Something Old, Something New
by Ravanne

Summary

Following the events of Just Rewards, Kurt and Adam arrive in Lima for a wedding and drama ensues…

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Kurt was exceedingly grateful that he had thought to ask Finn to pick them up at the airport rather than his father. Not that his father wouldn’t have done so, but with his cancer treatment and balancing the demands of his job in Washington as well as overseeing the garage, the last thing Kurt wanted was give him something additional to handle. Finn had been more than happy to make the two hour drive to pick him and Adam up. This way, his father would get a chance to relax before their arrival.

Besides, Adam had gotten increasingly anxious about meeting the elder Hummel the closer they got to their trip. Meeting Finn first would ease him into the family introductions and it was clear that Kurt had made the right call. Finn’s friendly presence during the drive back to Lima had gone a long way towards easing Adam’s nerves about finally meeting Kurt’s father.

Personally, Kurt thought that Adam was being a bit silly. After all, what father wouldn’t ultimately be thrilled to see their child with someone as kind, caring and generous as Adam was. Adam was practically designed to be the perfect “bring home to meet the folks” boyfriend. And point by point, Kurt had valid answers to any of Adam’s lingering concerns.

Their age difference and the presumed upset on his father’s part about Adam being several years Kurt’s senior? That was easily dissuaded. First of all, the three year difference between them wasn’t much more than the age difference between Kurt’s parents. Second, his father had often acknowledged just how mature Kurt was in comparison to many of his peers, so it made perfect sense that he would be attracted to an older, more mature man.

Annoyance that Kurt had waited until their relationship had gotten serious before introducing his boyfriend to the family? Well, given that Kurt lived a few hundred miles away, it wasn’t exactly practical for his father to expect a formal introduction to every man that he considered dating. And they were taking things slowly, as Kurt had still been emotionally healing after his break up with Blaine. Bringing Adam to Lima at this point was evidence that they were taking this still relatively new relationship seriously.

Concern that Kurt was throwing himself into a new relationship so quickly after breaking up with Blaine? Especially since Kurt was sure that Blaine would have done everything possible to paint the end of their relationship in a manner that didn’t put him in a bad light. It was almost certain that his father would say something about him moving on so fast while Blaine was so “obviously” languishing.

Kurt sighed to himself. Knowing Blaine as well as he did, he was in no doubt that Blaine had been throwing himself about and moaning to anyone who would listen to him about how sad he was and how unfair Kurt was being by not taking him back. There was a definite disadvantage in that by being in New York, Kurt wasn’t really in a position where he could defend himself against Blaine’s accusations. Coming in months after the fact meant that Blaine had plenty of time to poison all of their mutual acquaintances against him. And that included his father.

It might be long overdue, but Kurt was determined to set the story straight. He would have told his father about the real reasons for their break up when he visited for Christmas if it weren’t for the bombshell about Burt’s diagnosis and then Blaine being delivered like an unwanted present. He just never found a good time to talk to his father without Blaine always being there. And with his father being sick, the last thing that Kurt wanted was to give him something to worry about. With Blaine in Lima and Kurt in New York, he had been able to temporarily put Blaine and whatever connection his ex thought still existed between them out of his mind.
As much as he disliked the idea of airing his dirty laundry, Kurt was going to have to talk to his father and explain just what transpired and why Kurt had no intention of ever taking Blaine back. There were so many things that others just did not know, and that was partly Kurt’s fault. He’s never been one to wear his problems on his sleeve and seek out sympathy, and while it allowed him to become as self-reliant as he was, it too often allowed others to set the argument. There was no way that their friends and families could really know just how unhealthy and unbalanced the dynamic between Kurt and Blaine had been, or how much Kurt had to hide and swallow in order to keep up the image of the perfect teenage dream. It was long past time that came to an end and if Blaine pressed the issue, then he was in for a nasty surprise. Kurt’s days of biting his tongue to keep the peace was over.

“Sweetheart, it’s really lovely here,” Adam said from the front seat, where he sat beside Finn. They were pulling into Kurt’s old neighborhood and were just a few blocks from the house. “You really grew up here?”

“Not far from here,” Kurt answered. “We moved after dad and Finn’s mom got married.”

“It’s so quiet here,” Adam marveled. “It’s very different from New York.”

Kurt couldn’t deny that, but he so much preferred New York with all its noise and chaos and grit. Where he could be himself without always feeling like he was being judged and found lacking. Not in this little provincial town where even thought who were supposed to be on his side usually ended up working against him. No, he was much happier in New York where he was treated with a lot more fairness than he’d ever experienced before.

“Is it like this in England?” Finn asked.

“Some parts, probably,” Adam answered. “But I grew up in a fairly large town, and I spent a lot of time in London because of my parents’ work.”

“Well, I’m sure that Kurt will be showing you around,” Finn said. “Not that there’s much to see here, but…”

“I’m sure that Lima must be a fascinating place for someone like Kurt to come out of here,” Adam said, throwing his boyfriend a loving glance.

“Flatterer,” Kurt answered back teasingly.

“And here we are,” Finn announced as he pulled the care into the driveway of the Hummel/Hudson home. He looked over at the man sitting next to him as he turned off the ignition. “Adam, I hope you’re ready for this.”

The British man inhaled deeply to steady his nerves, visibly steeling himself for the anticipated confrontation that awaited him. Kurt got out of the car and went to give his boyfriend an encouraging hug. “It’s going to be fine,” Kurt assured him. “He’s going to grumble a little, but he’ll love you.”

“I hope so, sweetheart,” Adam said softly.

Finn got their suitcases out of the trunk and carried them inside, calling out “We’re here!”

Kurt winced at the volume, but lead Adam into the house.

“Once more into the breach,” Adam muttered beneath his breath, very much hoping that he wouldn’t be facing an angry father with a shotgun the instant he walked through the door.
The house looked great. Carole had clearly done a bit of redecorating since Kurt left home and there were a lot of new pictures of the family adorning the walls. Adam spotted one of Kurt that was several years old and marveled, “Look how young you were here! You were just a baby! And that school uniform was so adorable.”

Kurt came over and saw just what picture he was looking at. “I’m going to have to talk to Carole about what qualifies as a ‘cherished memory’,” he groaned. “Could she have picked anything more embarrassing?”

“But you looked wonderful, love,” Adam assured him. “What were you singing there?”

“‘Candles’, Kurt answered, wincing a little at the memory. “That was my one and only featured duet in a competition and it only happened because Blaine wanted into my pants. I was singing with him.”

Adam cocked his head, looking a bit perplexed. “But wasn’t that a break up song?” he asked, his brow furrowing in confusion.

“Don’t get me started,” Kurt complained. “I didn’t pick it, but I probably should have taken it as a bad omen.”

“Maybe it was meant to be ironic,” Adam theorized, trying to be generous but Kurt shook his head.

“No, Blaine doesn’t have an ironic bone in his body. He’s got as much nuance as a piece of toast. But then, he is the guy who sang a song in public with a line about sex toys to the closeted guy he was crushing on.”

Adam blinked in astonishment. “That’s… inappropriate.”

Kurt chuckled. “Inappropriate should be Blaine’s middle name.”

Adam shrugged. “I suppose that I can’t be critical. After all, the song that I tried to impress you with was all about arses.”

“And I was impressed,” Kurt assured him. “Once I stopped laughing because it was so ludicrous.”

Adam looked at a few more pictures from Kurt’s childhood and high school years and marveled, “I’m getting a chance to see you in a whole new light. You don’t talk too much about your life before you came to New York.”

“Well, I’m sure that Dad will be happy to break out all my most embarrassing baby pictures as soon as he’s done threatening you,” Kurt promised.

Finn came tromping down the stairs. “Kurt, I put both your bags in your room before Burt could order me to stick Adam in the guest room.”

The older man grinned widely. “Thanks, Finn!”

The bright smile on Adam’s face faded very slightly when a burly older man stepped into the living room. “Hey, sport,” he greeted Kurt, opening his arms for his son to step into a warm hug. “How’re you doing?”

“Good, Dad,” Kurt answered, squeezing his father tightly. “I missed you!”

Burt could feel Kurt’s stronger frame and stepped back to take a look at him. “You’ve put on some
“muscle there,” he said admiringly. “Looks like New York has been good for you.”

“It’s been great. I’ve got so much to tell you about school and everything,” Kurt swore. His expression softened as he tried to ease both the men in his life into an easy introduction.

“Dad, I’ve got someone that I’d like you to meet,” he said softly, stepping back so that Burt could see the man standing behind him. “This is Adam. My boyfriend.”

The two men didn’t say anything immediately as they sized one another up. Burt broke the silence and stepped forward to shake Adam’s hand. And if he was using a big more force than absolutely necessary, neither of them commented on it.

“Good to finally meet you,” Burt greeted; taking a good long look at the man that he son was so besotted with. “Kurt’s told me quite a bit about you.”

“Thank you, sir,” Adam said respectfully. “He’s told me so much about his family that I feel like I know you all already. I’ve been looking forward to having a chance to meet in person.”

“Well, Carole is out shopping because we suddenly remembered that we’re going to have three young men to feed while you’re all here, but she’ll be back soon,” Burt informed them. “Why don’t you two take a chance to get freshened up before she gets back?”

“Thanks, Dad,” Kurt said gratefully. He looked to his boyfriend and mouthed, See? Not so scary.

Adam didn’t look totally convinced but seemed willing enough to go along with Kurt for now.

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After taking a moment to wash the travel grease off his face, Kurt took stock of their clothing and got their suits for the wedding quickly hung up in his nearly empty closet.

“They’re not too wrinkled, I don’t think,” Adam claimed.

Kurt eyed them a bit more critically. “Your tie is a bit of a mess. I’ll steam it later.”

Adam just smiled tolerantly, well aware of just how much a perfectionist Kurt was when it came to his wardrobe. He wasn’t overly concerned about the state of his tie, but knew that Kurt wanted him looking his best when meeting his old classmates and Adam wanted to make him happy. For some reason, Kurt seemed to think that they had something to prove.

“If you think it needs it, love,” he granted good naturedly.

Kurt sighed and closed the closet door. “Do you think I’m being a little neurotic?” he asked? “I know I can be a bit much at times.”

“Not at all,” Adam assured him. “I know that you want us to make a good impression, and that you’re anxious about seeing your old friends again. Don’t worry… I’ll tell you if you start getting out of hand.”

Kurt smiled, accepting Adam’s warm hug. “Thanks. I don’t know if I would be able to stand this without you here.”

“Oh, hush...,” Adam chastised gently, kissing Kurt on the forehead. “You are the most determined person I’ve ever met. You’d be fine.”

“Still, I’m glad that you’re here,” Kurt insisted, nuzzling his cheek against Adam’s shoulder like a
“Think that you’re up to dealing with my dad again?”

“Probably not,” Adam admitted. “But I doubt that he’ll let me hide up here for the rest of our trip.”

Kurt smiled and pulled Adam’s face towards his and pressed a lingering kiss to his lips. “Come on. Let me show you off a little bit.”

By the time they returned downstairs, Carole had returned from her errands and immediately pounced on Kurt and Adam the instant she saw them.

“It’s so wonderful to finally meet you!” she proclaimed, the warm hug she gave Adam in greeting a marked contrast to Burt’s earlier reserve. “Kurt’s told us so much about you.”

“Thank you,” Adam said, relieved that most of Kurt’s family seemed so accepting. Maybe this wouldn’t be such an ordeal after all.

“Well, I hope that you boys are hungry because I’ve got plenty for lunch,” Carole informed them.

“You didn’t have to go through so much trouble,” Adam protested, but Carole took his arm and all but dragged him into the kitchen.

“Don’t be silly! I’m used to feeding growing boys,” she insisted. “Finn still eats like there’s no tomorrow, and I’m sure that you’ve seen how much Kurt can put away. I have no clue where someone so thin puts it all, but I’ve seen him out eat Finn.”

“Lies… all lies,” Kurt claimed playfully, sitting down at the table. “I have the appetite of a bird.”

“A vulture, maybe,” Carole laughed.

“Darling, don’t forget that I’ve seen you eat. You managed to knock off nearly an entire pizza all on your own.”

Kurt’s expression turned positively maudlin. “See what abuse I put up with?” he whined, his lower lip set in a very unpersuasive pout.

“How do you ever manage in your acting classes pulling expressions like that,” Adam teased.

Burt was waiting for them with Finn at the table as the rest of the family joined them. “Finally,” he complained playfully. “I thought that Finn and I were going to starve waiting for the rest of you.”

“Oh hush,” Carole admonished gently. “I swear, the whole bunch of you are nothing more than empty stomachs.”

Once the food was served and everyone was eating, conversation was light. Adam thanked the older couple for being such wonderful hosts and Carole kept a steady stream of conversation going, asking Adam questions about himself and his family. Admittedly for Adam, having the majority of the questions coming from Carole and Finn made it feel less like an interrogation and more the friendly “getting to know the new boyfriend” luncheon that Adam had been hoping for.

He could easily sense Burt’s wariness and it was hard to miss that the older man was watching him carefully and paying close attention to his responses to his wife’s and stepson’s innocuous questions. Adam couldn’t help from seeing that the elder Hummel was very much like his son in uncertain respects. He remembered how when Kurt first joined the Apples, he would watch and listen carefully, taking in all the information possible before making a decision on how to act. Much the way that his father was watching Adam right then. For two men who looked so totally dissimilar,
their mannerisms were nearly identical in many ways.

“Dad, Adam’s already done some professional roles,” Kurt said proudly, wanting to show his father that despite his casual appearance and calm personality, Adam was as serious and focused about his career as Kurt was. “He played Oberon in a production of A Midsummer’s Night Dream last summer.”

“It was summer stock. I tend to play a lot of Shakespearean roles,” Adam admitted ruefully. “Must be the accent.”

“Are you also in the theater program?” Burt asked, swallowing a bit of his sandwich.

“I’m in the dramas program, sir,” Adam answered. “But I’m minoring in voice training. My primary interest is in straight plays and comedies, but there are a lot of good roles that do require at least some singing and I don’t want to limit my professional opportunities. And our choir group… that’s just for fun.”

“Adam’s planning to audition for this summer season with the same company,” Kurt said proudly. “They’re doing Macbeth and Much Ado About Nothing this summer.”

“I’m trying to convince Kurt to audition too,” Adam said. “He would make a wonderful Claudio.”

“I don’t know,” Kurt said thoughtfully. “Don John would be really interesting to play. And I do love a good villain.”

“No, no love… with your face, you need to be the young romantic hero,” Adam protested. “Not a bratty prince who was such a failure that they wouldn’t even properly punish him during the play.”

Burt had been watching the interactions between Kurt and his boyfriend very closely turning lunch. The smile on Kurt’s face at that casual praise from Adam hinted strongly to him that the dynamic between them was drastically different than it had been with Blaine. Kurt wasn’t having to inject himself into the conversations in order to be seen or heard, nor was Adam apparently interested in tempering Kurt’s effusiveness. It was an interesting shift that Burt knew was much better for Kurt. Still, it was difficult for him to just accept this new man in Kurt’s life. Emphasis on “man”. Blaine had been a weedy little boy in comparison and Burt had few concerns that Kurt wasn’t more than capable of managing a relationship with someone his own age. But Adam was a grown man, already having been out in the world for years and the differences in their ages and life experiences was more than a little concerning to him.

“Well, I don’t know about all of you, but I’m stuffed,” he announced. He kissed his wife on the cheek. “Thanks, hon.”

