, but Quinn stayed just far enough out of reach. She denied Rachel her mouth, but let her stomach brush against Rachel's center, sending the throbbing from delicious to agonizing. Rachel could feel her arousal coating her as she was bare against the cool countertop.

"Do you want me to give you what you need, Rachel?" Quinn husked, looking up at her through
dark lashes.

She could only bring herself to nod, completely overwhelmed by the assault on her senses.

Quinn moved her hands from her thighs to circle her sensitive nipples, cupping her breasts, sliding down over her stomach, and under the thin material of her t-shirt to make contact with the warm, naked flesh there.

Rachel bit her lip hard to keep from moaning at Quinn's touch, the way Quinn looked at her, the way her blonde hair fell half across her face as she roamed Rachel's body with something in her eyes, in the way she moved, that could only be described as *possessive*.

Rachel dared to reach out for her, wanting to bring Quinn's entire body against hers, but Quinn denied her again.

"Quinn..." she breathed, needy. "Please."

At that, Quinn stepped away at once, breaking the spell, and went back over to the stove to stir the contents, acting as if nothing had happened.

Rachel was splayed over the counter top, cold and utterly exposed, her legs spread, shirt pushed up around her breasts, breathing hard, and leaning back on her arms. She stared at Quinn with her mouth agape in complete astonishment.

"Don't worry, sweetie," Quinn said with the most perfectly innocent smile. "I told you I would take care of your needs. Dinner will be ready soon."

There were times in her life when Rachel had experienced intense moments when her vision would flash red or white, but never before had she experienced such a flash of black *fury*.

Rachel knew she would find Quinn hard at work studying for a crucial midterm when she came home from her dance workshop with the hellacious Cassandra July. Not wanting to disturb her, she gently toed off her boots and shrugged off her jacket to hang on the hook by the door. She took extra care to be quiet as she glided over to her girlfriend who was deep into the study zone and pecked her on the lips to say hello as they had done many times already and would continue to do for a very, very long time.

Their apartment was quiet - just the faint roar of the city filtering in...and that was not without its consequences. It had kept Quinn up their first month there while Rachel slept like a rock. Quinn was envious, but, of course, Rachel had fallen in love with the sound their very first night in the city a few years ago when they had their first chance at Nationals.

Unfortunately, Quinn didn't take to it as quickly. New York was an acquired taste for her and the never ending noise from the city that never sleeps only put her further on edge. They tried everything from earplugs to Zzzquil to energetic sexcapades just to see if it would knock her out.

That was also just because they could.

Sometimes she did get a few hours, but she always woke up too soon and her sleep was always a restless one. A severely sleep-deprived Quinn Fabray was not something Rachel ever wanted to endure again.

Somehow, it all fixed itself in one night.
Quinn was restless as usual, so much so that her tossing and turning woke Rachel, who almost cried while begging her to sleep before they both went insane. Giving up, Quinn left their bed to allow Rachel to finally rest fully and decided to go for a walk.

Some time later, Rachel realized Quinn was gone. She had woken from a fitful sleep, this time because of Quinn's absence rather than her restless presence.

She was still half asleep when she called out for Quinn, getting no reply. She wondered if Quinn had finally fallen asleep on the couch and stumbled out of their room. Instead, she found the apartment completely empty.

There was no note, nothing that told her where Quinn had disappeared to. Wide awake and in a complete panic, she frantically tried to called her, but the fear just escalated when Quinn's cell buzzed in the other room on their bedside table.

She left her phone behind.

Quinn was out there somewhere, in the wee hours of the morning, in New York City, alone. Rachel was beside herself.

After much pacing, several close dials of 911, and imagining a hundred gruesome scenarios where she'd end up in the hospital or even the morgue, Rachel heard some scuffing noises outside their door, a key in the lock, and Quinn walked in like nothing was out of the ordinary.

Rachel froze in the middle of the apartment and stared at her.

"What are you doing up?" Quinn frowned, taking her jacket and shoes off. "Don't you have an early workshop tomorrow?"

Rachel responded somewhat less articulately than she would have preferred. A series of unintelligible shrieks, a few items thrown, and an angry shove were all she managed before Quinn wrapped her in a full body hug and refused to let go until Rachel calmed down.

"Dead...hospital...worried sick...hate you...can't do that...not Lima...are you insane?"

Quinn held her close and nuzzled into Rachel's sleep-mussed and worry-tangled hair.

"M'sorry," she murmured. "I thought you'd gone back to sleep."

"That doesn't make it okay for you to just-!"

"I needed to clear my head," she explained. "I think it worked."

"It worked?"

Quinn yawned and smiled sleepily at her. "Yeah. I think I can sleep now. Come on."

She took Rachel's hand and led them into the bedroom, climbing back into bed, with a stunned-to-silence Rachel following tow. They were back under the covers and Quinn curled up close to her, burrowing down inside their blankets and snuggling into Rachel as much as she could.

"Where did you go?" Rachel asked finally. She needed to know before she could sleep again.


Rachel stared at her in the dark in complete bewilderment. Quinn would have laughed at how
comical her reaction was if she wasn't already halfway into dreamland.

Quinn slept for twelve hours and when she finally woke, she only ate and showered before sleeping again. Twenty-four hours later, Rachel finally had her girlfriend back, and Quinn never had a problem sleeping again.

When Rachel asked just what was it on that walk that sparked the change in her, from being ambivalent, sometimes even bitter at the city for keeping her awake, to falling head over heels in love with it just as it was, Quinn could only shrug.

She saw New York for what it was that night. It was like she finally let go of the last barrier she held coming from small town Lima and allowed herself to invite this new world inside of her. She saw the brightest lights and the darkest shadows. She saw the baffling yet perfect contrast of sleek modern skyscrapers towering above the comforting character of the centuries old townhouses that still remained. She saw the people...so many people...of all different shapes, colors, and sizes.

She finally saw New York the way Rachel saw New York.

She saw its freedom, the place of endless possibilities. She saw a place to find something, something hidden in the hustle and bustle of the day and the wildness of the night. She saw a place where you can make your dreams come true even if you didn't know what those dreams are yet.

So the noise didn't bother Quinn anymore at night. It became ingrained in her, and two weeks later, she declared a double major in Business and Architecture while minoring in Communications and Theater.

After she pecked Quinn on the lips, Rachel didn't stop for anything else. She left Quinn diligently studying and went off to shower, needing to wash off the sweat from that intense dance class. Quinn barely even responded to Rachel's kiss hello. She just mumbled an acknowledgment before absently waving in the other girl's direction. She never took her eyes off her textbook.

At least she was wearing her glasses, Rachel thought. She had finally convinced Quinn to take out the contacts a few months ago so that she wouldn't strain her eyesight while studying. They went together to pick out new glasses for Quinn and, that night, Rachel thoroughly enjoyed having a naughty librarian playing in her bed.

When she was in the doorway of the bathroom, she looked back to see her girlfriend still in the same position on the couch. She didn't move an inch except for when she was highlighting something. An overwhelming sense of love and peace washed over Rachel in that moment. Quinn in her pajamas, yellow socks, and sexy-librarian glasses - she pretended to hate it when Rachel called them that, but Rachel knew it wasn't true – her forehead smooth but her eyes intensely focused in concentration the way they always had been even when she was just reading in the back of the room on the risers in Glee club.

Stirring, as though she could feel a pair of eyes on her, Quinn looked up from her textbook and searched around. When she found Rachel watching her from the other side of the room, she smiled. It was an enormous, no holds barred, perfectly Quinn, smile.