“I’m done too,” Kurt said, picking up his plate. “Adam, why don’t we…”

“Adam, why don’t you join me outside,” Burt interrupted, cutting off whatever Kurt was proposing. He was going to have a good talk with this man to make sure that he wasn’t thinking about trying to take advantage of a kid just out of high school. “We can have a talk… get to know one another a little bit while Kurt helps Carole clean up.”

Adam looked a trifle nervous at the invitation/demand and to Burt’s surprise, looked to Kurt for reassurance. Kurt rolled his eyes and turned an annoyed look to his father.

“Dad, just so you know… I hid the big garden shovel,” he warned. “So if you kill my boyfriend, I’m not going to help you hide the body. You’ll be on your own with the police.”
“Hey! I’m not going to do anything!” Burt protested. “I’m just going to take a moment to…”

“To threaten my boyfriend to protect what innocence you mistakenly think I still have,” Kurt finished succinctly. He turned to Adam and gave him an encouraging smile. “Don’t let him frighten you. He’s really just a big teddy bear under all that gruff.”

After giving Adam a kiss on the cheek for luck, he shooed them both to the back deck where they could talk but still be in full view of the kitchen. Burt noted that Kurt was helping Carole clean up as requested, but was keeping a close eye on them. He was actually a little hurt that Kurt would mistrust him like this.

Adam was watching him warily, waiting for him to start the grilling and Burt motioned for him to sit down at the deck table. “So, Adam… you and Kurt have been dating for a little while now, right?”

“Yes, sir. Since the start of the semester.”

“And you’re a senior, right?”

Adam nodded. “I’m set to graduate this spring, all going well.”

Burt leaned back in his seat. “Do you think it’s a good idea to get involved in a relationship with someone when you might not be around for long?”

Adam’s eyes narrowed in confusion. “I’m not quite sure I get what you mean, sir.”

“If you’re graduating, then you’re probably going back to England afterwards,” Burt pointed out. “I mean, I don’t know what your residency situation is, but I don’t want to see Kurt hurt when you have to leave. That’s not fair to him.”

“Actually, I plan to remain in the States,” Adam corrected. “I don’t have any visa issues that would force me to leave and my hope is to start landing more professional work after I’m done with school.”

“I thought you’re English,” Burt said, feeling stupid over that question because the accent was a giveaway.

Adam nodded. “Yes, but I was actually born in the United States, so I hold dual citizenship. It’s rather convenient and will make working in either country much easier.”

“But you were raised in England?” Burt asked, a bit confused.

Adam nodded, folding his hands in front of him and looking a bit sheepish. “My parents didn’t exactly plan on my being born here, but they were in the States for work. My dad is a concert cellist and he was playing with the London Philharmonic while they were on tour. They should have been able to get back home in plenty of time for me to be born but… I suppose you can say that I had other expectations. I was a bit of an ‘oops’ baby.”

“So you don’t have to go back to England after you graduate?”

Adam shook his head. “Not unless I want to. I mean, I will be going back to see my family occasionally. And at some point I would like to play a role on the West End, but there are a lot more opportunities for me professionally in the US.”

Burt wasn’t sure if that was reassuring or not. On the one hand, it was good to know that Kurt wasn’t facing having his heart broken in a few months, but it also meant that potentially, Adam could
be sticking around for a good long time.

“So tell me a bit more about your folks,” Burt urged. “Are they both in the arts?”

“Well, I already told you a bit about my dad,” Adam explained. “He’s no longer with the symphony, but he does a lot of chamber music performances with a string quartette and he also teaches. My mum is a barrister. What you would call a lawyer in the States. My older sister, Melissa… she took after mum and works for an animal welfare charity in their advocacy group.”

“And they’re okay with you being in another country like this?” Burt asked. He couldn’t imagine it. It was hard enough for him dealing with Kurt being in another state. He didn’t know how he would deal with Kurt living on the other side of the world.

Adam nodded. “They are now. I mean… they would have preferred it if I’d stayed in England. I’d been accepted into several conservatories but NYADA really does boast some of the best training available. And it will open up professional opportunities for me in the States. I also have to admit that I’ve gotten very fond of this country. And several people here.”

The unspoken implication of just what “people” Adam was referring to didn’t need stating, Burt thought. “So how did you two meet?” he asked.

Adam’s eyes got a bit dreamy and he smiled as he remembered the moment. “I saw him the first time at the showcase where he was invited to perform. I’d never seen or heard anyone like him in my life. Mr. Hummel… it’s a shame that you couldn’t have been there, because Kurt was extraordinary. I’m not ashamed to confess that I was more than bit infatuated, just from hearing him sing.

“And I admit that I did pursue him afterwards… to join our choir,” he clarified when he saw Burt start to bristle. “Kurt is such an exceptional young man and he beautiful, so when he asked me out for coffee, I just couldn’t say no.”

“Hold on there… You mean, he asked you out first?” Burt asked. He knew that it probably shouldn’t surprise him because Kurt had a history of being quite determined in going after what, and who, he wanted.

“Mr. Hummel, I think I know what you’re thinking,” Adam said softly. “I am a few years older and I’m not going to try to deceive you. I am very, very deeply attracted to Kurt, and I have been from the moment I first saw him. But I’ve also seen too many younger students run into trouble because they got dazzled by an upperclassman showering them with attention. I didn’t want to pressure Kurt and if he hadn’t made the first move, I would have respected his boundaries.”

Burt blinked in surprise. “That… I wasn’t quite expecting that,” he admitted.

Adam nodded understandably and Burt found himself suddenly liking this other man. He might not be thrilled about the age difference between them, but it was pretty obvious how much Adam cared about Kurt. And Kurt wasn’t someone that could just be pushed around by a good looking guy spinning a pretty line.

“We started off as friends,” Adam explained. “Kurt was still hurt over his break up and I didn’t want to push him into a relationship before he was ready. Even once he started seeing one another, we kept it slow until Kurt was sure he was ready for more.”

“And your family… do they know about Kurt?” Burt asked.

“I’ve told them about him,” Adam admitted. “Probably a lot more than is proper, but it’s hard not to spend all my time talking about him. My parents are quite keen to meet him, even if it’s only over a
Skype call. But I felt it was inappropriate for them to meet Kurt before you met me. I didn’t want to overstep bounds and give the impression that meeting his family wasn’t important. I knew how much your opinion means to Kurt and that he very much wants us to get along.”

Burt nodded, more than satisfied with all of the answers Adam was giving him. Nothing sounded practiced or coached, and it was clear how much this young man felt about Kurt.

“You seem like a really nice guy, Adam.” Burt granted, and he could see the sense of relief washing over the other man. “But Kurt is very, very important to me. And I sometimes worry that he bites off more than he can really handle. You’re a grown man who’s been out in the real world for a couple of years and he’s… he’s my little boy.”

“Sir… with all due respect, Kurt is a man,” Adam gently reminded him. “He’s not a child. And he’s more than capable of making his own decision about things. He very much wants your approval, but honestly? He shouldn’t need it.”

Adam’s assertiveness on Kurt’s behalf took Burt by surprise, and he had to admit that Adam was right. Kurt wasn’t a child anymore. But that didn’t ease his lingering misgivings. “I’m not going to lie… I was admittedly a lot more comfortable with Kurt dating someone his own age,” Burt admitted.

“I get that,” Adam said understandably. “I must seem a bit threatening since I’m only the second man that Kurt’s been seriously involved with. But Mr. Hummel, you shouldn’t make the mistake of thinking that just because Kurt is a few years younger than me that I don’t see him as an equal in every way. Or that just because someone is younger that they’re less of a threat.”

Burt’s eyes narrowed at that. “What the hell do you mean by that?” he demanded.

Adam sighed deeply, bowing his head regretfully. “I probably shouldn’t have said anything, but this is something that you need to discuss with your son. There is a lot about his relationship with Blaine that I’m fairly certain that you weren’t privy to. You really should talk to him. And more importantly, you need to listen to listen to him.”

“Are you telling me that Blaine did something to Kurt?” Burt asked, growing increasingly concerned. Not so much about Adam, but what might have happened without his knowledge.

“Sir, it really shouldn’t come from me,” Adam insisted. “Talk to Kurt. He should be the one to tell you.”

Burt sat back in his seat and stared at the younger man, seeing the earnest expression on his face and realizing that he needed to do as Adam was telling him.

“You really care about Kurt. Don’t you?”

Adam smiled warmly and nodded. “Very much so. I fell very hard for him from the moment I first saw him, and I’ve grown only more enthralled since. He’s quite a remarkable man.”

That was definitely something Burt could agree on. And judging from how Adam was talking about Kurt, it was clear that Adam’s feelings were sincere. He wasn’t putting on an act here, and that honesty more than anything won Burt over.

“Listen Adam… I know that Kurt is his own man,” he acknowledged. “He’s been practically an adult since he was eight years old. I know that I haven’t always been the kind of parent that he needed, but I’m not going to try to make up for past mistakes by trying to run his life for him now. Like you said, he’s an adult and he can make his own decision about things.
“And you seem to have Kurt’s feelings at heart, so I can’t hold that against you. Like you said, he doesn’t exactly need my approval,” Burt admitted. “But he’s got it. Maybe you’re not what I might have wanted him to bring home, but you seem to be what will make him happy.”

Adam’s smile brightened and it looked like the sun emerging from behind clouds to Burt. “Thank you so much, sir!” he exclaimed, shaking Burt’s hand warmly. “That means a great deal to me.”

“Just treat Kurt right and you and I won’t have any problems,” Burt stated, allowing a small smile. He gave Adam a firm pat on the shoulder. “Now let’s get you back inside so Kurt can stop fretting.”

He wasn’t surprised at all to find his son waiting for them. “Alpha male posturing done with?” Kurt demanded, giving both of them a once over. “No bloodshed?”

“Not at all, darling,” Adam promised. “It was just like you promised.”

“Good.” Kurt nodded agreeably, letting his boyfriend pull him in for a gentle kiss. He hated that he kept comparing how Adam behaved with Blaine, but it was hard not to. He couldn’t remember Blaine ever showing some kind of physical affection with his father around.

“So what do you two have planned for the rest of the day?” Burt asked. “Finn mentioned something about dinner with your old classmates.”

Kurt nodded. “We’re all going to meet up at Breadsticks to catch up on things. In the meantime, I thought that I’d take Adam for a drive and kind of show him around a bit.”

“That sounds like fun,” Burt agreed. He pulled his car keys from his pocket and tossed them to Kurt. “And Adam… good to meet you, son.”

Adam smiled broadly, the anxiety he’d felt early now completely resolved. “Thank you, sir.”

“Hey, it’s Burt. None of that ‘sir’ nonsense,” he chuckled. “I’ll see you both later.”

Burt went to find his wife and Kurt looked up at his boyfriend in please surprise. “So now he’s ‘Burt’?” he asked.

“Apparently. Not that I’m complaining, given that I honestly believe that man was capable of ensuring that my body would never be found if he really disliked me.”

“I wouldn’t worry about that,” Kurt advised. “The doctor wants him to rest as much as possible and truthfully… hiding bodies is more trouble than it’s worth.”

“Oh? Then what would you suggest, darling?” Adam asked.

Kurt’s grin was positively feral and sent a delicious shiver up Adam’s spine.

“I’m a fan of letting them stew in their own misery,” Kurt laughed. “Because the best revenge is just letting them suffer a long and miserable life.”
The guided tour about Lima didn’t take very long since the town really didn’t have too many real points of interest. It wasn’t home to the world’s biggest ball of twine, or even the second biggest. It didn’t have a real historical center or any particularly interesting architecture. There was the art museum, and the old railroad station, but nothing else really remarkable. Instead, Kurt focused on the places that were important to him. They drove past Kurt’s old grade school, and the ballet school in the strip mall where Kurt had taken his first dance classes. Then Kurt took him to McKinley.

“So, this is the fabled McKinley high school that produced two NYADA students,” Adam marveled as they stood outside the building. “Do you know how very rare that is? Especially two students in the same class?”

Kurt nodded, leading against the car. “Sure, I do now. It’s funny but when I got rejected the first time, I figured that the universe was trying to tell me that there was only room for one star to come out of McKinley and it wasn’t going to be me.”

Adam looked at him carefully, not liking to hear Kurt think so disparagingly about himself. “I hope that your thoughts on that have changed since then,” he said gently.

Kurt nodded and allowed a rueful smile to touch his face. “It’s going to sound stupid, but just seeing this school… it really brings back a lot of baggage that I try to forget about when I’m in New York. At least in New York, I’ve got a shot of actually getting what I want. Here, I was the weird gay kid who was never going to be anything more than a supporting player.”

Adam sighed and reached out to take Kurt’s hand in his. “If it’s any consolation, you’ve moved well past this place,” he reminded Kurt. “You’ve accomplished so much in such a short period of time.”

“I know,” Kurt sighed, resting his head against Adam’s shoulder. “I just can’t shake this feeling that the first time I audition for a part that isn’t the gay sidekick that I’m going to have the director laughing in my face.”

Adam wished that he could tell Kurt that his fear was unreasonable, but he wouldn’t lie to him like that. “Unfortunately that might happen at some point,” he granted. “There are sadly too many closed minded people in our industry who can’t look past their own prejudices and that’s unfortunate. It’s happened to me a few times already, but we have to remember that it’s not just our sexuality that can get in the way of being cast. I’ve seen so many people rejected for being too tall or too short, too pale or too ethnic… being gay is just one of a hundred things that we’re going to be judged critically for.”

“I’m not sure if that makes me feel better,” Kurt mused. Perhaps it had been unreasonable, but he honestly had hoped that once he was outside of Lima that he wouldn’t have to face such narrow-mindedness. Instead, it was probably going to be more of the same and being passed over in favor of the conventional and easily marketable.

“Kurt, if there is one thing that I truly believe, it’s that you will be one of those who’ll eventually persevere,” Adam insisted. “Not only because you are so unique a performer and so talented. But because you’ve got the strength to handle those rejections and move past them. You’ll keep learning and pushing until you get the break that you deserve. You’re not so fragile that you’ll give up at the first rejection.”

That certainty about Kurt’s professional potential put a smile on the younger man’s face. “You are so biased,” he accused playfully, but Adam wasn’t letting this slide.
“About some things, unquestionably,” he allowed. “But about your potential? I care too much about you to give you unrealistic expectations of what’s out there. I think you are one of the most dynamic performers that I’ve seen in years and at some point, someone is going to recognize just how good you are and nothing else is going to matter. It’s not going to be easy and yes, there are times when you’re going to get rejected for no good reason but you have what it takes to push through that.”

Kurt inhaled deeply, still so unused to being supported like this. “Adam, I…” he started, but had to swallow hard before trying to continue. “No one, except maybe my dad, has had that kind of faith in me.”

Adam pulled his boyfriend into a close embrace, not caring that possibly inhospitable eyes might see them. He refused to hide his feelings for Kurt because they might be in a less tolerant place than New York.

“Sweetheart, this school couldn’t hold you. NYADA can barely hold you. Do you really think that there is anything out there that will stop you from fulfilling your goals?” Adam insisted. He gently brushed his fingers down Kurt’s cheek. “The only thing that can stop you is yourself, and I don’t want to see that happen.”

Kurt found himself staring into Adam’s eyes, nearly overwhelmed by his feelings for this man. “What did I ever do to deserve you?” he whispered.

Adam’s smile seemed slightly sad that his sweetheart would ever think that he didn’t deserve to be loved and supported. “You deserve so much. Someone to believe in you? That’s the very least you should expect.”