Rachel went to shower and Quinn went back to studying, but neither one stopped smiling for a while.

Santana and Brittany came up during the winter break to visit. Rachel told them that if they popped
the air mattress that she and Quinn purchased for overnight guests, they'd be buying them a new one. Santana rolled her eyes and put on a good show about being insulted, but Rachel caught her scrolling through her phone an hour later already looking at new air mattresses to order.

Santana really liked school in Miami. She was majoring in Entertainment and she got a job at one of the biggest nightclubs in the city. It was low pay at first, just handing out fliers and promoting the club at night, but it got Brittany a foot in the door. Santana made fast friends with the manager of the club and as soon as Brittany auditioned, she secured her spot on the house entertainment team. They liked Brittany so much, people started paying even more attention to Santana. Not long after that, Santana got promoted to waitress, then bartender. The customers absolutely loved her so she made a ton of cash. Rachel said that at the rate Santana was going, she'd be running the club herself soon. Santana didn't deny it.

Insisting that she'd had enough of clubs for a while, but that didn't mean she didn't want to drink and dance, Santana challenged Quinn and Rachel to find a place for them to party. Rachel, naturally, decided on the NYADA karaoke bar. No one ever questioned Rachel's presence there. She wasn't technically a student, but she had been accepted. Besides, her friends there knew Rachel Berry belonged anywhere people valued talent.

Santana was skeptical at first, but Brittany thought it would be fun. Ten minutes after they arrived, they dropped Quinn and Rachel, losing themselves in the crowd to dance and drink. Rachel and Quinn didn't mind in the least. They were more than happy to be on their own and Rachel's friends were there to socialize with.

Rachel and Quinn drank more than usual, probably from the stress of having Santana Lopez living with them for a week. As much as they loved their friends, anyone would be driven to drink if asked to share a one-bedroom apartment with these girls for an extended period of time.

"I haven't seen those girls before. Did we get some newbies?" Gianna said, leaning over with her eyes glued to the couple on the floor. "They're hot!"

Rachel had met Gianna in her improv class a few months ago and they became friends quickly. Quinn thought it was amusing how Rachel always managed to find the most sexually flamboyant people to be friends with. She teased that it might say something about Rachel herself.

"Not that hot," Quinn grumbled into her drink.

"Are you kidding? The blonde is sexy as hell! Look at how she moves – she can take me any day, any time, any how."

"Down, girl!" Rachel slapped Gianna's leg. "Those are our friends from high school, Brittany and Santana. Besides, Brittany? Really?" Rachel cocked her head as she swung her feet back and forth, looking somewhat childish on the barstool. "I would have thought you'd go for Santana."

"I'm not exactly opposed...but the blonde – Brittany, you said? – is clearly a dancer. Never turn down a dancer, Rachel."

"Are you giving my girlfriend dating advice?" Quinn asked sharply.

Gianna held her hands up in surrender and laughed, turning back to watch them on the floor.

"But tell me the truth, Rach," she said slyly, pretending not to notice Quinn's hawk eyes on her. "You're the one who's into the brunette."

"Hm..." Rachel tapped her chin thoughtfully while biting down on her straw as she took a long pull
of her drink. "I will admit to having considered it once or twice..."

Quinn snorted. "Yeah, right!"

"What?" Rachel turned to her innocently. "You're going to honestly tell me that you never once thought about it?"

"Thought about sleeping with Santana Lopez?" Quinn scoffed and jumped off her stool. "I am clearly not drunk enough for you two...yet." She scooped up her glass and Rachel's and made her escape before they could draw her into anything else.

Gianna and Rachel laughed as they watched Quinn go.

"I think you might have traumatized her," Rachel giggled.

"What could be so traumatizing about getting down and dirty with that?" She gestured loosely towards Santana and Brittany.

"Oh, sweet summer child...what do you know of fear?"

Gianna thumped her hand on the table victoriously. "You watched Game of Thrones! At long last!"

"Turns out it wasn't too bad," Rachel shrugged, "but it was still terribly gruesome and far too gratuitous for my taste. Quinn got more into it than I did."

Gianna looked back out at the dance floor and groaned dramatically. "She's so hottttttt."

"Roll the tongue back up; that's never an attractive look."

"Nope, I'm making it happen." She drew herself up to square her shoulders in determination. "It's on! Just you watch, Brittany is going home with me tonight."

"May I remind you that this is my friend you're talking so...romantically about seducing?" Rachel drawled.

"I promise to take such...such good care of her..." Gianna grinned, holding up three fingers. "Scout's honor."

"Give it up," Rachel waved at her dismissively while searching the bar for Quinn, leaning out much further than she really needed to for the task. "They're completely in love with each other – there's no way you're getting within five feet of Brittany."

"Why? Is she a bitch?"

"No, her girlfriend is," Quinn answered from behind them, having reappeared with fresh drinks. She handed one to Rachel before sitting back down. Apparently she'd gauged the situation as safe enough to jump back in.

Rachel perked up at having Quinn back next to her as well as getting to have another drink. She eagerly sucked on the straw while nodding at Gianna seriously. "Don't let her size fool you; Santana can and will take you."

"I'd welcome the challenge..." she said slyly.

Quinn and Rachel exchanged a knowing look before Rachel put on a saccharine sweet smile. "You know what, maybe I'm wrong. I shouldn't underestimate your powers of seduction when I've seen
them in action with my own eyes. Go for it! See if you can get Brittany one-on-one and work your magic!"

Gianna slammed her glass down. "Done!"

Rachel smothered her drunken giggles with her hand as they watched Gianna cross the floor and stake out a place close to the grinding girls. Quinn just sighed and picked up Gianna's half full glass, chugging it down without a care. She knew the girl wouldn't be back for it. Santana and Brittany were lost to the world. All they saw was each other and a sea of nondescript faces as the music filled their ears and led their bodies as they smiled at each other, laughed together, and danced like wild women.

Ten minutes later, Rachel and Quinn watched from their new spot at the bar as security led Gianna out while Santana and Brittany resumed dancing, wrapped up in a world all of their own, like nothing out of the ordinary had happened. Rachel and Quinn didn't pity their New York friend. They'd warned Gianna and maybe she'd be better for the experience of encountering Santana Lopez.

Quinn turned to Rachel with a shrug. "Shots?"

It didn't matter what Rachel answered, she was already flagging the bartender down.

"Shots!" she agreed with a jubilant smack of her hands on the counter. "But only if Santana buys this round!"

"Done," Quinn said with a nod and slipped her arm around Rachel's waist to pull her closer. "One of my oldest and dearest friends – who, according to Gianna, you're now leaving me for – has apparently left her tab open..."

Rachel's eyes went wide with excitement, and she spun around, shouting, "MAKE IT FOUR!"

The bartender winced because Rachel had, quite literally, just shouted that in her face, but she laughed it off and proceeded to pull out two more shot glasses.

Quinn gave the woman an apologetic look. "She's right there, Rachel, you don't need to yell."

Rachel shook her head vigorously, obviously disagreeing with Quinn's assessment of the situation. "IT'S LOUD IN HERE!"

"You're the only one being loud, baby."

The corners of Rachel's mouth turned up at that and her eyes narrowed in focus. She leaned in closer with her hand on Quinn's waist and her lips were brushing her ear.

"You like it when I'm loud..." she said seductively and Quinn nearly jumped out of her skin when she felt Rachel's tongue trace her ear.

Trying not to show how affected she was, Quinn flushed a deep red that had nothing to do with alcohol, and turned to the bartender for a distraction.

"You in?" she asked almost desperately, picking up a shot glass.

Rachel giggled and picked one up as well.

"Maybe on your next round," the bartender said with a wink and moved on to another customer.

"I'm not leaving you for Santana," Rachel said matter-of-factly. "But..." she drew her eyes in
concentration as she tried to figure out how to word it properly. "I am not opposed to a potential threesome, or foursome, if needs be."

Quinn burst out in a round of drunken laughter, covering her eyes in disbelief. "Oh my God, Rachel! When did you turn into such a little slut when you drink?"

"That's rude!"

Quinn ignored that and pulled her closer. "Kiss me, Berry. You're my little slut tonight."

"Mmm...not just for tonight...for a very...very long time, Fabray. You'll never be rid of me."

"Not even if I tried," Quinn said jokingly.

Rachel had a brief moment of sober sincerity. After pausing to frame her words carefully, she said softly, "No...even when you tried."

It took Quinn off guard and she went silent. Their gazes locked as the rest of the bar, the chatter, the music, fell away, and it was only the two of them in that room.

Finally, Quinn broke it with a slow nod. "Even when I tried."

Rachel leaned in and kissed away the sad smile on her lover's lips, leaving a much brighter one in its place. She traced the curve of Quinn's cheek to her chin with the lightest touch of her finger.

"Much better," she said, satisfied.

Quinn bit her lower lip in sneaky anticipation and watched Rachel's expression as she let her hands slip from her waist over the slope of her bottom and, very...very quickly, dared to brush high between her thighs. Rachel's eyes went from contented, to excited, to shocked amusement. Quinn noted that there wasn't a trace of care from Rachel about anyone else having seen it.

The bartender, a tall and very attractive blonde, came over to them again with a bottle in hand. They still had two full shot glasses left on the counter. She eyed Rachel and Quinn carefully for a moment before taking out an extra glass and pouring herself some whiskey. They held up their glasses in a silent toast.

"I'll do the shot, but nothing else you two seem to have in mind," she said before tossing it back.

Quinn choked, spluttering and coughing as the alcohol burned her throat almost as much embarrassment burned her face. But Rachel downed hers smoothly without a care. She licked her lips and set the glass down neatly.

"Don't worry, honey," she said to the woman across from them. "You wouldn't have stood a chance anyway."

The bartender laughed and poured them out another round, on the house this time, she said. Quinn just stared at her girlfriend in disbelief while Rachel happily tilted back the free liquor.

"Back off, Frodo!" Santana barked. "Your blonde is on the other side!" She grabbed Rachel by the shoulders to pry her off of Brittany and shoved her back over to Quinn a few feet away.

Brittany just waved goodbye and brought Santana back in.

Rachel stumbled into Quinn's arms quite happily and wrapped her arms around her girlfriend's neck.
"Hi there!"

Quinn raised an eyebrow. "You mistook Brittany for me?"

She scoffed theatrically. "Never! How could you even ask me that?"

Quinn looked at her.

"Okay, maybe a little," she relented with a wrinkle of her nose.

"We don't look anything alike!"

"It's...dark in here?" she offered weakly.

"Unbelievable."

Rachel pouted and drew Quinn closer. "Don't be like that. I only saw her from behind. It was just a few moments of harmless bump n' grind."

"Bump n' grind..." Quinn mouthed disbelievingly. "How are you drunker than me? Did you sneak shots when I wasn't looking?"

"There's nothing wrong with accepting free drinks, Quinn!"

"How many exactly?"

Rachel ignored her. "Look on the bright side! Santana got me away from Brittany before I managed to touch her boobs! And believe me, Quinn, I was soooo going for them..."

At that, Rachel looked down between them and grinned at Quinn's cleavage, but her eager hands were seized and pulled back around Quinn's neck.

"Don't even think about it."

Rachel didn't seem to be fazed, only flashed a dazzling smile at Quinn. "Maybe...I can make you feel a little differently about that after we dance some more..."

Quinn grabbed her waist and spun her around so Rachel's back and ass were pressed solidly against her. She held her tightly, not allowing an inch of space between them, and they started to sway to the music. Slowly at first, but then their rhythm allowed them to catch up to the beat.

The only one Rachel was going to be an out of control drunken mess with was her.

Rachel's breathing quickened and her body throbbed as if one pulse while they moved together intimately. Heady with alcohol and the feeling of Quinn' soft, supple body behind her, Rachel was trapped between two worlds. It was heavenly, but moving like this was only making the ache between her legs grow. Her mind, her body, her blood, screamed for one thing and one thing only.

The only thing different now from every other time this happened was that there were other people in the room and they still had their clothes on. She needed release, but what she really wanted was Quinn's release.

"Still don't know the difference?"

"You feel way better than Brittany," she admitted throatily and grasped handfuls of Quinn's ass.
Quinn laughed, sticking her tongue out at Santana and Brittany who were dancing next to them, while Rachel spun away, still making sure to hold onto Quinn's hand so she could come right back.

After a few songs' worth of very enthusiastic dancing, Rachel suddenly grabbed Quinn's arm and pulled her off the dance floor.

Quinn didn't protest, just focused on not stumbling into anyone as Rachel pushed her way through the crowd ahead of her.

"Hey, Rachel! Where are you going?" a guy with light caramel skin and hipster glasses called out. "You promised me a duet!"

"Broadway Baby can wait another night, Travis!" she said and led Quinn away.

"Where are we going?" Quinn asked, giggling, before she realized that Rachel was ushering her into the bathroom. "Oh, you could have just said—"

Rachel backed Quinn up against the wall until she was flush against her body. Quinn swallowed thickly.

"I want to touch you..." Rachel murmured, eyes glassy and unfocused, but her hands knew exactly what they were doing. "I've been dying all night, Quinn. The moment you came out in this dress...you smelled so good...I want to taste you."

"Here?" Quinn said with wide eyes, looking around the currently empty, but still very public, restroom with stalls.

Rachel grinned devilishly, bit her lower lip, and nodded before she took Quinn's face in her hands, ravaging her mouth without mercy. She left Quinn gasping for air with gloss all over her mouth in the sexiest mess imaginable.

"Is there really anything better out there than what you could have in here?" Rachel purred as she ducked to Quinn's throat.

"N-no, but it's still really – oh! – public, Rach!"

"True..." she nodded, hiking Quinn's dress up anyway, "and there is a karaoke stage out there after all..."

She gasped when Quinn kissed her, hard, punishing.

"Okay, mmph!" She giggled. "Maybe not."

"Get over here." Quinn grabbed her by the front of her dress and led them both into a stall, locking it behind her. "Someone's going to see!"

Rachel didn't seem to care, already leaning in for more. Quinn fell, banging loudly, against the locked stall door, but she hardly noticed. She raked her nails down Rachel's back where bare skin was exposed from the dress while meeting her lips again and again.

Rachel turned her around and, with one hand, interlaced both of Quinn's above their heads. She slipped the other beneath Quinn's short dress to rub against the soaking wet patch of her underwear.
"Oh, God," Quinn moaned. "We're not really doing this, are we? Someone will walk in!"

"Tell me to stop," Rachel dared her, her voice husky and her breath hot against Quinn's ear. "Tell me you want me to stop touching you and we'll just go right back out to the bar, have another drink, rub against each other in a crowded room with no real satisfaction. We'll just..." she yanked Quinn's dress down enough so that she could palm her breasts, relishing the feel of her warm flesh, loving just-right weight in her hands, tweaking the already rock hard nipples, "watch Santana and Brittany fuck each other on the dance floor, and listen to terrible NYADA students butcher more classics before we go home in the cold...is that what you want, baby? Or do you want--"

Quinn ground her ass back against her hard. "Shut up!" she groaned, her forehead pressed against the stall. "I give. Just...Rachel..."