Kurt pressed his lips to Adam’s, not caring that anyone could see them. He wasn’t a high school boy with a boyfriend that feared any kind of overt public display of affection. He was an adult, who had a wonderful, giving man in his life now and he wasn’t going to hide what he felt for Adam.

Adam’s hand reached up to cradle Kurt’s face as the kiss deepened and he felt Kurt’s body press closer to his. It always felt so good, Kurt’s form matching up against his perfectly. It would have been easy to completely lose himself in the feeling if he didn’t have the suspicion that they were being observed.

Breaking away from the kiss, Adam noted that there were several young girls watching them from a distance, watching them intently with expressions of longing and… oh yes, these were some very switched on little girls.

“What...?” Kurt started, not happy to have Adam pulling away like that.

“Sorry darling, but we seem to have an audience,” Adam informed him, gesturing with his head behind Kurt.

Kurt turned to see the trio of girls standing there, one of which has her cell phone out and had taken at least one picture of their embrace. Another of the girls waved coyly at them and then the three broke down into giggles as they scurried away.

Adam pulled Kurt back into his arms and rested his chin on his shoulder. “It appears that we now have fangirls,” he said blithely, more amused than anything else.

Kurt sighed and closed his eyes. “Just great,” he grumbled. “I’m back in town only a few hours and am already scandalizing the locals.”

“Oh, I don’t think that those girls were scandalized,” Adam mused. “Not at all. I think that we’ve
fulfilled a few fantasies there.”

“Wonderful… so now I’m corrupting minors. So much better.”

Adam grinned and pulled him back into a warm embrace. “Well, if you would just stop being so gorgeous, maybe we wouldn’t have this problem.”

Kurt made a humph sound and gave Adam a small smack to his arm.

“Come on,” Kurt said, taking Adam’s hand and pulling him towards the car. “I’ve had enough high school memories for one day. At least until we meet up with the others for dinner.

“Besides, I have some other people I’d like to introduce you to first,” Kurt stated. “Nice sane people, who don’t take pictures of perfect strangers while they’re kissing.”

Adam just laughed and let his boyfriend lead him away, amused at how bent out of shape his boyfriend was. Personally, he found it adorable that these young girls would be so titillated by the sight of them kissing. It reminded him of Mags and the other lady Apples, who seemed to have made it their personal mission to get him and Kurt together and keep them together.

* * *

“Oh my god… did you see them!”

“They were so gorgeous!”

“I know! And they were kissing right in front of us!”

“It was so hot! I mean…”

Blaine walked past the girls who were squealing over something on one of their phones and rolled his eyes dismissively. He had much more important things to worry about.

He knew that Kurt would be coming to Mr. Scheuster’s wedding that weekend, but he hadn’t told Blaine when he would be coming or what his plans would be when he arrived. When Kurt ignored Blaine’s carefully worded invitation to go together, Blaine had been deeply hurt and agreed to be Tina’s escort. Even so, he was hoping that Kurt would be receptive to spending the evening with him. They’d have a chance to dance together, maybe sing a song or two… he’d even reserved a room at the hotel in case something more happened between them.

Since Christmas, Kurt had remained somewhat distant towards him. Sure, he accepted Blaine’s calls when he was free and he responded to Blaine’s emails, but he couldn’t remember the last time Kurt called him since before Christmas. He wasn’t picking up on Blaine’s cues about maybe trying to reconcile. Even though Blaine was sure that Kurt had forgiven him for that awful lapse in judgment, Kurt still was keeping him very much at arm’s length. Even when Blaine told him that he had applied to NYADA, Kurt showed a total lack of enthusiasm.

Stopping at his locker for the books he needed for his chemistry class, he knew that this weekend was going to be critical if he was to stand any chance of winning Kurt back. Maybe using the wedding was a little manipulative, but Kurt couldn’t resist these kinds of big romantic moments. All he needed was for Kurt to be overcome by the emotion of the day to reignite the spark between them and he’d be able to remind Kurt of just how good they were together.

He had to show Kurt that he’d learned his lesson and that his cheating was a one off. Kurt had to see that he could be trusted again. He was going to win Kurt back no matter what.
Adam looked up at the sign over the cinderblock building. “This is your dad’s business then,” he stated as he climbed out of the car.

The smile on Kurt’s face was much brighter than it was at the school and he was all but dragging Adam inside. “Yup! Come on! I have people I want you to meet.”

Adam could only shake his head in bemusement, surprised that Kurt would be so enthusiastic about an automotive garage. Knowing Kurt as he did, he couldn’t imagine that Kurt would have been too happy to spend time in a place that would put his amazing wardrobe at such risk. Still, something about this place was obviously important to Kurt and he was willing to go along with his boyfriend and see why he looked so happy.

The inside was bigger than he would have expected. There were four lifts and no fewer than ten men working on various automobiles. A radio in the back was blasting classic rock music and there was a lot of noise from the equipment and the men yelling back and forth between one another. It was organized chaos and for the life of him, Adam couldn’t see what Kurt would want with this place.

None of the workers seemed to notice their presence and Kurt got a mischievous look on his face. Adam quirked an eyebrow upward, wondering what he was up to. The younger man strolled over to where a burly man was up to his elbows in the engine of a Chevy and looked over to see what he was doing. The man was so focused on his work that he didn’t notice that he had an observer.

Adam bit the inside of his cheek to keep from laughing at the wide-eyed look on Kurt’s face. Kurt had definitely broken out his “I solemnly swear that I’m up to no good” expression for the occasion and Adam wondered what he was up to.

Kurt continued to watch the man struggle with the engine, trying to figure out just where the problem was. When it was clear that he wasn’t going to be noticed anytime soon, he gave a loud huff and said loudly, “You know, you should check the distributor. It’s always an issue with this model.”

The man gave a startled curse and jerked upright, nearly banging his head on the hood of the car. He spun about, cursing furiously at who dared startle him and fell silent when he saw Kurt’s grinning face.

“Kurt!” he exclaimed loudly. Before the younger man could do anything, he was caught up in a tight hug and lifted off his feet.

“Guys! Look who came to visit!” he called out to the rest of the crew.

The men looked up from their tasks and to Adam’s shock, quickly dropped their tools and rushed over. Kurt was soon surrounded by men in stained coveralls, all clamoring for his attention. The man who Kurt had accosted tried to protect Kurt from too many grease-stained hands grabbing at him.

“Guys… hey! Back off, you animals!” he ordered. He hugged Kurt again. “Why didn’t your dad say you were coming into town? I’m going rip Burt a new one.”

“Bill, take it easy on Dad. He’s got a lot on his plate,” Kurt reminded him. He motioned for Adam to step forward and join him. “Guys, I’ve got someone I’d like you to meet. This is my boyfriend, Adam.”

“Hello,” Adam greeted, feeling a little out of his element as he was appraised by a group of rather rough-looking men.
“Adam, this is Bill. He runs the place when Dad’s not around,” Kurt said. “And keeps the rest of this lot in line.”

Bill looked at Adam and gave Kurt an approving smile. “Now this is a lot more like it,” he said brightly. “That last kid you brought around… never knew what you saw in him. This one looks more your speed.”

“So glad you approve,” Kurt said dryly, linking his arm with Adam’s. “Let me show you around. I practically grew up here.”

Adam shook his head in bemusement as Kurt lead him about the garage, explaining about how it had all started from a tiny garage with only one lift into the thriving and obviously successful business that it was now. Kurt gave Adam a personal introduction to all the employees, and was familiar enough to ask how their families were doing. And it was obvious to Adam that Kurt knew an enormous amount about cars the way he was poking his nose into the work the other men were doing and offering well-received suggestions.

Adam had to admit that he was genuinely surprised at the warm welcome they were receiving. These didn’t seem to be the kind of men that he would expect to be as receptive as they were towards Kurt’s boyfriend. He could see them accepting Kurt as the owner’s son, but they seemed sincerely pleased to meet him and judging from the comments earlier, they hadn’t exactly approved of Kurt’s ex.

Kurt was chatting up a man named Greg, who was finishing an oil change and asking about the man’s children, while being asked questions about school.

“So since you’re here, maybe you’d like to get your hands dirty,” Greg suggested. “For old time’s sake. Because at some point you’re going to be a big star and we’ll never see you again…”

Like that would ever happen, Adam thought. Kurt was not one to put on airs and ignore those that others might think “beneath him”. He more than proved that in the past few weeks.

“I’d love to,” Kurt said with sincere regret. “But we’ve got plans for tonight and I need to be presentable.”

“So Adam…” Greg said, turning the question to the man who’d been observing with confused bemusement. “Do you know anything cars?”

“I’m afraid not,” he said “I mean, I can drive but I’ve never really learned anything about maintenance or repairing them.”

“Well, I’m sure that Kurt will be happy to teach you,” Greg claimed, wiping his hands on a rag that was nearly as grease-stained as his coveralls. “This kid’s got a real knack for cars. He could be running this place.”

Bill, the manager, was clearly especially happy to see Kurt. “We missed you kid,” he stated as he took them into the office for a cup of coffee. It was a bit quieter and they could actually talk. “It hasn’t been the same without you around. But New York seems to be treating you well. How are things at that fancy school of yours?”

“It’s amazing,” Kurt said happily. “Everyone there is so talented, and I’m learning a lot.”

Adam nodded in agreement. “Kurt’s become quite the stand out there.”

“Good,” Bill said, pleased. He looked to Adam and said, “You know, when Kurt was working here,
he’d be digging into some old wreck’s transmission and still be belting out his show tunes. He’d even gotten some of the other guys singing along with him.”

“You really used to work here?” Adam asked, more than a little surprised. He looked at his boyfriend with his tailored clothing and fastidious manners would do something where he’d get so dirty. He looked down at Kurt’s perfectly manicured hands, with their neatly trimmed nails and unblemished skin. It was hard to imagine them grease stained and work hardened.

Kurt laughed when he saw what Adam was looking at. “Why do you think I take such good care of my hands? I don’t mind getting them dirty for something worthwhile, but there’s no need to let myself go completely,” he explained good-naturedly.

“I’m sorry, love,” Adam said sincerely. “It’s just, I can’t imagine you really working here.”

“Hey, we’ve still got a set of his coveralls in the back,” Bill insisted. “He’s been here since he was a little kid.”

“Oh God… remember the coveralls Dad got me when I was a kid?” Kurt laughed.

Bill laughed out loud. “How could I ever forget!” He reached over to the desk and found a picture in a frame and handed it to Kurt. “You were the cutest little thing back then.”

Kurt looked at the picture and burst out loud laughing. “I can’t believe Dad hung onto this,” he chuckled, handing the picture for Adam to look at.

As expected, it was of Kurt and his father, Adam noted. Burt was wearing his work clothes and looked much younger, though already showing signs of early hair loss. Kurt looked to be no more than six or seven years old, wearing his own set of coveralls with his name embroidered over the breast and what looked like some kind of jewels decorating the collar. He looked cute as a button, with his chubby cheeks and wide smile that showed a missing front tooth.

“You were adorable!” Adam exclaimed, turning a loving look to Kurt. “You were so little here.”

Kurt smiled leaning over to look at the picture with Adam. “This was taken shortly after my mom first got sick,” he explained. “When she was in the hospital, I would spend the afternoons here after school. And Dad would leave me with Bill and the others when he had to take Mom to appointments.”

Adam didn’t miss the trace of old sadness in Kurt’s voice. He’d already known that Kurt had lost his mother to cancer when he was very young, but this was the reality of that loss staring him in the face. A child spending his afternoons at his father’s business because his mother was too ill to care for him.

As if reminding himself that the loss of his mother was long ago and that it wasn’t necessary to dwell on his grief at this point, Kurt’s smile brightened. “I don’t think Dad knew what to do with me besides teach me to work on cars. I actually liked it,” he insisted. “And the rest of the guys kind of adopted me.”

“Hey Adam, the next time you come into town with Kurt, give us some notice. Our families would love to see Kurt again and it’ll give us a chance to introduce you to the wives and kids,” Bill suggested. “We usually do a big barbeque over Memorial Day weekend.”

“That sounds great!” Adam said cheerfully. He was still very much taken aback by how welcoming everyone has been, and not just being tolerable. It very much the opposite of what he’d been prepared to handle.
The manager finished his coffee and got up from his chair. “I’d better get back to work and keep an eye on these guys,” he announced, tossing the paper cup into the trash. He clapped Kurt on the shoulder and pulled him into a warm hug.

“We missed you, kid. Don’t be such a stranger, okay?”

Kurt nodded and squeezed the older man back.

Bill then reached out to shake Adam’s hand warmly. “It’s good to meet you, son. You treat this one right, you hear me?”

Adam nodded. It wasn’t even a question.

Once left alone in the office, Adam pulled Kurt gently into his lap. “Come here, you,” he growled, wrapping his arms around the younger man and holding him close.

Kurt giggled and found himself nose to nose with his boyfriend. “Hi,” he said coyly, throwing his arms around Adam’s neck.

“You remarkable creature,” Adam said softly, gazing into Kurt’s beautiful eyes. “Every time I think I have you figured out, I learn something new.”

Kurt’s gaze softened and he let himself sink into Adam’s warmth. “I’m not that complicated,” he protested quietly.

Adam merely cupped Kurt’s cheek in his hand, his thumb stroking the soft skin at the hinge of his jaw. “I’m going to disagree with you on that one,” he said gently. “Because every time I turn about, you surprise me in wonderful ways. And when I think my feelings for you couldn’t possibly get any deeper, you do something unexpected and I just find myself falling even more in love with you.”

Kurt’s breath caught in his throat. They hadn’t used that word yet to describe their feelings for one another. And for Adam to say it in such a matter of fact manner, with no grand pronouncements, just made it all the more real for Kurt. And all the more frightening.

He wasn’t good with love. Either he kept too much of himself apart, or gave too much of himself. He knew that he was a person of extremes in that manner, neither of which was conducive to a healthy, long-term relationship. He found it hard to trust, and then once his trust was given he found it difficult to maintain boundaries. Even for his own well-being.

Adam wasn’t a perfect man, Kurt knew. He wasn’t foolish enough to idealize him the way he’d done with Blaine so often. But the older man always seemed to have a good sense of what Kurt needed from him. He respected Kurt’s boundaries, but had a strong instinct of when he could gently press against them. He knew that Adam would want to hear a similar pronouncement in return, but Kurt just wasn’t ready.

And Adam respected that. He knew that Kurt came with a load of baggage, that he was healing from the wounds of broken trust and it would take time before he could find himself able to give that trust freely again. But Kurt feared that it would take too long and Adam would lose his patience before then.

When Kurt didn’t respond immediately, Adam’s eyes lowered. “I’m sorry,” he said gently. “I didn’t mean to tell you that. I’m not trying to pressure you.”

“I know you’re not,” Kurt accepted. “What I don’t get is why you put up with me. I’m such a mess and I don’t want to hurt you. You deserve to be loved as easily as you love.”
Adam just smiled gently and continued to hold Kurt, gently stroking his skin. “Because I fell in love with you. And you’re worth waiting for.”

Kurt felt his heart swell at the quiet pronouncement. “You are amazing,” he said thickly, his throat tightening. “I hate that I can’t tell you what you deserve to hear right now.”

“It’s okay, sweetheart,” Adam assured him. “This is still new for both of us and you’re still getting your emotional feet under yourself. And you’re hardly the only one with relationship baggage, so don’t worry about me feeling put out.” He pressed a warm kiss to Kurt’s mouth.

Kurt closed his eyes and opened his mouth slightly, deepening the kiss between them and pressed himself as closely against Adam as their positions would allow them. It was so easy for him to lose himself in the physical side of their relationship and forget all the emotional hurdles he was struggling to climb. He could at least give Adam that and maybe his boyfriend would be satisfied with that for now.

Kurt groaned when Adam’s strong arms tightened their grip on him, pulling him tight against the older man’s body. It never failed to surprise them at just how easily they clicked physically. There were no awkward fumblings. Adam made love the in the same manner that he approached all things in life. With passion and joy and an instinctive consideration for those with him.

Adam felt himself hardening against Kurt’s gorgeous backside, his sudden erection pressing almost painfully against the fly of his jeans. His hand slipped down to cup Kurt’s crotch, feeling Kurt hardening in response and the younger man breathlessly moaned against his mouth. He wriggled a bit, increasing the delicious friction between them. Kurt’s hands tangled in his blond hair and he subtly lifted one knee and parted his legs slightly to give his boyfriend better access.

“Kurt, are you still here? I… holy shit!”

The two men broke away from each other to see Bill standing in the doorway.

“Sorry Bill,” Kurt said sincerely, once he was able to speak without it coming out as an embarrassing squeak. His could feel his cheeks burning red at being caught like this. Of all the places to be caught making out… in the garage. His father was going to kill him.

“That’s okay, kid,” Bill assured him. “Just wasn’t expecting to walk in on something.”

Kurt wanted to sink through the cracks in the floorboards.

“I’m so sorry,” Adam said sincerely, trying to shift Kurt enough to relieve some of the pressure on his groin without putting himself on display. “This was terribly rude of us.”

“Hey, do you think I never caught my kids like this?” Bill chuckled. “At least you’re both still dressed, so I’ll count my blessings.”

Kurt’s blush deepened and he carefully disentangled himself from Adam, all but mentally willing his erection to start fading. He had never gotten caught like this before. Ever.

But then, when had Blaine ever willingly touched him in public? Sure, he’d held Kurt’s hand a few times but kissing whenever there was a chance that someone might see them? Never. Well, not unless he was completely inebriated.

He looked at his boyfriend getting up stiffly from the chair, and couldn’t help from marveling that Adam did seem to genuinely desire him. With Blaine it had always been a question whether or not Blaine was really physically attracted to him.
He shook his head ruefully. He shouldn’t be comparing them all the time; that wasn’t fair to either of them.

“Did you need something, Bill?” Kurt asked, hoping to distract the man from having caught them in such a compromising situation.

The older man chuckled, not missing anything in how embarrassed the two boys were. “Just wanted you to ask your dad if he could stop by at some point in the next couple of days. It’s nothing serious, but I need to go over some things with him before he heads back to Washington.”

“Sure,” Kurt answered. He looked to his boyfriend and shrugged. “Want to get going? We’ve got a little time before we’re meeting the others.”

“Of course, love,” Adam answered, pulling his jacket closed. At least now he felt like he could walk without hurting himself.

Kurt exited the office first and nearly ran back inside when the entire garage staff was wolf whistling and cheering them. He heard someone yell out “Get some!” and thought it was Greg. Or maybe Marco. Marco who used to carry him piggyback and sneak him candy to distract him when his dad was busy with a customer.

Kurt grabbed Adam’s hand and rushed out of the garage before he spontaneously combusted in embarrassment.

* * *

Puck burst out laughing as Kurt acknowledged that he and Adam had spent much of the afternoon scandalizing the greater Lima area, including the staff of Hummel Tires and Lube. Santana smirked and gave Adam a long side eye at their antics. “You corrupting my boy, Sherlock?”

After having been exposed to Santana since she moved into the loft with Kurt and Rachel, Adam had learned that Santana had a viciously sharp wit and apparently was going to nickname him after any British-sounding television character she could think of.

“Actually, Kurt corrupted me,” he joked winsomely, giving his boyfriend a playful wink. “I was just an innocent, lonely boy from Essex and he’s taking advantage.”

“Wanky,” Santana said admiringly. She looked to Kurt, who was trying to sip at his diet cola and not crawl under the table to hide from her smirk. “Didn’t know you had it in you, Hummel.”

“Oh, I’m guessing that he had it in him,” Puck laughed riotously, earning a glare from Kurt.

“But maybe it was the other way around,” Finn said. “I mean, who said that Kurt’s the girl in the relationship?”

Mike snorted and nearly choked on the piece of fried shrimp he’d been trying to eat.

That was it, Kurt thought as his cheeks burned with embarrassment. He was going to kill his stepbrother and his old classmates. No judge in the country would hold him responsible.

It was supposed to be a nice evening, having a chance to introduce his boyfriend and have a chance to catch up with everyone. Instead he had his stepbrother being clueless, Santana smirking, Puck laughing so loudly that the entire restaurant was staring and Mike… well, Mike was being Mike.

His only support seemed to be Mercedes, who quickly got things back under control.
“First of all Finn, neither of them are girls so stop being all dumb and offensive,” Mercedes ordered. “Second of all, I think that it’s wonderful that my boy has found someone deserving of him so let’s not scare Adam off, okay?”

“Thanks hon,” Kurt said gratefully.

“Besides… he’s the only one sitting here with a significant other,” Quinn pointed out, giving the entire group a knowing glare. “I don’t see any of you with hot adult girlfriends, do I?”

Kurt felt himself start to preen at that little statement. He knew that Mike didn’t have a steady girlfriend at this point and Puck was… well, Puck. Quinn had sort of been dating someone, but he didn’t know the details and it apparently wasn’t someone that she was able to bring to the wedding. Being the only one sitting there with his post-high school boyfriend while everyone else was either single or not in a serious relationship was a rather significant change in the normal dynamics of their group.

“So Adam…” Puck leaned over the table and grinned conspiratorially. “Is Kurt as wild in the sack as I think he is? Because those buttoned up types…”

“Puck, if you finish that sentence, I will not only cut your break lines, but I will ensure that your body is never found,” Kurt snapped, cutting him off with a harsh swat of his hand to the larger man’s head. “And you know that I will do it, so do not push me!”

The larger man stared at Kurt in astonishment, shocked silent by the threat and the look on Kurt’s face that warned that it had not been an empty one.

Santana cackled and stood up. “I’m going to give you a standing ovation, because I’ve never gotten to see you put the Puckhole in his place,” she said, applauding Kurt. Quinn and Mercedes were just laughing quietly as Puck resumed his seat, his expression rather crestfallen at being taken down a peg by Kurt.

Adam could see that Kurt was still bristling like an aggravated cat and gently placed his arm about Kurt’s shoulder. “It’s okay, darling,” he assured Kurt. “They’re just being nosy. Just like the Apples at times.”

Kurt inhaled deeply to regain control over his temper. Adam was right… once he and Kurt officially became an item, there was no end to the probing questions and jokes by the others in their group. Any time he and Adam were an instant late for anything, they were beset by jokes about quickies in the janitor’s closet or a hand job in an empty classroom. There was endless speculation on who topped who. This was positively mild by what they tolerated from their friends.

Maybe if the joke had come from someone who hadn’t previously bullied Kurt, he’d be able to handle it better. But from Puck, and even Finn… admittedly his tolerance was extremely limited.

Their entrees arrived and it was hard for Kurt not to turn his nose up a little at the offerings. After being exposed to the enormous variety of ethnic cuisines in New York, having nothing but a mediocre Italian restaurant and a Chinese takeout place was a bit of a letdown. Most of the group had gotten exposure to the wider world and Quinn was bragging about an amazing pizza joint near her campus, while Mercedes bemoaned how everyone in Los Angeles seemed to be on a juice fast of some kind. Even Puck and Finn, neither of which could ever be considered particularly discerning diners, shared their sentiment that the food scene in Lima was utterly lacking.

“Speaking off mindlessly offensive people… anyone know when Rachel plans to grace us with her presence?” Quinn asked, idly twirling some fettuccini onto her fork.
Kurt shrugged. “She’ll probably fly in tonight so that she’s in time for the wedding,” he guessed. He hadn’t really worked out any plans with her once he’d let her know that he and Adam would be traveling together. Knowing her, she was wrapped up in whatever Brody had going on, or preparing for her Funny Girl audition. Things were still somewhat strained between them and while they still technically lived together, they didn’t see much of one another. Not with her spending a lot of free time with Brody and Kurt spending more time with Adam and the Apples.

He saw Finn flinch at the mention of Rachel’s name and couldn’t help from feeling sorry for his stepbrother. Yes, of course Finn made huge mistakes with Rachel but Kurt had no question that he still loved her. Seeing her moving on without him had to be difficult and this weekend would be especially hard for him to manage.

It would probably be much the same for Blaine. Kurt didn’t want to think about how his ex would feel seeing Kurt with Adam, but their situation was very different from Finn’s and Rachel’s. Finn did honestly think that he was doing the best thing for Rachel by sending her off to New York and had been very lost trying to find his own way. He had been too caught up in sorting out his own life to remember to stay in contact with Rachel and she’d taken that as a cue to move forward without him. Finn’s mistake was thinking that Rachel would be content to wait for him. A bad mistake, yes, but nothing at all like fucking a random because his partner missed a few phone calls.

In all honesty, Kurt wasn’t so much concerned about Blaine’s wounded feelings than he was about Blaine making a scene about Adam.

“Darling, you look about a million miles away,” Adam said, gently prodding him back to the present. “You okay?”

Kurt forced a smile to his face and nodded. “Just getting another reminder that coming home isn’t always easy,” he explained. “And trying to understand how two guys who were so homophobic are so curious about the particulars of my sex life.”

“Sorry Kurt,” Finn said sincerely. Kurt glanced over and saw the hangdog expression on Finn’s face and knew that this stepbrother was sincerely remorseful. “I didn’t mean to insult you guys.”

Inhaling deeply and remembering who he was dealing with, Kurt decided to let it go. Now was not the time to go into the workings of same sex relationships.

“It’s okay,” he allowed. “But you guys don’t need to worry. I’m really happy with Adam. And things are really good between us.”

“We’re glad, Kurt,” Mike said.

“Besides… Adam is seriously gorgeous,” Quinn added, giving the Englishman an admiring look.

“Definitely,” Mercedes confirmed. “Serious relationship upgrade if you ask me.”

“I’m so glad that you all approve,” Kurt answered dryly. He looked to Adam with a wry smile.

Adam just smiled and leaned in to give Kurt a long, lingering kiss that caused his toes to curl.

Santana whooped with delight and Mercedes clapped in approval. If the boys at the table were made a little uncomfortable by the overt display of affection… well, too bad, Kurt thought. He’d seen enough of their lip locks with their girlfriends over the years so he wasn’t going to hide this aspect of his relationship. Not from people who were supposed to be his friends.

Kurt smirked and turned an impish grin to the rest of the group. “So… is anyone up for dessert?”
“Did you kids have fun?” Burt asked as the boys walked in late that evening.

Finn nodded. “Yeah, it was nice seeing everyone before the craziness starts.”

“Finn asked us to stop by the choir room to meet the new kids,” Kurt said, hanging up his and Adam’s jackets. “It’ll be nice to see what they’ve got going.”

“And Finn has sprung it on all of us that we’re to help with the entertainment for the wedding, so Kurt and I will have to come up with a few song selections,” Adam chimed in.

Finn flopped down on the couch. “Adam, you don’t have to feel obligated,” Finn assured him. “I mean, you don’t know Mr. Schu and Ms. Pillsbury. You’re Kurt’s guest.”

“As if I would ever turn down a chance to sing with Kurt,” Adam said, aghast that Finn would even suggest such a thing.

Kurt sat down next to Finn and sidled over to make room for Adam, who promptly put his arm about Kurt’s shoulders. It had been a long day for them and they were starting to feel it.

“Well, I’m glad that you boys enjoyed yourself,” Burt said. He looked to Adam and saw how Kurt was tiredly resting his head on his boyfriend’s shoulder. He knew that he needed to talk to Kurt now that Adam had planted a seed of worry in his mind and better do it before Kurt was totally exhausted.

“Guys, do you mind if I have a few minutes to talk to Kurt?” he asked. He saw Adam’s concerned expression and quickly assured, “It won’t take too long.”

Kurt raised his head and looked at his father worriedly. He then looked to Adam for reassurance, who nodded and gave his hand a gentle squeeze.

“I’m sure it’s alright, sweetheart,” Adam said gently. “I’ll wait for you upstairs.”

Finn stretched and stood up too. “I’ll head up too. I’ve got to be up early for choir with the kids.”

Once alone, Kurt inhaled deeply, already apprehensive about what his father might want to talk about. Adam might have survived his earlier interrogation, but the look on his father’s face hinted that something was seriously upsetting him.

Burt turned off the television so he could give his son his full attention. “You know… when you told me that you were dating Adam, I was really worried. I mean… what would a grown man want with a kid right out of high school?”

“Dad…” Kurt started, ready to head off an argument when Burt held up his hand.

“Kurt, let me finish,” he insisted. He folded his hands in front of him, a gesture that Kurt recognized that his father was uncomfortable but was planning to bull forward.

“I had my doubts,” Burt admitted. “But Adam… he really seems to have your interests at heart. And he reminded me that I tend to forget that you’re an adult and that you’re able to make your own choices about things.”

Kurt felt his lips curving into a smile at his father’s admission, and Adam’s statement of support.

Burt pursed his lips thoughtfully. “Adam seems like a really good guy. That he really cares about you.”
“He does,” Kurt said with certainty.

“But I thought that Blaine was a good guy too,” Burt stated. He gave his son a long, appraising stare. “And now I’m starting to wonder if I was wrong about that. Adam said something earlier and to be honest, it has me worried.”

Kurt inhaled deeply, knowing that this conversation was about to get very uncomfortable. “Remind me to kill my boyfriend before I leave,” he muttered.

“Hey, Adam is only looking out for you,” Burt insisted, surprising Kurt by coming to the Englishman’s defense. “He didn’t tell me anything, really. Just that things between you and Blaine weren’t what I thought they were and that I needed to talk to you.

“So now we’re talking. What was going on that I didn’t know about?”

Kurt looked down at his folded hands, now realizing that he had the same coping mannerisms as his father when stressed. They were so much more alike than anyone would really believe.

“Dad… did you ever think about why I broke up with Blaine?” he asked, wanting to know what Burt really knew and what he might have been told by other people.

Burt huffed a bit. “Well, you weren’t telling me anything. One day you were dating Blaine and another I’ve got him showing up at the shop like a sobbing mess that you wouldn’t speak to him.”

“And you never thought to ask why I broke up with him?” Kurt asked. “Would you think that I would do something like that without a good reason? After being with him as long as we were?”

“I know you had a reason!” Burt insisted. “But let’s be serious Kurt… getting you to tell me that something is wrong is like pulling teeth! You weren’t going to tell me anything until you were good and ready and knowing you… I’d be collecting Social Security by then.”

Kurt had to admit that his father was right. He was so used to keeping his cards close to his vest that even in the worst of times, he didn’t talk about his problems. He certainly wasn’t the kind to air his dirty laundry in front of others. Especially his father.

“Did Blaine tell you anything?” he asked, needing to know just how much Blaine tried to influence his father against him.

Burt gave his son a long, hard look because he recognized a delaying tactic when he saw one. “He was talking about distance and that the separation was too much for you. That was why I brought him to New York for Christmas. I thought that maybe getting you together in the same room might shake a few things loose, but given the cold shoulder you gave him the whole time, I get the feeling it was a lot more than that.”

Kurt nodded. “Dad… I broke up with Blaine because he cheated on me,” he said flatly. “I couldn’t believe it when he told me. I mean… he was my first,” he admitted. “I remember what you told me, bout it needing to mean something, and it did. Blaine and I loved one another and this was how I could show him that I loved him.”