She didn't need to be told twice and quickly pulled the fabric of her underwear aside, pushing deep inside the wet heat that was waiting for her.

The couple let out a simultaneous moan of satisfaction. Quinn threw her head back and Rachel used the chance to suck on the exposed flesh at her shoulder.

Rachel kissed, licked, nipped and sucked her way up Quinn's throat and across her jaw before moving down again. Quinn squirmed against her hand, grinding back into Rachel, who was growing short of breath with Quinn pressing against her like that.

"Rachel..." Quinn groaned.

Rachel wanted Quinn's climax just as much, so she dropped her hand from above their heads to grip Quinn's waist and pulled her more firmly against her, shamelessly rocking, gaining her own friction against Quinn as she pumped her fingers at an unyielding pace.

Tucking her head into the crook of Quinn's shoulder, Rachel couldn't think of a single thing outside of this. The delicious, unrelenting pressure coiling low inside her, how she'd already soaked through her underwear, Quinn keening, moaning, and grinding against her, how her hand needed to move faster, dripping with Quinn's arousal, sliding in and out of her, rapidly bringing Quinn to the edge. Even in her drunken haze, Rachel realized how rare it was that she got to take Quinn like this. Have her at her complete mercy. Begging and pleading for more without a care who heard. Who was the lion now?

The outer door swung open, letting in the sound of the crowd and music briefly before it shut again, but Rachel and Quinn were too far gone to care.

Someone pounded on the stall door. "THIS ISN'T A CATHOUSE!"

"GET LOST!" they both cried.

Not caring who was there or what they would hear, only focused on the achingly beautiful woman in front of her, Rachel spun Quinn around and dropped to her knees. She pulled Quinn's leg over her shoulder and buried her mouth between Quinn's thighs, her fingers still working deep inside her. Quinn was delirious with pleasure as Rachel's fingers continued to plunge inside her and braced herself on both sides of the stall to keep her balance.

"Ugh, lesbians," they heard a female voice say from outside the stall.

Rachel pulled herself away for a brief moment. "ACTUALLY, I'M—" she gasped with effort, "I'M BISEXUAL!"
Quinn grasped Rachel by the hair, tight enough to make her yelp, and pulled her back. Rachel bit down on the sensitive flesh of Quinn's inner thigh as a warning, but gladly put her tongue to use again. It wasn't much longer that she felt Quinn tighten around her fingers in a tell-tale sign.

She came apart with a whimper and knocked her head against the door – hard – before sagging against Rachel who scrambled to her feet to keep Quinn propped up between her and the door.

Giggling uncontrollably, Rachel peppered her lover with kisses all over her face until she found her lips again and kissed her deeply. Quinn happily, ecstatically, rapturously kissed Rachel back until she finally had to push her away in order to breathe.

"Did you really—" she panted heavily, "t-tell that girl you were...b-bi?"

Rachel wrapped her arms around her, making sure every inch of their bodies were flush against each other. She couldn't seem to get close enough, no matter how hard she tried.

"Rach?"

"Mmm, what?" she asked, looking up with heavy-lidded eyes. "Oh, yes, I did."

"But you don't do...labels..." Quinn gasped, trying to get her heart rate back to normal.

Rachel shook her head distractedly, running her hands over Quinn's body, smoothing her dress out.

"I can't explain labels to a stranger and fuck you at the same time, Quinn," she said, exasperated. "Even my talents have limits."

She unlocked the stall before Quinn could reply and they stumbled out together, laughing. There were some other girls there, but it didn't seem to be the ones from before. This group just ignored them and they were only too happy to do the same.

Quinn pulled them both out of the bathroom, back out into the bar, where the loud noise and smell of booze assaulted their senses. She pressed Rachel up against the nearest wall with a dangerous gleam in her eye. "Is that what you did?" she asked, licking her lips. "Did you fuck me in a public bathroom stall?"

"I did!" Rachel grinned proudly. "Showed that bartender what she missed!"

"Oh, you think that's what fucking is?" Quinn scoffed. "No, I'll show you fucking, Rachel Berry!"

She grabbed Rachel's jaw roughly, making the other girl gasp delightedly, and forcefully turned her head to the side while she licked down her throat and covered the same path again with lips and teeth. She pushed her thigh between Rachel's legs, uncaring of who might be around them to witness it, and pressed hard into Rachel's wetness.

Rachel moaned, greedily reaching out for Quinn to bring her closer. She settled for scraping her nails across Quinn's bare shoulders, making Quinn cry out and their lips crashed against each other in a mess of teeth and tongues.

Rachel wrapped one leg around Quinn's hip arching so that the thigh between her legs would hit higher and harder. Quinn's was about to plunge her hand beneath Rachel's dress, when she was yanked back by an equally drunk Santana.

"YOU ARE SO PAYING ME BACK FOR THOSE DRINKS, FABGAY!"
"IT'S FABRAY!"

"NO, IT'S GAY AND WE NEED TO LEAVE NOW."

"WHY?"

"BECAUSE YOU HAVE AN AUDIENCE."

Santana gestured wildly to the crowd of people who were standing nearby, hooting and cheering, begging for the show to go on.

Quinn had the good decency to remember to be embarrassed, but Rachel was too drunk to even notice that. She grabbed Quinn and Santana, dragging them towards the exit.

"Hands off, Berry!" Santana snapped. "I got to find Brittany."

"Rachs- we need our coats. A-and the card. Credit thingy. It's somewhere."

"I got 'em!" Brittany chirped appearing out of nowhere and slipped Quinn's credit card in her pocket while handing everyone their winter coats.

"Thanks, B!"

"You're a lifesaver."

She pouted. "Those are Lord Tubbington's favorite post-coitus snack...I miss him..."

Santana and Quinn exchanged a nauseated look while Rachel didn't seem to hear...or care...

Brittany sighed. "Also, I charged all our drinks on your tab, Quinn, so we're even."

"Wha—" She didn't get to respond because Rachel was kissing her and had started moving towards the door at the same time, taking Quinn with her.

"Home, Quinn!" Rachel demanded loudly. "It's my turn!"

"Get the hell out the door already, Fabgay!"

"It's Fabray!"

Santana rolled her eyes. "Not after that show tonight, Miss Sahara from Nevada. All that was missing was your pole."

 Needless to say, Quinn and Rachel came to a wordless decision the next morning that they would not be showing their faces at the NYADA karaoke bar again for quite a while.

Quinn was studying on the couch as she usually did and Rachel was bored. She didn't have work that night. She didn't have any classes. She didn't feel like going out with any of her new friends. She didn't want to watch TV. She'd already read half of her latest book and was tired of reading.

She wanted Quinn's attention and felt like a neglected puppy with no one to play with and nothing to do, but she couldn't begrudge Quinn taking her classes seriously. She'd made the Dean's List her first semester and was determined to make it happen again. Rachel was hardly going to get in the way of that, but it didn't stop her from wishing she could have Quinn all to herself instead of having to share her with school.
She knew if she became too distracting, Quinn would kiss her lovingly, then shove her stuff in a bag, and head out to the nearest coffee shop. The first time that happened, she was so insulted, she didn't speak to Quinn for two days...but they worked it out eventually.