If Burt was uncomfortable with the revelation that his son was sexually active, he gave no sign of it.
“That’s good,” he allowed. “I’m glad that it was important to you.”

“But Dad… that’s just it,” Kurt explained. “It was everything to me! I loved Blaine. And I really thought that we’d be together for the rest of our lives.”

Burt nodded understandingly, knowing how much this had hurt his son. “I’m not going to make light of what Blaine did. There’s no excuse for it.”

“Do you know what the worst part was?” Kurt asked. “He told me that it didn’t mean anything to him. Our physical relationship was supposed to be something that helped bring us together, but it clearly didn’t mean nearly as much to him as it did to me. Not if his sleeping with someone else didn’t mean anything.”

Kurt ran a hand angrily through his hair. “That was the last straw for me. I loved him and I was faithful even though I was finally in a place where I had a lot of men who were interested in me and he couldn’t survive a few weeks.”

Burt’s eye’s narrowed when he picked up on the hinted intimation that the cheating was only part of the problem. “So there were straws before that?”

Kurt sank back in his seat and nodded. “Looking back on it… yeah… there were things that I overlooked or let slide in order to keep our relationship going. Things that probably weren’t good for either of us.”

Burt nodded knowingly. “The rose tinted glasses got ripped off, huh?”

Kurt shrugged. “Not so much rose tinted… I mean, I knew that there were problems. It’s just, I didn’t think they were worth throwing out a relationship over. I loved Blaine.”

“I know you did,” Burt said sympathetically.

“But now when I look back, I do wonder why I stayed with him,” Kurt said. “The cheating might have been the final nail in the coffin, but there were so many times when I let stuff go so that I didn’t risk our relationship. I was so afraid of losing Blaine because… because I was afraid that no one else was going to love me.”

“Aw kid…” Burt muttered. “Why didn’t you tell me that you felt like this?”

“I was so embarrassed,” Kurt admitted reluctantly. “I mean, what kind of man am I that I couldn’t keep my boyfriend from screwing around on me? That I just wasn’t enough for him, and I get the feeling that I wasn’t for some time.”

Burt’s eyes hardened. “That’s bullshit and you know it,” he insisted.

“That’s not how I felt… I had it pointed out pretty frequently that Blaine was the attractive, desirable one and I was lucky to have him,” Kurt said. “He was the one that everyone wanted to be around… even the other guys at school. They just tolerated me, but Blaine was one of the guys.”

“So when Blaine cheated on me… it just felt fitting in a way. After all, why would Blaine want to be with someone like me when he could have anyone he wanted? I waited so long to finally have a boyfriend of my own and he could find someone else so quickly.”

Burt sighed at the pain in his son’s voice. Kurt was normally so confident, at least on the surface, and to hear him act like he should be grateful that a boy would pay him attention angered Burt. Especially given that he had unintentionally caused his son additional pain by bringing the cheating
little bastard into Kurt’s home.

“You listen to me,” Burt demanded gently. “Blaine might be good at conning people… hell, he conned me… but you are ten times the man he is. And you’ve got a man upstairs who thinks the world of you.”

The mention of his boyfriend cut through Kurt’s sadness. “Adam’s really won you over, hasn’t he?”

“Shut up,” Burt grunted. He hated when Kurt proved him wrong. “The point is that you deserve a lot better than Blaine. And didn’t you say that in New York there were other guys that liked you?”

Kurt nodded. He thought about Chase, at Vogue, who was always flirting with him. And there were guys at Callbacks and NYADA that tried to flirt with him even before he broke up with Blaine.

“So don’t let the fact that some small world, small minded boys didn’t see how fantastic you are,” Burt advised. “You moved on and grew up more in a few months than most people manage in their entire lives. And you’ve found someone more on your level than Blaine was; someone who cares enough about you to stand up to me.”

Thinking about Adam always put a smile on Kurt’s face. The older man had so quickly taken such an important place in his life.

“I’m sorry I didn’t tell you about this earlier, Dad,” Kurt said sincerely. His habit of hiding his wounds came back to bite him too many times and he needed to start learning to open himself up more. Especially to those who loved him.

“I didn’t want to upset you because you’re sick. And this is going to sound really stupid, but I was almost afraid that you would side with Blaine in this.”

Burt gave Kurt a hard stare, as if asking if he’d fallen on his head a few too many times. “Are you joking? That I would side with someone who screwed around on my son? Someone that we accepted into our family and couldn’t keep it in his pants a few weeks while you got settled in a new city?”

He reached out to his son, placing a warm, comforting hand on his shoulder. “You listen to me, Kurt. When I think that you’re wrong, I’ll tell you. But I will never not be on your side. Ever. Even when I think you’re wrong about something, I’ll still be on your side. Understand?”

Kurt blinked back tears and nodded. His throat felt strangely thick at his father’s pronouncement of unwavering support.

“But when something is wrong, I need you to tell me, Kurt,” Burt insisted. “You’re too good at hiding stuff and I get these kinds of surprises. The last thing I want to do is accidently hurt you because you’re not telling me that something is wrong, or that someone hurt you.”

“I’ll try, Dad,” Kurt promised. “It’s just… it’s not easy for me.”

“I know,” Burt said understandingly. “You learned to be pretty self-reliant a lot earlier than most. Too self-reliant, at times.” He gave his son a small, warm smile. “There are times when I still want my little boy who needs his daddy.”

Kurt gave up on trying to stop the tears from falling and wiped at his eyes. “I’m always going to need you,” he insisted.

“Then I need to know that when something is really wrong, that you’re going to come to me,” Burt
stated. “Not try to hide things until they can’t be hidden anymore. So let’s make a deal… I’ll remember that you’re an adult and treat you as such, but you need to promise me that I can trust you to let me know when you really need help. Okay?”

Kurt nodded, sliding forward in his seat to hug his father. “I will, Dad. I’ll try better.”

Burt just held him close. “I know you will,” he said gently. “Why don’t you head upstairs so Adam can stop worrying about you? And don’t worry. I know that he’s staying in your room so we’ll make sure we knock if we need you.”

Kurt blushed, but knew that this was his father’s effort to treat him like an adult. And he was grateful for it.

Walking up the stairs, he feeling totally drained but strangely better about things than he’d felt in some time. Now that the burden of hiding what had ended his last relationship was finally out and he knew that his father wasn’t going to turn against him, he felt like he could finally really start moving forward. He came to his bedroom and found Adam sitting up on the bed, reading from his senior project notes.

Adam looked up and saw the splotchy marks on Kurt’s face that were clear evidence that he’d been crying at least a little bit and put his notes aside. “Sweetheart, are you okay?” he asked.

That simple question, asked without prompting, caused Kurt’s heart to swell. How many times had he been in pain and those around him didn’t notice? Adam somehow always did. And seemed to know just what Kurt needed.

“Just had a bit of a cry downstairs,” he admitted, coming to sit on the bed next to his boyfriend. He idly noted that they should be relatively comfortable since he’d gotten a queen sized bed when setting up his bedroom after they moved. “Got a lot of stuff out in the open.”

“And?” Adam pressed.

Kurt inhaled deeply. “Had to admit to a lot of stuff that I didn’t want to. And that I was embarrassed by. But Dad made it clear that he’s on my side in this.”

Adam smiled gently, reaching out to gently smooth Kurt’s hair back. “I’m so glad. I know that you were afraid of telling him.”

“I knew I had to, but I just couldn’t build up the nerve,” Kurt admitted. “I don’t know if I could have done it if you hadn’t nudged him a bit to talk to me.”

“Nonsense,” Adam insisted. “You’d stand up to a grizzly bear if you needed to.”

“For someone else, definitely,” Kurt agreed. “For myself… not so much. I’ve always hidden when something was wrong so that I wouldn’t look vulnerable.”

Adam nodded understandingly. “That’s not a surprise given how badly you were bullied growing up. Looking weak would have made you feel like more of a target.”

Kurt nodded. “Exactly. And even when I couldn’t hide that things weren’t going well for me, I’ll be honest… a lot of my friends weren’t all that much help. So I learned to just get by on my own. Reaching out doesn’t come naturally to me.”

“I get that. I really do,” Adam said. “But that doesn’t excuse others for not noticing. If you saw someone bleeding in front of you, you don’t wait until they ask for help.”
Kurt smiled and lay down next to Adam, curling up against them so that they could hold one another. “There are times when I think that you’re too good to be true. Because you are just too understanding.”

“No, I’m not,” Adam protested gently. “I just do get why things are hard for you right now. But I also know that things will get better. A few weeks ago, you couldn’t accept a compliment without protesting that you didn’t deserve it. Now you’re accepting a sincere compliment graciously. I’ve seen the man you can be and I want to be there when you see him yourself.”

Again, that tightening in his chest, as if Kurt’s heart was suddenly too large to be contained in the space allotted for it. Adam was dragging something out of him that he was so afraid to really embrace again. After how badly Blaine hurt him, how could he let himself feel so strongly about someone else?

“It’s funny, but telling Dad… I feel like I can finally start moving past this,” Kurt said softly, looking into Adam’s blue eyes. They were so different from his own. Bright and clear, like the sky on a summer day. “I feel like I just unloaded something I didn’t know that I was even trying to carry.”

Adam smiled and gently kissed Kurt on his forehead. “I’m so glad, darling.”

Kurt closed his eyes and cuddled as close to Adam as he could manage. The next few days were going to be a challenge, no question about it. He didn’t trust Blaine any longer and knew that his ex was going to react badly to Adam’s presence. But for the first time in ages, Kurt felt like he was really ready to face it.
Walking though the doors of McKinley High School again felt like he was entering a war zone. Facing one’s past, and not a particularly enjoyable part of one’s past, was never pleasant and Kurt had plenty of reasons to suspect that he was in for a challenging day.

So he made sure to dress for the occasion. He often thought that Rachel tended to dress like she was wearing a costume for a role, but today he would be doing much the same. He needed to show just how far he had come since he graduated. He was going to be the New York Theater Student and make sure that they were going to see how badly they underestimated him.

The black jeans had come from a Vogue photo shoot with Isabelle’s blessing, since the Rag & Bone jeans seemed tailor made for him. He paired them with a charcoal knit shirt that clung to his upper body and showed off his increasingly toned chest. He selected a watch with a leather band and finished the look with a pair of Belstaff dress boots that he’d gotten from the Vogue vault because he was the only one who fit the sample size they’d sent.

Adam had also dressed up a bit to match him, understanding Kurt’s wish to present a unified presence. He wasn’t nearly the fashionista that Kurt was, but he could clean up well when he wanted to. The jeans weren’t designer but they were fairly new and in a dark wash with artful distressing at the knees. He wore a black, long sleeved button down and pendant that he’d found at a street vendor on a leather cord at his throat. The dark colors accented Adam’s blond hair and made him look mature and even a little dangerous.

Santana met them at the school doors and immediately took them in hand. “Good, you’re finally here,” she said, looping their arms in hers so that they would bookend her. “I need my man candy escorts.”

“Aren’t we the wrong gender for you?” Kurt asked wryly, letting her drag them along and forcing the crowd of students around them to part to let them through.

“Maybe, but you two are the best looking things right now and I need some pretty to really set this outfit off,” she claimed. “Besides, we all match so we should walk in together like the hot bitches that we are.”

Adam looked down at the slender girl dressed in a black turtleneck and denim skirt that just skimmed the tops of her thighs. With high heeled black boots to complete the outfit, it highlighted all the best points about her figure and made her look both incredibly sexy and formidable. He doubted that there was anyone that wouldn’t find her attractive regardless of their orientation.

The three of them were the last to arrive and Kurt guided Adam to take a seat on the riser with the other graduates where they were warmly greeted by the others. Kurt held Adam’s hand in his and took a moment to study the current members of the choir and get a sense of how receptive they might be to having so many older people intruding on their space.

Sam sat in the second row with Brittany and gave them all a wave. He was pleased to see Unique sitting in the back. She gave him a cheerful smile and an admiring nod of approval, mouthing “Gorgeous!” for the man at Kurt’s side. Artie, as always, was seated in the front alongside Tina and Blaine. Kurt didn’t know any of the younger students and hoped that Finn and Mr. Schue would remember to do a round of introductions; otherwise they were going to face a lot of long, awkward silences.
He didn’t miss the yearning glance Santana threw in Brittany’s direction and reached over to give her hand a reassuring squeeze. Nor did he miss the positively frosty look that Tina was giving him, which, which caused Kurt to frown in confusion. He wondered what he could have possibly done to offend her given that they had been quite close while he lived in Lima. Their communication had faded considerably after he left for New York, but he’d always considered her a friend.

As for his ex… Blaine looked more confused than anything else. He looked at Kurt pensively, but then saw a man that he didn’t know sitting by his side and was clearly trying to piece together what was happening and not liking the immediate answer he was coming up with. Kurt supposed that perhaps he should have warned Blaine that was in a relationship that had recently become more serious, but in all honesty he was tired of always having to take Blaine’s feeling into account. They were no longer together and it had been several months since Kurt broke up with him. He had no claim on Kurt, and Kurt didn’t have any obligation to run his social life by his ex for approval first. He had a right to move on.

Adam seemed to sense his increasing tension and looked over to him with a concerned glance. Kurt forced a small smile to his face, hoping to reassure him that he was all right. Blaine’s eyes widened in shock and hurt when he saw the clearly familiar gesture between them and Kurt turned a hard stare to his ex, as if daring him to make a big commotion in front of everyone. To his satisfaction, Blaine seemed to sink inwards, momentarily thwarted.

Kurt was genuinely surprised that Rachel hadn’t arrived yet. She’d texted him last night to let him know that she had arrived and was staying with her fathers. She was supposed to meet them at the choir room, and he didn’t think that she would pass up a chance to show off her recent accomplishments given the opportunity.

Finn had been talking with Mr. Schue while they were waiting for everyone to arrive and apparently decided to get started. They stepped forward and Finn took the lead in starting the lesson.

“Good morning everyone,” he greeted. “I’m really excited about today because we’ve got something really special happening. First, this is our last meeting before the Mr. Schuester’s and Ms. Pillsbury’s wedding and I know that we’re all really excited about celebrating this important moment in their lives.”

The group cheered and clapped at that announcement and it seemed to Kurt that everyone was looking forward to the ceremony and reception for their teacher.

Finn motioned for everyone to settle down and gave the group a smile. “But we’ve got a really rare opportunity here. Because of the wedding, we’ve got all of our graduated members in town and several of them are joining us today. A lot of you are hoping to one day go on into a career in some kind of performing art. We’ve got sitting in this room some amazingly talented people who have taken what they learned in this very room and have done just that.”

Mr. Schuester looked over at the choir and said, “You all are following in the footsteps of some very special people. Not just the choir who was able to win Nationals last year, but who were able to take their ambitions and make them real. They can show you better than anyone else I know that while it’s not easy to succeed, if you’ve got the talent and the drive, it’s more than possible to achieve your goals.”

Kurt tried not to frown at Mr. Schue’s rosy pronouncements. He made it sound so easy. That if you had talent and heart, it was all that was needed for success. Maybe for some, he considered, such as his roommate specifically. But he’d always found that besides that, hard work and determination were necessary to push through the failures in order to get anywhere at all.
But then, given how often they didn’t have set lists until the week before a competition and how Mr. Schue always fell to relying on the same performers all the time, that probably shouldn’t surprise him. But more to the point… most of them were students or still in the developing stage of their professional careers. None of them could be realistically considered great successes at this point.