"You distract me too easily because of how much I want you...I can't trust myself around you when that happens so I just have to leave if I ever want to be able to pass a class". Quinn had explained, and how was Rachel to argue with such a heartfelt, impossibly sweet explanation?

It wasn't that Quinn didn't make time for her, because she did! They had date night once a week and Quinn went out of her way to make sure they had their meals together and to give herself at least two additional nights off from studying to either spend it with Rachel or friends or both. Quinn would also run lines with her, help her with her song choices, listen to her rehearse and offer feedback, and brought home ice cream for her whenever Rachel felt like an audition didn't go her way.

...but none of that changed the fact that at this very moment, Rachel Berry was *bored*!

She put on some music because that was one thing that never bothered Quinn when she was studying, but that wasn't enough. She sat next to her very focused girlfriend on the couch and watched for a while as Quinn's eyes moved back and forth across the textbook. Sometimes she'd move to highlight something, or shift her glasses, or write something down in her notebook, or check something on her laptop.

Her hair had grown longer since she cut it last spring at Nationals, but it was still significantly shorter than what she used to have. Rachel loved it. Right now it was a messy, shaggy sort of cut that touched her shoulders.

She remembered how Quinn had almost always worn braids when she was pregnant. She stopped wearing her hair like that afterward and at the time she'd wondered if Quinn had worn the braids because she just liked them or because they made her look innocent. Innocence was something Rachel knew that Quinn had desperately wanted back then, to go back to when everyone saw her as the virgin head cheerleader, president of the celibacy club, and not the 16 year old teen mom she'd become.

She also wondered if Quinn stopped wearing her hair that way because it reminded her of the daughter she'd given up.

But she wasn't going to ask. It was the kind of thing that only Quinn needed to know. If Quinn needed to talk about it, Rachel would be there. Always.

She couldn't really help herself when her fingers found her way into the ends of Quinn's silky, soft hair. When the blonde sighed and rolled her shoulders to stretch, Rachel braced herself for the kiss-followed-by-disappearing-act.

Instead, Quinn reached out and squeezed Rachel's leg. Emboldened by that response, Rachel shifted closer and carefully separated three pieces of Quinn's hair and began to braid it. Quinn looked up from her book with an amused smile, and without a word, slid to the floor with her book in her lap so that Rachel could get behind her for better access.

Wildly, and somewhat irrationally, excited that she finally had something to do – and it was something to do with *Quinn* - Rachel took her task very seriously. The small one that she started was done away with so that she could do a full french braid. When she was done, she held onto Quinn's hair with one hand while looking around for anything nearby that could act as a hair tie. Quinn knowingly lifted her wrist above her head. Rachel made a little excited noise when she saw it, and pulled the hair tie from Quinn's wrist. She tied the braid off and sat back to inspect her work.
"Well?" Quinn asked. It was the first word she'd spoken in what felt like, and probably was, hours.

"A little crooked," Rachel sighed in disappointment. "I should do it over."

"Can't be anything less than perfect," Quinn replied simply and pulled out the hair tie herself. "Again."

Rachel smiled to herself and ran her fingers through Quinn's tresses to shake out all her work and start anew. She didn't mind. Clearly, Quinn was enjoying it, so she was happy to oblige. Before starting again though, she lightly massaged Quinn's scalp. When Rachel earned a soft, pleased sigh for her efforts, she got even more excited and moved her massage from Quinn's scalp to her neck and shoulders before going back into her hair again.

She noticed Quinn hadn't turned the page in her textbook for a while now.

Sam came to visit during his spring break. He drove up on his own in his pick-up truck to spend five days with the girls he considered his best friends. He had his bros and old teammates, for sure, plenty of people to hang out with and party with. He also had his very sweet and loving girlfriend that he shared almost everything with. But Quinn and Rachel somehow managed to find this place in his heart that no one else ever touched.

He thought it was just a need to protect them at first, but after a while, after hours of skyping, texting, and phone calls...he realized that there was something missing if he didn't talk to them at least once every couple of days. He loved those girls and he knew that they were the kind of friends that would be 'Aunts' to his children one day, the kind of friends he would call when he had something life changing happen to him, the kind of friends that he would always be able to lean on, no matter what.

He had long since forgiven and left behind the hurt and resentment of the past. Now, he knew was that he was one of the lucky few to find lifelong friends at such a young age.

Rachel was overjoyed to have the opportunity to take Sam to see his first Broadway show. She planned every single moment of the evening and even emailed him a description of the clothes he was supposed to wear. Quinn didn't know about that part until Sam called her to beg for mercy. Eventually, Quinn calmed Rachel down and Sam stopped threatening to cancel the trip entirely.

It turned out to be the perfect night, just as Rachel wanted. The show was stupendous, Sam loved it, and Quinn was happy as could be after taking her last exam. She was in the throes of midterm exhaustion so she was just happy to be anywhere that had nothing to do with school and everything to do with two of the people she loved most. Rachel did have to elbow her at one point during the show when Quinn nodded off.

Rachel could hardly fault her. She knew how brutal the last few weeks had been, so instead of chiding her, she just encouraged Quinn to rest her head on her shoulder so her girlfriend could doze again. She didn't mind Quinn missing the show too much since they'd already seen it twice before. She was just glad Quinn didn't snore.

As they walked out, the crowd shuffling along with them, Rachel gushed over the talent of the lead actress to Sam, who was also really excited, but suddenly she just stopped – overwhelmed by sadness. She couldn't even remember what she had been saying, but it didn't matter because Sam knew exactly what had happened.

He wrapped his arms around her shoulders and whispered into her ear. "You're a hundred times better than her. Don't worry, Rach, someone's gonna see that real soon."
Rachel hugged him tightly, lingering longer than she usually would to soak up his reassuring warmth. He was still one of the best huggers she'd ever known.

Four days after Sam left New York, she got a call back for the lead in a very off-Broadway play. It didn't seem like much in the beginning, just her first real job as an actress, but a new director took over the play and it started picking up steam. Before long, it broke onto Broadway to wide critical and box office acclaim: Spring Awakening.

Rachel Berry would, at long last, have her name in lights along the Great White Way.

After that, there was absolutely no convincing her that Sam didn't possess some keen psychic abilities. Quinn was exasperated by her obstinace, but Sam never minded – of course, he knew there was no truth to it – and always welcomed her calls for advice and support.

But until this happened, it was just another night, and she was still just waiting for another phone call – agonizingly unaware of the dramatic and incredible upturn her life was about to take.

Rachel excused herself to the restroom, partly out of need, and partly to collect herself so she could continue to be pleasant company instead of throwing herself a pity party and bringing the whole mood of Sam's trip down.

Quinn stood next to Sam as Rachel walked off. She was utterly exhausted and a little tipsy from the wine they drank at dinner, as well as intermission. Snuggling into Sam's arms as they waited in the lobby, she leaned against him more heavily than she normally would.

"You happy, Quinn?"

"There isn't a word for what I am."

"No," he chuckled, "There definitely isn't a word for what you are."

She smacked his stomach playfully, but then pecked him on the lips.

"Are you happy, Sam?"

"Life…isn't all too bad these days."

"Is that a yes?"

"That's a yes."

She giggled and burrowed deeper into him. It was a little chilly in there and Quinn only had a thin sweater over her dress, so Sam opened up his jacket for her to snuggle underneath. She closed her eyes contentedly and he rested his chin against the top of her head.

"How's Alex?"

"I dunno," he deepened his voice, "she's got gaps, I got gaps, together...we fill gaps."

Quinn groaned in exasperation. "Are you ever going to grow out of that?"

"Rocky is a classic!" he insisted. "It's Sylvester Stallone! Come on...tell me I sounded like him. You know I did. Admit it."

"Shut your face and close your jacket, I'm cold."
"I can't believe I put up with you..." he grumbled, but did as he was told, tugging his coat tighter around them.

"Quinn!" a lilting voice called and she opened her eyes to see a a bubbly redhead heading towards her. "I didn't think I would see you here tonight!"

Alyssa eyed Sam curiously, with some apprehension, but it soon vanished.

Quinn disentangled herself from Sam and hugged her hello before stepping back into Sam's arms. She gestured up him – the boy that was currently holding her up – and said, "Meet Sam, our best friend from high school. He just saw his first Broadway show. Tell her how much you loved it."

"I th-"

"He loved it," Quinn continued, not missing a beat. "We were all in Glee club in high school so an appreciation for musicals was a basic necessity."

"We?"

"Of course! Rachel's in the bathroom. You remember her right? Small, dark hair, loud?"

Alyssa laughed and Rachel popped up again.

"There's our superstar!" She said with a smile, still chuckling. "We were just talking about you."

Rachel hugged her enthusiastically. "Hi there! Saying only good things, I hope?"

"Depends on your perspective," Sam teased.

Rachel tossed him a dirty look before turning back to Alyssa.

"Third time this week? Honey, you're never going to make your rent. While in a perfect world, living on the streets would be a perfectly acceptable exchange for seeing all the shows you want, this is New York. You what that means better than I do."

"I'll have you know, tonight's on him." She jerked her thumb to the side where a young man was standing at the counter getting something to drink. "Why else do you think I date?"

"For the sex," Quinn deadpanned.

Sam was delighted and grinned at her like a naughty schoolboy. Rachel giggled. Alyssa merely stuck her tongue out at her. "And there's something wrong with that?"

"Not at all. Have at it." Quinn gestured absently towards the guy who seemed to notice they were talking about him and gave a sheepish wave.

"Quinn," Rachel gasped, but was unable to hide her amusement at the blonde's loose tongue. Alcohol was quite the inhibition off-switch for her typically cool and in control girlfriend.

Alyssa laughed again and hugged them both goodbye so she could return to her date.

"It was nice meeting you, Sam!" she called back over her shoulder.

"You too!" he replied hurriedly, making sure that Quinn couldn't beat him to it again, and then looked back between the two girls. "She was nice."
"Oh, I adore Alyssa," Rachel sighed. "Quinn brought her home from her Economics class one night. She's the most easy-going, laid back pre-law student I've ever met."

"And she has a fierce love of all things Broadway, which of course had her and Rachel getting along like pigs in mud. We were supposed to study, but they spent the whole time talking about the newest theater opening and completely ignored my existence."

"Ignored your existence? Please! You're such a drama queen..." Rachel rolled her eyes.

Sam snorted uncontrollably at the irony of that and both girls swatted him reprovingly, but he just kept laughing.

"How about we head home?" Quinn asked. "I'm totally wiped out."

"And a little tipsy, baby?" Rachel grinned knowingly.

"I'm a lightweight," she shrugged. "What can I say?"

Rachel wrapped her arm around her waist to keep her steady. "Hold on to me then."

Quinn nuzzled her affectionately, gazing at her with open adoration. "I always do."

Rachel couldn't resist a smile at that and kissed her sweetly.

Sam helped them make their way through the throngs and flagged down a cab to get them back to Rachel and Quinn's apartment. Quinn didn't so much step into the cab as trip, which had Rachel and Sam in stitches.

Unfortunately, Quinn didn't take kindly to them laughing at her. She slammed the door before either one of them could get in and told the cabbie to leave.

When the car pulled away, Rachel and Sam's laughter slowly died out before they looked at each other, stunned.

"Did she just...?"

"She did not!"

The cab disappeared in a sea of cars and Sam folded his arms across his chest and gave Rachel a look.

"Yep. She definitely ditched us."

"Oh for..." Rachel scoffed, shaking her head. "Why do I ever let her drink?"

Actually, she knew exactly why she didn't mind when Quinn drank. It was a crapshoot, but Quinn had two drunken sides to her, the angry one and the playful one. The playful one was the side that came out these days far more often than not. And Rachel loved a playful Quinn...

"Let her?" Sam echoed. "I'm not sure how exactly the 'let' part works with Quinn..."

Rachel looked down at what she was holding and her head snapped up in a panic.

"No! I have her purse. She has no money on her. She's not going to be able to pay her fare!"

Sam's eyes widened and they both stepped out into the street at the same time with their arms
outstretched, waving wildly.
"TAXI!"

Quinn yawned and rubbed her eyes as she ambled out of the bedroom, still half asleep as she made
her way into the kitchen to put on a pot of coffee. It was an expensive machine that was a
housewarming gift from her sister, Frannie, in Seattle. While it brewed absolutely sensational coffee,
it also took an inordinately long time, especially because it automatically ground the coffee beans fresh
before each pot.

"Morning," Sam said sleepily behind her and she heard the stool scrape the floor as he pulled it out to
sit at the counter.

"Morning."

When she finished setting the coffee and went to the fridge, Sam started to snigger. She looked at
him with a frown. It was too early and she was too tired for his shenanigans.

"What?"

He coughed to cover himself, but it was so obvious, Quinn could only roll her eyes.

"Don't mess with me. I have the coffee. If you expect to get any, I suggest you open your mouth and
say what you apparently find so amusing."

He raised an eyebrow and looked down at her chest before back up to her again. "Seriously? I
mean...seriously, Quinn?"

She looked down at her shirt and groaned.

Oh.

She had worn one of her 'RACHEL BERRY'S GIRLFRIEND' t-shirts to bed last night. Quinn
made good on her promise. After they'd gotten to New York, she wore it to her very first class.
Rachel stopped her from going on with it any longer and pushed Quinn into bathroom immediately
afterward, giving her something else to wear. There was a difference between being "out and proud"
and just being obnoxious.

As much as Rachel appreciated and recognized the devotion it took to wear that shirt on campus at
Columbia, it drew way too much attention to Quinn and Rachel was hardly going to make her
girlfriend withstand that sort of scrutiny on her first week at school. The nerves were bad enough
already with having to fit in and find her way through this new life.

That night, Rachel brought Quinn to bed, taking the time to make sure that Quinn was very aware of
just how much Rachel appreciated her and loved her for being willing to keep that long time
promise.

Quinn had no regrets.

"Leave my shirt alone," she grumbled, waving Sam off.

It was a pre-coffee hour. She wasn't capable of a better comeback before her morning coffee.

"I can't believe Rachel makes you wear that."
Quinn yawned again, staring at the coffee machine in a vain hope that it would make it work more quickly. "She doesn't. I had it made."

"That thing was your idea?"

"Yes. Now shut up and make yourself useful."

"How?"

She shrugged. "Cook something."

"Rachel's vegan. Breakfast for vegans is like...the stuff they put in a horse's feed bag."

"Am I vegan?"

He furrowed his brow as he thought about it. "...No?"

"Exactly. So cook me breakfast."

"Yes, ma'am," he muttered, rolling his eyes and they traded places, Sam in the kitchen with Quinn idling away on the stool.

"And Rachel's not vegan anymore, remember? She's vegetarian now."

"Same difference."

"Don't let Rachel hear that."

"I already got the lecture last month."

"What makes you think she won't give it again? ...Longer?"

He winced and gave a short nod of understanding.

They were quiet for a few moments. Quinn closed her eyes and let herself doze off a bit until Sam's voice woke her up again.