Finn took over again and quickly got things back on track. “The seniors here will certainly remember all our visiting graduates, but I’d like to take a moment to introduce them to the rest of our group. First, we have Mercedes Jones, who is currently in LA recording her first album.”

Mercedes gave a big smile and stood up, accepting their cheers at her achievement.

“We also have Mike Chang, who is a student with the Joffrey Ballet Company and Quinn Fabray, who is a drama student at Yale,” Finn went on and gave them a chance to stand and introduce themselves.

“We also have Santana Lopez, who has recently moved to New York to pursue an acting career, and Noah Puckerman, who is back from LA and is currently writing a screenplay,” Finn said with a lot more consideration than Kurt would have expected. Their introductions sounded a lot better than “college dropout, currently working in a lesbian beer garden” and “unemployed former poolboy”.

“And lastly, we have Kurt Hummel, who is attending the New York Academy of Dramatic Arts,” Finn introduced, giving his stepbrother a show of applause. “NYADA is one of the most competitive conservatories in the country. He’s here with Adam Crawford, who’s a senior there.”

Adam nodded to the group politely, giving the students a warm smile as Kurt gave the students a brief wave but he didn’t stand to join the graduates. He was a guest and didn’t want to overstep.

Finn proceeded to introduce the choir to the guests and Adam thought that they seemed like a lovely group. But he felt his jaw clench a bit when Blaine was introduced. So, that was the one who’d cause so much pain to his Kurt. Not quite what he expected, and in all honesty, he couldn’t really see why Kurt would be attracted to someone like that. His wardrobe was frightening and that hair… Adam could only imagine the gel stains that would end up on anything he came near.

Perhaps he was being unfair and judging the younger man harshly out of his feelings towards Kurt, but he couldn’t think kindly towards anyone who would be so careless with the feelings of another. Especially someone that they professed to love.

“So what have you all been working on?” Mercedes asked. “You’ve got Regionals coming up now.”

“We’ve been trying to mix things up and change how we’ve traditionally done things,” Finn explained. “I’d been reviewing our past competition setups and we’ve fallen into a serious rut. It’s usually a girl solo, or a boy/girl duet and a group number with a boy/girl pair on lead. To be honest, we’ve gotten really predictable and that’s going to hurt us at some point.”

“We’ve got a choir at NYADA that uses some very unusual arrangements,” Kurt explained. “Adam is the leader and he’s a real genius at coming up with performance arrangements. We use a lot of unusual song choices and play around with leads and supporting choruses all the time.”

Finn nodded approvingly. “That’s exactly what we were looking to do. Adam, I hope you don’t mind us picking your brain while you’re here.”

“Not all all, Finn,” Adam answered cheerfully. “I’ll be happy to help.”

“We’re also working on trying to get real emotion in songs, and switching things up,” a pretty young
girl that Finn had identified as Marley chimed in. “Finn tells us that we’re great at singing notes, but not at really reaching the audience.”

“Well if, there’s anyone who’s a master as emotional singing, it’s Kurt here,” Mercedes insisted, giving her friend a supportive hug about his shoulders. “I can’t count how many times he’d had us all in tears.”

“He made me cry more than once,” Puck admitted, getting a nod of confirmation from Mike.

“In fact,” Finn added. “I can’t think of a better thing than to give the kids an example. Kurt, maybe you can show them what it means to really tap into a song’s emotions. I don’t think there’s anyone who can do it quite like you do.”

Kurt hesitated, not having anything prepared but was swayed by the boisterous applause from his friends. Mercedes gave him a little nudge. “Go on, honey… we’re waiting on you.”

“I don’t know…” he said quietly. “I didn’t come here to show off.”

“Kurt, we’d love to have you sing for us,” Finn insisted. “It’ll be good for them to see what someone with the kind of training you’ve been getting can do.”

Kurt couldn’t help from looking to Adam, who gave him a warm smile and squeeze his hand reassuringly.

Kurt had barely gotten to his feet when the door to the choir room swung open, and as if on cue, Rachel stepped inside to make her grand entrance. “Sorry I’m so late,” she announced blithely, stepping up to join Mr. Shuster. “I hope that I’m not interrupting.”

Adam tried not to show irritation, because he highly doubted that her lateness was accidental. Knowing Rachel as well as he’d come to, he knew that she would do anything to get attention for herself. And judging for the tiny skirt she was wearing that barely covered her rear end, the blowed out hair and the thick eyeliner, she seemed well on her way to be back to her old pre-Midnight Madness self.

Still, she was Kurt’s friend, and managed to keep from rolling his eyes.

It was a little disconcerting to see Mr. Shuster visibly brighten at her entrance. He didn’t show nearly that much enthusiasm to the other graduates and it told Adam a great deal over why Rachel had been so favored during her tenure at McKinley.

“Non you haven’t missed anything,” he assured her. “We were just getting started.”

“So what are we doing?” Rachel asked, looking to her old teacher and all but ignoring Finn. Instead of taking a seat and joining the other guests, she remained at the front with the choir directors.

“Well, we’re working on artistic song interpretation and Kurt was about to give us an example,” Finn explained, admirably managing to keep irritation out of his voice and reminding the room that he was actually the one in charge.

Rachel’s face all but lit up at the prospect of having a chance to perform. “That sounds amazing. You know, at NYADA, we have so many chances to sing and try out new material and I’ve got something that I’ve been working on for my big audition coming up. I’d love to show it to all of you.”

“But Kurt…” Finn stammered.
Kurt sighed and took his seat again. It was so typical of Rachel to walk in and just take over, regardless of what anyone else had planned.

“Finn, I was thinking now that Rachel is here…” Mr. Schue began, and Rachel quickly chimed in, cutting him off.

“I would love to! Let me just put my stuff down and…” she began, but was quickly cut off by Finn.

“No, I think that Kurt should be the one to do this demonstration,” Finn said firmly, overriding his old teacher’s suggestion. “This is something that I don’t think there’s anyone better to really show what we’ve been trying to teach them.”

Rachel gave Finn a look of astonishment that he was openly favoring someone else over her. But she then pursed her lips firmly and gave a short nod and took a seat along with the rest of the graduates, smoothing out her skirt over the tops of her thighs.

Finn looked to his stepbrother. “Kurt, we’re ready for you.”

“Go on, love,” Adam said softly, giving Kurt’s hand another squeeze. “Show them what you can do.”

Kurt nodded and stood up again to the cheers of the members of New Directions and his friends. He glanced at Rachel and sighed when he saw the closed off expression on her face that clearly indicated that she was unhappy and feeling slighted. Wonderful… one more thing for her to hold against him.

He paused to spoke quietly with the band first, telling them what he needed before taking his place in front of the others. Mr. Schue and Finn took seats, with his former teacher looking a little dubious while Finn smiled encouragingly. Readyimg himself, he looked to the younger students.

“The amazing thing about music is that it’s a language that’s infinitely flexible,” Kurt said. “You’re only limited by your imagination. You can change the pitch, shift the meaning of the words in a song, and change the character of the singer regardless of what the lyrics might have originally intended.

“I’ve learned in NYADA to think more outside the box artistically,” he went on, throwing his boyfriend a fond smile. “There’s no such thing as a ‘boy’ song or a ‘girl’ song. You can bend a song anyway you want, but doing it successfully really depends on the singer to communicate the message. I picked this song to use as an example because the lyrics are a bit esoteric and not specific to one particular performer and really allows the singer to put their on spin on things.”

Kurt nodded to the band to begin and the keyboardist began to play in a soft and melodic manner that would support but not complete with Kurt’s vocal performance. Adam immediately recognized the tune and couldn’t help from smiling and wondering what Kurt’s interpretation would be.

Kurt closed his eyes and began to sing softly, his tone wistful as if thinking about a happier time in the past.

“We skipped the light fandango,” he sang gently, opening his eyes and having a faraway look in them “Turned cartwheels cross the floor. I was feeling kina seasick. But the crowd called out for more.

“The room was humming louder, as the ceiling flew away. When we called out for another drink, the waiter brought a tray.”
Adam had enough chance to watch Kurt sing to know just how remarkable he could be and this impromptu performance was no exception. But for some of these kids, it was their first chance to really see what an artist Kurt was and Adam couldn’t resist watching the reactions of the others to Kurt’s performance.

All of the graduates that had come to visit and the senior students in the choir who knew Kurt and knew what he was capable of were very engaged, enjoying the rare chance to see their old friend in his element. Even Rachel, obviously miffed at being passed over in favor of Kurt, couldn’t help from paying attention to her friend and smiling softly at his talent. Most of the younger kids seemed interested, albeit a bit more reserved in their responses since they didn’t know Kurt. But it didn’t take long for them to become more engaged. Kurt’s understated style was drawing them in and Adam couldn’t help from smiling at their reaction. He loved seeing people’s responses to Kurt singing as much as he loved listening to Kurt sing.

When Kurt reached the first chorus, his voice began to soar, but stayed so soft and gentle that he continued drawing the audience in, rather than pushing them back with a blast of sound.

“And so it was that later, as the miller told his tale,” Kurt sang, his voice lifting sweetly and gently. “That her face, at first just ghostly, turned a whiter shade of pale.”

Adam could see what Kurt was doing with his performance choices. He’d heard this song many times before, and it was a challenging song because with lyrics so layered with symbolism. It very much depended on the singer to give the story its form. Kurt was weaving a carefully constructed story out of distant memories of a relationship in its final stages.

Kurt looked at his audience, his expression soft and sad as he sang about strange images of vestal virgins and the ocean and making sense out of them with nothing more than his voice and the most subtle gestures of his eyes and body. When he belted, it was with control and restraint. There was nothing overblown or overly ostentatious about his performance style because he didn’t need to rely on tricks to keep the audience’s attention.

“If music be the food of love,” Kurt sang gently, with a sad faraway expression on his face. “Then laughter is its queen. And likewise if behind is in front, then dirt in truth is clean. My mouth by then like cardboard, seemed to slip straight through my head. So we crash-dived straightway quickly, and attacked the ocean bed.

“And so it was that later, as the miller told his tale. That her face, at first just ghostly, turned a whiter shade of pale.”

The conclusion was just as sweet and subtle as the opening of his performance was and Adam had to marvel at his clever, talented darling. Kurt used none of the noticeable tricks that other singers often employed to show emotion. No wild facial gestures or contortions of his body and voice. There was a quiet stillness in how he sang that was all the more powerful in the way that it compelled his audience to pay attention. It was a shame that Dean Tibideaux couldn’t be in the room, because Adam was sure that she would be very pleased with what her student accomplished.

The students, graduates and teachers knew well enough that they had just seen something special and the applause given to Kurt were more than heartfelt. Mercedes, Santana and Finn got to their feet to give Kurt the ovation he deserved. Unique carefully wiped at her eyes and even the brittle looking little blonde looked like she was sniffing. Kurt just smiled and gave a little bow before coming back to his seat besides Adam and pressing his face into his boyfriend’s shoulder.

Mr. Schue seemed especially surprised when he and Finn retook their places at the front of the room. “Kurt that was…,” he began hesitantly, trying to gather his thoughts. “Where did that come from?”
Mercedes made a dismissive sound and hand wave in response. “It’s always been there, Mr. Schue,” she insisted. “Maybe you just weren’t paying attention.”

“That is exactly what I was trying to explain,” Finn said, quickly cutting in to blunt Mercedes’s sharp words. “You don’t need to yell at your audience to keep their attention. Sometimes less is more. What you sing has to come out of you and it can be controlled but still sincere. I’d like to thank Kurt for giving us such a great example of that.”

Finn then asked if any of the students wanted to give it a shot and Adam was pleased to see that several jumped at the chance, even though it meant trying to follow Kurt and that wasn’t a challenge that a less confident singer could take on easily. Three students volunteered to perform, and it wasn’t a huge surprise that Blaine was one of them. He felt Kurt stiffen slightly next to him and hoped that the younger man wasn’t going to use this as an opportunity to embarrass his ex-boyfriend.

The first was Marley, who had such a sweet, vulnerable stage presence that Adam just wanted to wrap her up in a blanket and feed her soup. She picked “Over the Rainbow” and gave a lovely performance. It lacked a lot of Kurt’s complexity and layered emotions, but she was able to communicate the wistful yearning that was normally associated with the song quite effectively.

Unique was next, and she gave a beautiful rendition of “Easy To Be Hard” from Hair. Both were wonderful singers, but Adam could see what Finn had been driving at. Neither had been able to take the song and turn it about to make it totally their own, however lovely their performances were.

Then again, it wasn’t something that came easily to most. Kurt had a natural gift in that respect, but these were young kids who were still developing as artists. Hopefully they would learn to expand their abilities since Finn was aware that it was a deficit that they had, though he doubted that Mr. Schuester had the ability to give them the kind of training that they needed. Which was a shame since they had a lot of potential.

“Here it comes,” Kurt muttered, when Blaine took his place in front of the group.

The younger man looked to everyone and took a long breath to steady himself. “It’s been so wonderful to have our friends coming back, even just for a visit,” he said, forcing a smile on his face that looked nearly pained. “So I’d like to perform something to show how much they mean to us.”

“Oh no…” Kurt moaned, knowing that his worst fears were about to come true.

“Childhood living is easy to do,” Blaine sang, his voice wavering slightly as he tried to show all of his emotions. “The things you wanted I bought them for you.

“Graceless lady, you know who I am. You know I can’t let you slide through my hands. Wild horses couldn’t drag me away.”

Kurt felt his cheeks burning as everyone began to stare at him, the message in Blaine’s performance so painfully obvious and for once, Kurt just wasn’t in the mood to sit quietly and accept their censure. How dare Blaine put him on the spot like this? He bit his lip to keep from interrupting, no matter how much he wanted to. He couldn’t believe that Blaine would do this to him.

And if he was going to sing about his feeling like this, couldn’t he at least have changed the pronoun?

Throughout the song, Blaine would throw small glances in Kurt’s direction, leaving no doubt in anyone’s mind who he was directing his song at. He had all the subtlety of a baseball bat. And Adam could feel Kurt’s increasing discomfort. Finn, being one of the few who knew what had caused the break up seemed genuinely concerned on Kurt’s behalf, while most of Blaine’s classmates only saw
a heartfelt performance towards an old love.

“I know I dreamed you a sin and a lie. I have my freedom but I don’t have much time,” Blaine crooned, his voice nearly cracking on the notes that were outside the comfortable part of his range. His face scrunched unappealingly as he tried to express overwhelming emotion that wasn’t readily apparent in his voice. “Faith has been broken, tears must be cried. Let’s do some living after we die. Wild, wild horses, we’ll ride them some day. Wild horses couldn’t drag me away.”

Blaine finished his song with an audible sniffle and wiped at his eyes. He looked to Kurt briefly with the “heart in his eyes” expression that at one time would have caused Kurt to melt. Now, it only made him angry. That Blaine would sing a song like that so clearly directed towards him and make some kind of public declaration about their non-existent relationship. And in front of Adam no less.

Blaine was getting enthusiastic applause from his classmates, but Kurt could only feel his anger growing. He waited until the applause died down and growled out, “Just what was that supposed to be?”

Blaine blinked, apparently surprised that Kurt wasn’t awed by his display. “I just tried to show how much you... I mean, all of you mean to us.”

The slow nod of Kurt’s head and stern glare made it very clear that he didn’t believe a word that his ex was saying. “Of course. You miss us all so badly. How silly of me to have not seen that.”

He looked to Finn and Mr. Schue and said as calmly as he could manage, “I’m sorry, but I totally forgot that we need to take care of some things today. I’ll see you all tomorrow at the wedding.”

Adam took Kurt’s cue and followed him out of the choir room, heading towards the exit. He could practically feel the anger radiating off his boyfriend and knew that he would want to get away before he exploded.

“Kurt! Wait up!” Blaine called out, rushing to follow them.

“Go away, Blaine,” Kurt ordered, proud that he was able to keep his voice from cracking. “I’m not in the mood to deal with you now.”

Blaine didn’t listen and hurried to catch up with them. “Please! You’ve got to listen to me!”

Kurt spun about and glared at Blaine so furiously that the other man was stopped dead in his tracks. “I have to listen to you? After you embarrassed me in front of everyone like that? How dare you!”

“Kurt, I just wanted to tell you how I felt about you,” Blaine insisted. “I know that I screwed up, but you said that you’d forgiven me.”

“That didn’t mean that I wanted to get back together with you,” Kurt reminded him, his voice raised in anger. “I have made it abundantly clear that we are not getting back together. Now leave me the hell alone.” He was at the point that he didn’t care if he had an audience or not. Blaine had pushed him too far. He turned to leave, but Blaine grabbed him by the arm to hold him back.

“Let go of me!” he snarled.

“Kurt! You’ve got to listen to me!”

Adam has been watching the confrontation carefully, not wanting to intrude but he refused to see Kurt hurt because Blaine didn’t know when enough was enough. He stepped in and was able to get Blaine’s hand off of Kurt. “You need to back off right now,” he warned sternly. “Kurt is telling you
to leave him alone and if I were you, I’d do what he asks.”

Blaine looked surprised at the other man’s interference and pulled back, cradling his hand as if hurt but Adam knew that he hadn’t used that much force. “This has nothing to do with you!” he insisted, but neither Kurt nor Adam were backing down.

“It is when you when you put your hands on him,” Adam insisted, growing increasingly angry with the younger man.

A tall blond woman dressed in a red athletic suit stepped out of her office at the outburst. “I thought that I heard the dulcet tones of my Sweet Porcelain,” she said. “And the screeching of a badly dressed hobbit.”

Kurt inhaled deeply, trying to regain control over his temper. “Sorry, Coach,” he apologized sincerely. He hated making a spectacle of himself like this.

Sue gave him a smile that showed a trace of warmth, softening the harsh lines of her face. “I suppose that you’re in town for the impending nuptials of the two most awkward individuals that ever walked the earth?”

Her cutting jokes managed to get Kurt to crack a smile. “Guilty as charged.”

“While you looked well on your way to giving your former pocket-sized lover the kind of smack down that you’re clearly aiming to do, I wouldn’t advise doing it in the hallways,” Sue advised. “So you don’t traumatize the rest of these pathetic weanlings that shouldn’t have been left off their leashes.”

She turned to Blaine and said harshly, “If you want to keep what remains of that glued on mess that you call hair, I’d suggest you head back to your previous activity. Otherwise I might be tempted to sic Porcelain on you to give you the comeuppance you so clearly are begging for.”

Blaine threw Kurt another longing glance but had enough sense of self-preservation to back off. He slunk away, shoulders huddled and looking as if his world were coming to an end. Sue watched him stalk off to make sure that he was gone before turning her attention to the other two men.

She focused on Adam and gave him a long look that left the young man feeling like he’d just been strip searched. “And you are Porcelain’s new suitor?”

“Yes, ma’am,” he said respectfully, nodding his head.

The accent caused the corner of her mouth to twitch. She turned to Kurt and asked sharply, “There aren’t enough strapping American male homosexuals to choose from that you had to start importing?”

Kurt chuckled and took Adam’s arm, leaning against him. “I needed someone more on my level and decided not to wait for the home grown crop to reach acceptable standards.”

Sue’s eyes brightened at Kurt’s snarky response. “Oh, how I’ve missed having your razor sharp wit around here. We’ve got nothing but marshmallow fluff polluting this school. It’s been too long since I’ve had a proper challenge since you, Lopez and Fabrey graduated. I should have doctored all your grades to hold you back for at least a year or two.”

Adam cocked his head curiously, not quite certain if the woman was joking or not, but he noted the glint in Kurt’s eyes that he wasn’t at all phased by her irrational statements. If anything, Kurt seemed amused by the strange woman.
She gave a huff of annoyance. “Well, no use lamenting what can’t be undone. If I were you, I’d take you’re crumpet of a boyfriend and get out of here before the bad taste of this place rubs off on him.”

“Wonderful idea,” Kurt agreed. He took Adam in hand and started to lead him out of the building. “Thanks Coach!”

Adam looked to Kurt as they hurried out the building. “Kurt, she wasn’t serious, was she?”

“With Coach Sylvester, there’s no way of telling,” he advised. “Better to play it safe and take the escape when she offers it.”

Adam shook his head in bemusement as he let Kurt pull him along. This trip was certainly proving to be interesting.

* * *

Mr. Schue ran out of the choir room as soon as everyone had been dismissed, leaving Finn to tidy up. He really didn’t mind, as he knew his old teacher had to get things ready for his wedding tomorrow. He gathered up the sheet music and tucked it away to be sorted and filed later and cleaned off the white board.

Most of the others had already gone. Blaine had slunk back in after having chased after Kurt and left with Sam and Tina. Finn didn’t want to think of what the three of them would be getting up to, but he made a mental note to keep an eye on them tomorrow. He didn’t want to see Kurt being harassed while he was in town.

Rachel was the last left in the room with him, having patiently waited for the others to file out before approaching Finn. He tried not to feel anxious, but this was the first time he’d been alone with her since their final break up. The last time he’d seen her at all was when she and Kurt came to Lima to see the musical and she’d made it clear that their relationship was over. He accepted that.

Still, seeing her hurt. And seeing her so radically changed made the pain even more acute. There was a hardness to Rachel’s appearance now that he didn’t particularly like. The sweetness and vulnerability that he’d found made her inherent abrasiveness easier to overlook seemed gone. He wasn’t sure he’d call it more mature, but it was very different.

“Finn, can we talk?” she finally broached, her high heels clicking on the floor as she walked toward him.

He shrugged, trying to give the impression that it didn’t make any difference to him when inside he was screaming. “Sure,” he granted, as he pulled the cover over the piano.

She inhaled slightly, a signal that she was steeling herself for a fight and Finn had to wonder what was bothering her now. He’d done as she asked and left her alone. She’d been the one initiating their rare moments of contact so he had no clue of what he might have done to upset her.

“What was that back there?” she questioned, her voice still soft but taking on that shrill edge that came out when she was upset.

“What do you mean?” he asked, finally turning to face her. No, he really didn’t like her new look at all.

She pursed her lips and glared up at him. “Back there, when Mr. Schuester wanted me to sing. You’ve never put someone else ahead of me like that.”
So that was it, he realized. She was feeling slighted that he’d stuck to his choice of having Kurt do
the demonstration.

“Because Kurt was the best one to show the kids what I wanted to teach them,” he explained
frankly. “If we were doing a lesson on imitating Barbra, I’m sure you would have been perfect. But
you know as well as I do that Kurt’s got you beat when it comes to that kind of interpretation.”

She looked at him in shock that he was actually insulting her performance style. “How could you say
that?” she complained. “You’ve always considered me to be the most talented of us.”

“In some ways, you are,” he granted. “But let’s be real, Rachel. You’re a lot more interested in
showing off your voice than anything else. They already can do that just fine. You wouldn’t have
been the best example for this kind of lesson.”

The young woman looked completely outraged and being dismissed in such a forthright manner.
“This is about punishing me for breaking up with you, isn’t it?” she snapped. “Because you would
have supported me if we were still together.”

“Oh for God’s sake, Rachel! Not everything needs to be about you all the time!” Finn finally
exclaimed. He looked at her with a glare that stunned her silent. Never before had he shown that
much open anger and exasperation when dealing with her before.

“Do you really think that I passed you over out of spite?” Finn demanded. “I hate to break it to you,
but you’re not the absolute center of my universe anymore. And that makes you nuts, doesn’t it?”

“That’s not it at all!” Rachel exclaimed, her eyes narrowing in anger.

“Then what is it?” Finn asked. “This stupid, psychotic need you have to be adored every waking
moment of the day? That if everyone isn’t kissing your ass all the time, you just can’t deal?

“You waltz into my choir room and act as if we’re all just here to give you another place to show
off? ‘Oh look everyone! Rachel is here! Drop what you’re doing and bow at her feet because she’s
gracing us with her presence!’” he simpered.

“And worse… I’m the one who’s been leading New Directions, but you tried to use Mr. Schue to
get what you wanted against me.”

Rachel was gritting her teeth at his outburst, her face flushed with anger. “That’s not it at all! I’m
talking about you shutting me down because you’re still upset that I decided to end things with you.”

Finn just shook his head in bemusement. “Wow… you really are full of yourself. You know, I saw
this kind of thing from you a lot, but I just shrugged it off. I got that you were so needy for attention.
You were always so insecure and needed to be reassured all the time. But it’s never enough for you
is it? It doesn’t matter how many leads you got, or all the times we acknowledged how talented you
were. It doesn’t matter that you got into the school of your dreams after totally blowing your audition
or that you win some kind of huge prize. It’s just never enough. Not when you think that anyone else
is getting acknowledgment. If anyone else gets treated as if they’ve got a shred of talent and you
aren’t at that moment, you just can’t handle it.

“So yeah… now that we’re broken up, I’m not under any obligation to cater to you anymore,” he
said firmly, shrugging as if completely indifferent. “I don’t have to worry that if I don’t want to fight
with you that I’ve got to throw everyone else under the bus in order to keep you happy. You can
stamp all your feet and whine about how unfair we all are, but guess what?” He leaned in close and
could almost smell the rage coming off her. “I’m done with your games.”
He turned away from her and grabbed his jacket. “You can go cry to Mr. Schue or your New York boyfriend about how unfair I am because I’m through,” he stated firmly. “I’m done putting you ahead of everyone else, including myself. Find some other lapdog to boss around.”

He didn’t wait to give her a chance to respond, or to see if his words had any effect on her besides rousing her anger even more. As he walked out of the school and didn’t hear her trying to follow him to press her argument, he realized that things were really over between them. There was no going back from this because he’d just done the one thing that she would never forgive. And to be honest? He wasn’t sure that it bothered him that much.

And the fact that he wasn’t bothered him more than anything else.

* * *

Tina found Blaine eating his lunch by himself, looking totally despondent. As enthusiastic as he’d been this morning at the prospect of seeing Kurt again, now he looked totally shattered. His attempts to win Kurt over had totally failed and Tina was very much suspecting that the handsome man who’d been at Kurt’s side was not just a friend.

She and Sam had tried to console Blaine afterwards, but he had rushed off to find a place to lick his wounds. Now he just looked completely crushed that Kurt hadn’t been at all receptive to his efforts and she couldn’t help from feeling anger at Kurt for hurting Blaine like this and a bit of sadness that Blaine couldn’t give her that kind of love.

She sat down next to him and reached out to him. “Blaine, it’s going to be all right,” she tried to assure him. “I know that you’re upset, but you can do so much better than Kurt.”

“Tina, I love him,” Blaine insisted, looking down at his hands. He gave a loud sniffle and seemed to huddle in on himself. “I was trying to show him how I feel and he just rushed off. Like he couldn’t get away from me fast enough.”

The young woman sighed, knowing that she wasn’t going to be able to say anything to make Blaine feel better. “I know you do, hon. But he’s still really mad at you. And I know Kurt as well as you do… he’s not the forgive and forget type.”

“But he forgave me,” Blaine claimed insistently. “He told me so himself.”

She nodded. “But he didn’t forget. And Kurt isn’t the kind who just lets go of things that hurt him.”

“And who was that man with him?” Blaine asked plaintively. “He was all over Kurt.”

Tina inhaled deeply, knowing that if she was right that her friend was going to be hurt terribly. “Blaine… I’m thinking that he might be Kurt’s new boyfriend. I mean, why would he bring someone to a wedding if they weren’t dating?”

Blaine looked up at her, his face awash with horror when her words confirmed what he already feared. “You don’t really think that, do you?”

Tina bit her lower lip and nodded. “I think so. I mean, you saw the two of them together. I think that they’ve been dating for awhile now.”

“Oh no,” Blaine groaned, covering his face with his hands. “He can’t be. No..”

“Oh Blaine…” Tina quickly reached out to wrap her arms around him, pulling him close. “Kurt doesn’t deserve you. Whatever mistake you made, he shouldn’t be treating you like this.”
“I’m losing him, Tina,” Blaine moaned. “He’s left me for some old British guy. You know how much Kurt likes anything from England! He’s not even that good looking!”

Tina wanted to tell Blaine to forget about Kurt. Sure, cheating was horrible and she could understand Kurt being upset, but he was always such a drama queen. And he had no right to play with Blaine’s feelings like this. But Blaine was one of her best friends now and he still wanted Kurt, so she had to try to be supportive.

“You listen to me, Blaine Anderson,” she ordered firmly. “Kurt may have forgotten how wonderful you can be, so show him what he’s missing! We’re going to go to that wedding tomorrow and you’re going to look amazing and we’re going to have a good time.”

Blaine sniffled again and gave Tina a watery smile. “Thanks Tina… you really are too good to me.”

She smiled and gave him a reassuring hug. At the thought of Blaine’s ex, her eyes narrowed coldly. Kurt had been her friend once, but she couldn’t believe that he would do this to someone as special as Blaine. And she was going to make sure he knew exactly what she thought about him.

* * *

Finn sat on the back deck, staring off into the distance as he sipped absentmindedly on the cup of coffee in his hands. He hadn’t expected the day to go the way it did. He’d be harboring the hope for a long time that he and Rachel might get together someday, but he probably had slammed the door on that ever happening now. His ex-girlfriend could tolerate many things, but the kind of betrayal that he’d just perpetrated? That was the one thing that she would never forgive.

He heard the sliding door open and Adam stepped out, cradling a mug in his hands. “Hey,” Finn greeted.

“Mind if I join you?” Adam asked. “I kind of got evicted from the kitchen.”

Finn couldn’t help from smiling. “Kurt kicked you out?”

Adam grinned sheepishly. “I suppose that I was getting a bit underfoot.” Kurt normally didn’t mind sneak attack hugs, but not when helping to cook dinner.

Finn chuckled and gestured at the seat near him. “Make yourself comfortable.”

“Thanks.” Adam sat down and sipped at his mug. “Your mum is really amazing. She even got proper tea for me.”

“Thanks.” Adam sat down and sipped at his mug. “Your mum is really amazing. She even got proper tea for me.”

“She likes you,” Finn stated. “You’re really good for Kurt.”

“You think so?” Adam asked, looking at Finn from over the rim of his mug.

Finn nodded. “Yeah… I mean, I’ve just met you. But I see the difference in Kurt. He’s a lot more confident now. He looks happy.”

Adam smiled warmly. “That makes me really glad,” he said.

Finn looked at Adam appraisingly. “Can I ask you something?”

“Of course,” Adam answered.

Finn paused before speaking, wanting to get his thoughts organized. “When you first met Kurt, what did you think? I mean… was it love at first sight?”
Adam paused before answering. “I don’t think ‘love’ per say. I certainly admit to being very attracted. I mean… he is gorgeous. And a phenomenal performer. But he also was so sad and uncertain about things.” He smiled fondly remembering how Kurt was immediately following his Showcase performance. He seemed so genuinely surprised that people were actually applauding him.

“The more time we spent together, the more I found myself falling for him.”

Finn nodded understandingly. “It was kinda like that with me and Rachel,” he admitted. “I mean, I thought she was cute and all, but it took a long time before I fell in love.”