"You know..."

She cracked her eyes open to look at him.

"If there was any doubt that you were the one for Rachel, that shirt would prove them all wrong. You two were meant for each other. Can't think of anyone else I know that would do something like that, or even think to do something like that."

"Rachel does things like that," she replied sleepily.

"That's my point."

Quinn propped her chin on her hand, scrutinizing him for a few minutes as he moved around the kitchen.

"You really think we're meant for each other?"

Sam looked up from the stove with a lopsided grin. "The shirt says it all...Rachel Berry's girlfriend."

"It's totally overboard, isn't it?"
"I think the giant face under the arrow just kind of puts it over the edge. Otherwise you might have gotten away with it."

Quinn laughed.

Just then, a sleepy brunette shuffled her way out of the bedroom and came up behind Quinn. She dropped her head on her shoulder and snuggled up against her, arms around her waist.

"Tell me the coffee's ready," she mumbled.

"The coffee's ready."

Rachel lifted her head slightly with a frown.

"It's not ready, is it?"

"No, we have a sloth for a coffee maker, but you told me to tell you it was."

"I hate it when you play games with me in the morning. It's cruel."

"I seem to recall you like some of my morning games..." she replied in a husky whisper.

Rachel grinned into her girlfriend's back and nuzzled her before kissing her neck. "Hm. I suppose I'll have to take that back then."

"Guys..." Sam groaned from the other side and they both looked up in surprise.

He had his hands over his ears.

"You promised to be better about this stuff."

"That was not PDA," Rachel grumbled. "It's not on the list; we're not breaking any rules. I know it's not on the list because I memorized the list."

They had haggled and bartered; Quinn left the apartment at one point just to escape the endless bickering, and then finally they reached an agreement. Rachel made all three of them sign at the bottom to make it official.

"You were nuzzling her!"

"Which you acceded to as part of the negotiation in exchange for taking off below the waist, above the thigh, touching in your presence, whether seen or unseen. Paragraph 2, subsection C."

"You were talking about morning...you know...fun stuff," he whispered, looking around as if he were plotting a terrorist attack and the CIA was onto him.

At that, Quinn rolled her eyes. "Fun stuff? Are you for real? We're all grown up now, Sam. You wouldn't even get away with saying that in high school without getting tossed into the dumpster."

He just shook his head. "I wasn't going to say the real thing because you two would get pissed at me."

"We would be upset with you for saying 'sex'?" Rachel asked.

"For talking about you two having sex!"
Quinn frowned. "I thought you were mad at us for talking about us having sex?"

He stared down at the pan on the stove for a moment. "My head hurts."

"Mine too." Rachel sighed. "Is the coffee ready now?"

"No," the other two replied in unison.

She dropped her head back down on Quinn's shoulder with a whine.

"You should have a t-shirt too," Sam said.

Rachel and Quinn looked at him questioningly.

"What? If Quinn wears one, shouldn't Rachel have one too? It's only fair."

"Is he making sense?" Rachel asked. "I can't tell."

Quinn waved him off. "He never makes sense."

Sam looked behind him and nodded in that direction. "The coffee's ready."

"Oh, now that made sense!"

"Match made..." he said under his breath as Rachel bounded over to the machine to pour them all some caffeine.

"'In heaven' is the end of that platitude," Quinn retorted.

"Or hell," he replied with a mischievous smirk.

"No coffee for Sam," the blonde said flatly.

"Okay," Rachel agreed.

"Hey! Not fair! I'm cooking!" He waved down at the stove wildly with a spatula to make his point.

Rachel looked around him at the food with a frown and wrinkled her nose. "That's hardly vegetarian friendly. The coffee ban stays."

"Give me that!" He dove for the pot as Rachel carried it off.

Quinn put her head on the counter. It was far too early for this.

"Hand it over!"

"When you stop eating slaughtered pigs, I will!"

"So I should eat them while they're still alive?"

"Pigs are harmless animals that have every right to live instead of being bred, caged, tortured, and murdered for your sick appetite!"

"Bacon is essential to an American breakfast!"

Rachel took a step back with her hand on her chest, looking stricken. "You're making a patriotic case out of murder?"
Sam's jaw dropped and he threw his hands up in forfeit. "Forget it! No coffee is worth this."

Quinn held up her mug in the air, head still on the counter.

"Someone put coffee in here now or I will be making a patriotic case for murder, seeing as how my right to caffeine was unjustly denied."

"You're too cranky in the mornings, Quinn."

"He's right," Rachel nodded, "there's no need to be so irritable."

She groaned.

Why did they always have to gang up on her?

Sam had gone back to Lima a couple days before when Rachel came home from a night out with her new theater friends and found Quinn asleep on top of their bed, fully clothed on top of the covers. Their living room was a mess of books and papers strewn about with Quinn's laptop on top of everything. She let a lot of her work slide in the time Sam was visiting to give him her undivided attention and she'd spent the last two days trying to catch up.

Quinn worked hard to make sure she stayed on top with her grades and would likely be a TA by the next semester – still in her sophomore year. Rachel was so proud of her and how well she was doing. Quinn deserved all the awards possible for being the star collegiate that she was, but Rachel still wanted her girlfriend to actually *survive* long enough to get her degree... The way she was working herself to the bone, something was going to have to give soon.

Rachel went to turn off the light, knowing how much Quinn needed to sleep, but a hand shot out to stop her before she could reach the lamp on the bedside table.

"What time is it?" Quinn asked groggily.

"Just after nine. Go back to sleep, sweetie."

"No, I still have four more chapters to review," she mumbled and tried to rouse herself, but Rachel put a gentle, firm hand on her shoulder.

"You can finish in the morning. You don't have class until late tomorrow afternoon. Sleep, Quinn."

Not pleased with that idea, but having more trouble getting out of bed than she expected, Quinn screwed her eyes shut with a frown. Rachel tutted at Quinn's behavior and kissed her lightly, trying to smooth that frown away. It worked.

Quinn opened her eyes again and the mental battle between her mind, which wanted to stay awake, and her body ended. Rachel had won.

"I'm getting in the shower – sleep."

"I wanna shower."

"Can you make it to the bathroom without passing out?"

"I can try."

Rachel shook her head, not bothering to hide her smile, and pulled Quinn to her feet before starting
to take off her own clothes as she made her way towards the bathroom. Quinn followed suit, but much more clumsily. Rachel turned on the shower and was testing the water temperature when Quinn came in behind her.

"How are you feeling about your audition tomorrow?" she asked sleepily. "It's the one with the nuns right?"

"No, this is more of a performance art piece. That one is next week. And I'm feeling better, actually. Being out with Kurt, Blaine, Kristin, Maya, and the others tonight helped. Being surrounded by people going through exactly the same thing as me makes me feel less alone with what I'm going through. I really thought I would get something for that musical adaptation of *Spring Awakening*...I was so sure..." she trailed off with a sigh and stepped into the shower, followed almost immediately by Quinn. It felt so good to be under the hot water, letting it soak her hair and body.

"Hey, I'm here for you, Rachel. Always." Quinn wrapped her arms around her from behind and the shower stream soaked them both. "You know that. If they didn't see the talent they had in front of them, then it's their loss. Their money down the drain because it would never be a real success without you."

"Truer words never spoken! I'm positive that cranky producer was tone deaf anyway." Rachel flipped her wet hair back with an air of confidence – but there was something lacking in it. "And, of course, I know you're there for me, Quinn." She turned in Quinn's arms to face her. "It's just different being able to talk to someone else who's also had endless streams of rejection. It's a different kind of support, that's all."

Quinn was silent for a moment. "Am I not here enough for you? I know school takes up a lot of my time and we don't get to see each other much sometimes between my classes and you working and your workshops and your auditions..."

"Quinn, stop. You're not doing anything wrong. We're perfect. I just need to land a role, even just a minor one, and then we'll be...even more perfect!"

"You will."

"I know."

"Rachel...you will."

"Are you nervous about your interview with Professor Katton?"

"A bit."

"You're gonna nail it."

"Just like you're gonna blow them away at your audition tomorrow."

"See? We're perfect. Now wash my hair." Rachel handed her the shampoo bottle and turned her back to Quinn. She raised an eyebrow, but did as she was told anyway.

"I love you, you know," she said.

"I love you too..." Rachel replied quietly, glancing at her over her shoulder, "more than anything."

Quinn touched her chin to Rachel's shoulder, lowering her voice as she spoke against her ear, "Then believe me when I tell you that no matter what happens tomorrow, you're going to be a star. All it
takes is one break. One time. One director. One audition out of a hundred."

Rachel sighed and leaned back against her, reveling in the way their wet, naked bodies slid against each other. "I was wrong before. You're way better support than Kurt and the others."

Quinn scoffed. "You're just saying that because you want me to have sex with you tonight."

"That too."

Two days later, Rachel got her big break.

Rachel walked into their room, more than ready for bed after a long day of rehearsal, and found Quinn pacing back and forth lazily while on the phone. When she saw Rachel, she covered her cellphone with her hand before she whispered, "Sam and Alex broke up."

"What?" Rachel's eyes widened and she sat down on the bed. "But I talked to him last week; everything was fine!"

Quinn took a moment to listen to Sam to make sure she wasn't missing anything before replying. "She got into UCLA and she doesn't want to do long distance because it was already difficult enough to do when they were at different schools in the same state."

"And he disagrees?"

"He's insisting they can make it work. He just loves her and doesn't want to admit the truth. He thinks they've been together long enough to give them a chance."

Rachel pouted sympathetically for their friend and settled into bed to listen while Quinn continued her conversation with Sam. After another ten minutes, Quinn finally convinced Sam to sleep on it, allowing her to sleep as well, and hung up. She crawled into bed next to Rachel with a tired sigh.

"He used us an example with her, of how people who want to be together make sacrifices to be in the same place."

"That's not fair at all," Rachel complained. "I never asked you to sacrifice where you went to school for me. If you chose to go to Yale, I would have supported you. We would have made it work!"

"I know. Shhh. I said the same thing. He can't ask her to sacrifice her education just to be in a relationship. He knows that; he's just not ready to accept it yet. He will."

"I was talking to Tina the other day, and she told me how hard and confusing it was for her to break up with Mike. She's dating someone else now, you know? Took her some time to move on, but she did. That reminds me, I want to go visit her and meet him next week. Production is dark Sunday and Monday this month so I plan to take advantage of it."

Quinn nodded. "That sounds like a plan."

"She told me that it was so confusing to break up with someone you love," Rachel said, turning toward Quinn. "When there's no infidelity, no big arguments, no fundamental differences in personalities... When you really love someone, but your lives are simply going in different directions and you're forced to face the fact that while you love them, they're not the love. She said she questioned her decision all the time—why was she ending a relationship with someone who made her happy? Where's the sense in that? It was the right decision in the end though."
"Maybe you should be the one to call Sam tomorrow."

"I think I will."

She watched Quinn who already had her eyes closed, ready to drift off into sleep. There was something still nagging at the back of her mind. The same thing that had bothered her the moment she walked into their room tonight.

"You know, as adorably sexy you look, I still say there's something unseemly about my longtime girlfriend wearing her ex-boyfriend's high school football jersey in OUR bed."

"Ex-boyfriend, turned one of my best friends," Quinn said, turning her head to look at Rachel.

"I thought I was your best friend!"

"That's why I said one of my best friends."

"But I'm number one..." she grumbled.

"Yes, Rachel," Quinn said wearily, but her eyes sparkled all the same. "You are always number one."

"I still don't see why you feel the need to keep that jersey in your wardrobe. You have plenty of other suitable sleepwear options or none at all..."

Quinn raised an eyebrow, but let it go.

"High school was ages ago!" she persisted stubbornly. "You should have thrown it away by now."

"It was two years ago and you still wear my Cheerios jacket."

"Because you are my girlfriend! That's what we do! We wear each other's clothes! Not our exes' clothes!"

"That and you stole my jacket..." Quinn muttered.

"How would you feel if I wore Finn's jersey to bed all the time?"

"Annoyed."

Rachel gestured between them emphatically to say she made her point.

"Because," Quinn continued patiently, "it'd swallow you whole, drag on the floor, make you trip and slam your head on something and then I'd have to take you to the ER all because you wanted to wear a stupid, smelly, torn up jersey from our Lurch ex-boyfriend to make some nonexistent point." She scoffed. "And Sam replaced Finn as quarterback. Why do you want a loser's jersey? At least mine was worn by someone who won games."

"That is so not the point!" Rachel gaped at her. "And I can't believe you just talked about having to take me to the hospital for a grievous head injury like it would be a terrible chore!"

She remained unfazed. "I think you're forgetting how I got this jersey in the first place."

"Sam gave it to you. What is there to forget?" Rachel punched her pillow to fluff it up and settled back down in a huff.
"He gave it to me because you accidentally dumped an entire vat of your perfume on him when we were at the mall senior year. He didn't even want to go that day, but you insisted he needed a 'gentlemanly scent for special occasions' and harassed him until he gave in."

"I don't see what—"

"He was wearing his jersey at the time because of the pep rally we had earlier that day. He said he washed it half a dozen times after that, but it still smelled like you. He couldn't take it anymore, so he gave it to me, and ordered a new one."

"But-but-" Rachel's protests were much weaker now.

Quinn pressed on knowingly. "Why would he give it to me Rachel? Why would he think I'd want his jersey?"

"Because he loves you," she replied stubbornly.

"Exactly. And he knows how much I love you. It still smells like that perfume, you know? I like it. It reminds me of us in high school. All that time I spent in your room...in your bed..." She shook her head. "It feels like a lifetime ago. Sometimes I miss it."

"You miss hiding and lying and fighting and all of the teenage emotional roller coaster rides?"

She rolled her eyes. "Of course, I love our life now so much more. It's just...that's where we started. It's a nice reminder. A good memory."

"I wouldn't call where we started a good memory," Rachel grumbled.

"It wasn't the best start," she admitted with a hint of sadness, "but it's where we happened. It's what led to where we are now. It's the reason why you're in bed with me right now complaining about a football jersey. That qualifies as good in my book."

Rachel gave a small sigh and stared at an invisible spot on their sheets before peering up at her. "You can really still smell it?"

Quinn smiled fondly. "It's not very strong anymore, but yes."

She shimmied closer until she was pressed up against Quinn and buried her nose just beneath Quinn's breasts, breathing deeply. Quinn simply threaded her fingers through Rachel's hair, lazily stroking the ever longer locks.

"I don't smell it," she announced, frowning.

"Maybe it's just in my head now." She shrugged. "It's been years and taken way more than a half a dozen trips through the washing machine..."

Rachel rested her head on Quinn's stomach and sighed again, louder this time.

"You always do this."

"Do what?"

"Make me feel so loved. Make me love you more all the time. I'm ruined for anyone else, you know?"

"I know," Quinn replied simply.
She knew because she was ruined too.

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