Adam nodded, taking a sip of his tea. “Kurt said that you were together for a long time.”

“Two and a half years,” Finn admitted. “I mean, we weren’t perfect and we broke up at one point. But I really thought that we were going to spend our whole lives together. And then it all started falling apart.”

Adam didn’t say anything, giving the younger man time to get what he wanted to say out.

Finn looked down at the mug in his hands. “I knew what she wanted to do. It was all she talked about. Broadway. Being a star. I knew that was what she wanted most. I just thought that she wanted me as much. But I couldn’t keep up with her.

“She got into NYADA and I… I had nothing,” Finn said, shamed by his failures. “I didn’t have anything that equaled what she was going to do. I couldn’t follow her.”

“Finn, I’m sure that’s not true,” Adam protested. “I mean, Kurt’s shown me videos of you all performing. You’re very talented in your own right.”

Finn smiled sadly at the compliment. “Thanks, but I’m realistic about that. I mean, I’m pretty good, but I’m never going to make a career as a singer. And I couldn’t act my way out of a paper bag. When Rachel told me that I should audition for NYADA so we could be together again, I knew that I just wouldn’t stand a chance. I… I just can’t be what she wants. I don’t fit in her world anymore.”

Adam didn’t tell Finn what he was thinking because he didn’t want to hurt the younger man. Finn was honest in his assessment of his talent, which was a pretty rare thing. Good, but not good enough to get into an elite conservatory. Rachel asking Finn to seek admission was basically telling him that he either fit into her world, or not at all.

“And everything else I tried got messed up. I’m not good enough for college football. I tried to join the army and I washed out of that,” Finn said morosely. “I’m just spinning my wheels.”

He looked over at Adam with a heartbroken look in his eyes. “You know, Rachel offered to defer starting NYADA until I could reapply for school in New York so we could go together. But I knew that she would end up resenting that. And that she would blame me for holding her back.”

“What did you do?” Adam asked gently.

Finn wiped at his eyes. “We were engaged. I wanted to marry her but… I let her go. I put her on the train to New York and hoped that maybe once I got myself together that we might be able to be together. But I waited too long and she changed too much and… it’s really over between us.”

Adam could see the pain in Finn’s face when he spoke and it was so clear that he still loved Rachel. Even knowing that they could not be together didn’t change that, and he was blaming himself completely for not living up to her expectations.
“What you did was incredibly selfless,” he said gently. “Letting someone go to live out their dreams when you can’t follow… that just shows how much you love her.”

“I totally screwed things up,” Finn protested. “Maybe if I hadn’t totally disappeared and kept in touch with her, we might have stood a chance.”

“Why did you?” Adam asked, putting his empty mug aside. “I’m not trying to be critical, but why didn’t you keep in contact with her?”

Finn looked down, his cheeks flushing with shame. “I was embarrassed. I totally screwed everything up in my life. She’s in New York at this amazing school where she was going to be a big star and I couldn’t even survive basic training. I have no idea of what I’m going to do with my life. How can I be with someone like Rachel?”

Adam might not have known Finn that well, but it bothered him deeply to hear the younger man speak so despairingly about himself. Talking as if he had nothing to offer just because he hadn’t figured out what he wanted in life yet. And believing that he didn’t deserve to be in a relationship with the woman that he loved because he couldn’t match her ambitions.

“Finn, from what I’ve seen, you have a lot to offer,” he stated gently. “You’re right now managing your choir very capably. That’s no small thing.”

The younger man snorted derisively. “The only reason I’m doing that is because Mr. Schue had to take time off for awhile.”

“And you’re doing it better than him in a lot of ways,” Adam claimed. “I’ve only seen a little bit, but you’re a lot fairer than your Mr. Schuester. And you’re actually trying to give the students some real vocal training.”

Finn ran a hand through his hair. “I can’t do this forever,” he said softly. “Once Mr. Schue is back from his honeymoon, he’s not going to need me there. Then what?”

Adam took a long moment, thinking of what to say before trying to answer. It certainly wasn’t his place to try to tell Finn what he should do with his life.

“Then you get to decided on what you want to do next,” Adam said. “Finn, you’re hardly the first person to need a gap year to figure their lives out.”

“Gap year?” Finn’s brow furrowed in confusion.

Adam sat up and smiled reassuringly. “It’s actually pretty common in England to take a year after finishing school to get a sense of what you want to do with your life. Better that then to rush into university or a job before you’re really ready to handle it. Instead of looking at this as some kind of failure on your part, take advantage of it. Use the time to explore a bit and see what motivates you.”

The anguished expression on Finn’s face began to ease. “You really think so?” he asked.

“I’ve got several mates who took a year off after we finished school,” Adam assured him. “Some went on to university, one of them took an apprenticeship… there’s no set rule to figuring life out. Not everyone is fortunate enough to know exactly what they want to do with their lives straight away. Some of us have to explore a bit before making a decision.”

Adam considered something carefully before broaching his next question. “Finn, are you feeling terribly for yourself specifically because you’re not measuring up to Rachel? Because if you are, you’re doing yourself a real disservice. Especially trying to match someone as uncompromising as
Rachel can be.”

Finn’s eyes narrowed as he had to consider what Adam was asking him. Would he feel as badly as he did if he wasn’t comparing himself to Rachel? After all, he wasn’t the only one of his classmates still seeking. Santana had dropped out of college and Puck… Puck had no clue what he was doing.

“I don’t know,” he answered honestly. “Maybe.”

“You shouldn’t,” Adam insisted. “You can’t run your life to live up to someone else’s expectations. You have to live it for yourself.”

Finn couldn’t deny that Adam was giving him some very good advice. He realized just how much of his past actions in the past year and a half have been about trying to match Rachel’s lofty ambitions. Applying for an acting program when he really didn’t have a huge interest in acting had been a mistake, as had pinning all his hopes on a football scholarship. He might not be the most talented guy around, or the smartest, but that didn’t mean that he had no options or future. That just because it wasn’t as clearly formed as the ambitions of Rachel’s and even Kurt’s that he had no path open to him.

He looked to Adam, finding none of the belittlement that he sometimes thought he saw in the eyes of others. “Your friends… the ones that took the ‘gap year’… what did they do to figure out what they wanted?”

“Well, one of them did a lot of traveling,” Adam explained. “He went backpacking through Europe. Another took a job for awhile until he was ready for university. And one of my friend’s sisters got a job in the US as a nanny and ended up studying to become a teacher. They just needed that extra year or so to sort things out in their heads.”

“I did some traveling,” Finn said, remembering his weeks on the Appalachian Trail. “I liked it. I didn’t have to think too much. Just putting one foot in front of the other.”

“What about working with the choir?” Adam asked. “Like I said, you’re really good at that. The kids really seem to respond to you.”

“I’m not very smart,” Finn admitted. “My grades in high school kind of sucked. I was really counting on football to get me into college.”

“You’ve got community colleges in the US,” Adam reminded. “It’d be a good way to get some upper level education under your belt and get a sense of what you want to do. And there’s no rule that you have to go to college if you find something else you want to do. But the important thing is that you pick what you want because it’s right for you and not because it’ll fit in with someone else’s expectations.”

Finn didn’t answer immediately, absorbing what the older man was telling him.

“Thanks, man,” he finally said with sincere gratefulness. Without Kurt around and his parents so tied up with Burt’s work in Washington and his diagnosis, he hadn’t really had anyone to talk to about what was going on. And he was so worried about disappointing his family. It felt good to have someone to talk to that didn’t seem a bias against him, or his own interest in Finn’s decisions. “Really appreciate you listening.”

“My pleasure,” Adam assured him. He very much liked Finn and he could understand being a bit lost in life. He could only help that he was able to help Finn in some small way.

The sliding door opened and Kurt poked his head out. “You guys about ready for dinner” he asked.
“Sure!” Finn said brightly, the worries that had plagued him clearing from his face. He looked to Adam. “You hungry, man?”

Adam turned a warm smile to his boyfriend. “I could eat,” he answered.

Finn walked inside to wash up for dinner and Kurt stepped out to join his boyfriend for a moment. “You two have a good talk?” he asked. “He looked really upset when he got home.”

Adam nodded. “He just needed someone to listen to him.”

Kurt sighed and sat down next to his boyfriend, leaning his head against Adam’s shoulder. “The past year hasn’t been easy on him,” he said softly. “I’m glad that he was comfortable talking to you.”

“I like him,” Adam said, kissing Kurt’s temple. “I’m happy that I might have been able to help him a little bit.”

Kurt smiled, taking Adam’s broad hand in his, entwining their fingers. “I wish that I knew what to tell him. He just seems so lost.”

“He is, but I think that he’s starting to figure his way out,” Adam assured him. “Especially if he stops comparing himself to Rachel all the time.”

Kurt sighed sadly, once again feeling caught between two people that he cared about. “Rachel… she’s not an easy person,” he acknowledged. “I love her, but it’s her world and we all just play parts in her story.”

“I know you care about her, love. It’s just…” Adam trailed off, not wanting to hurt his boyfriend and say what he really thought about her. The more time he spent around her, the less he liked her.

“I know that she’s hard to take sometimes,” Kurt agreed. He knew that better than most. “She means well. It’s just… she can’t see past her own wants a lot of the time.”

“I get that. I just don’t appreciate the way she treats people,” Adam insisted.

Kurt cuddled closer, knowing that Adam meant him specifically. But he knew who Rachel was and how to handle her, which made him more inclined to forgive her. Others found it a lot more challenging.

“We’d better go inside for dinner,” Kurt suggested, not wanting to argue the point with Adam. He knew that Adam was only trying to protect him.

Adam kissed Kurt again. “I just don’t want to see you hurt, sweetheart. I’m sorry if I come across too harshly. It’s not my place to criticize your friend.”

“Adam… it’s okay,” Kurt assured him. “I know that you just want to protect me. But I’m not blind to her behavior.”

“Okay, love. I’ll be nicer to her,” Adam promised, earning a glowing smile from his boyfriend. “Let’s go enjoy that wonderful meal you and your stepmother fixed for us.”

For the first time in months, Kurt got to enjoy a proper Friday night dinner with his family, keeping up the tradition that his parents had started when he was very young. Having Adam sitting at his side, accepted as part of the family felt so right.

And seeing the shadows dissipating from Finn’s eyes… well, that just made the evening perfect.
Blaine checked his suit one last time before zipping up the garment bag. He had considered wearing a tuxedo because Kurt had always appreciated it when he was really dressed up, but the wedding wasn’t a black tie affair. Mr. Schuester had wanted the students to be comfortable and felt that it was unreasonable to ask a group of high school students to spend the money to buy or rent a tux since the odds were most didn’t own one already. And Kurt had said many times that the biggest faux pas after being underdressed for an occasion was to be overdressed. So he would be wearing his best suit and hopefully that would impress Kurt.

He opened the drawer with his tie collection and tried to decide which one would appeal to Kurt. He thought about wearing the royal blue tie that Kurt had given him for his birthday last year, but that would be very presumptuous and would probably send the wrong message to his ex-boyfriend. Especially if that Englishman was indeed dating Kurt the way Tina suspected.

The thought of Kurt with someone else tightened Blaine’s stomach uncomfortably. He couldn’t stand the idea that someone else would be seeing that special little smile that Kurt would give only when he was happily surprised, or the way his blush would flow all the way down his chest when excited or angry. And the idea that someone would know what Kurt’s face looked like when he was aroused, or the way he would gasp when his lover’s teeth would worry the spot below his right ear made him physically ill.

He realized that he was running out of time. Kurt would be returning back to New York shortly and if Blaine couldn’t win him back, then he would lose him forever. Even if he got admission into NYADA, Kurt will continue to drift away from him, building a life that Blaine would not be a part of. Another man would be the one to hold Kurt, to know what only Blaine had known about Kurt up until now.

Steeling his resolve, Blaine decided on a red tie that he knew that Kurt particularly liked and would go well with his black suit. Tina had mentioned that she would be wearing red so they’d match nicely. He had already ordered from the florist a bouquet of red roses prepared for him to give her before they leave for the wedding. Even though they were just attending as friends, he still wanted it to be a special night for her.

Still… Reaching over to his night table, he pulled out several condoms and a fresh bottle of lubricant and tucked them into his shaving kit. Just in case.

He had arranged at the hotel to have champagne and chocolates waiting in his room for after the reception. Kurt always appreciated being spoiled and this would be his chance to show Kurt what he meant to him. It might be a bit extravagant, but if that is what it took for Kurt to see how much Blaine loved him, it would be well worth the effort. Kurt would see that Blaine could offer him so much more than that man he’d brought with him.

Honestly, Blaine couldn’t see what Kurt might want with someone like that. He looked so much older than Kurt, and not the kind that Kurt had ever shown interest in before. He was sure that this Adam was just a rebound. But then again, Kurt could be very stubborn and he had been digging in his heels about Blaine’s mistake for some time now. It was long past time for them to talk and get this out of Kurt’s system.

This would be it for him. Either he won Kurt back, or he would lose him forever. And Blaine was determined to win. He knew Kurt better than anyone, and knew what would appeal to him. There was no way that anyone else would get what made Kurt tick the way Blaine did and the instant that Kurt remembered that, Mr. Old Englishman would be left in the dust.
Rachel walked into her bedroom after bidding her fathers goodnight. They had been thrilled to have her home, even if only for a few days, and wanted to hear all about her adventures in New York. After so many weeks of challenges and disappointments, it was refreshing to have that kind of unstinting support. She didn’t have to feel badly about failing in her dance class, or losing Midnight Madness to Kurt. With her fathers, there were no challenges as a person and as a performer. She was still their shining star with no rival. After the kind of day she had, she very much needed that affirmation.

Still, it felt somewhat strange to be back in her old room even though it was left untouched by her parents. The same posters on the walls, the gold star decorating her dressing mirror. The pictures of her idols that she tried so hard to emulate. All her awards and certificates that showed just how highly she had been regarded by all her teachers and trainers before she left home. It felt like a time capsule, and part of her knew that it was her fathers’ way of showing pride in what she’s accomplished. One day, when she was a huge star, it could be preserved to show where she had come from.

It should make her feel proud. Instead she felt… oddly hollow.

On the picture board by her bed were all the photos of those special moments. Photos from her senior year competitions. One of her and Blaine from West Side Story. A few of herself and Kurt. And Finn… so many with Finn.

Her first instinct was to pull them down and toss them into the garbage. Finn had turned on her in a way that she never would have expected. Going back to before they started dating, and even when things were not good between them and when he went back to dating Quinn, he still supported her in New Directions. He had never said anything negative about her talent. Now? Now he mocked her right to her face.

Finn didn’t deserve to be counted as one of the people that she would think of fondly from her past. He was a mistake. One that needed to be put in her rear view mirror. She had moved on to bigger and far better things now. Why should she be at all concerned about what a small town boy who would never escape Lima thought of her? She reached up to pull his picture off the board when she caught a glimpse of herself in her mirror.

Her skirt was riding up in the back, nearly exposing her underwear. Her feet were hurting from the high heels that she had taken to wearing, and at the end of the day her makeup was starting to look smeared and overly harsh. She could barely recognize herself from the young girl in the pictures with Finn.

Had she really changed so much since she left home? Was she so awful that Finn, who had claimed to love her so deeply, wouldn’t want to be near her? Sure, she was the one who’d ended thing between them, but she’s had good reason to.

It had hurt so much when Finn cut off contact with her, leaving her alone and floundering in New York. She had been totally lost and the one person that she needed, along with her best friend, was the man that she loved. And he’d abandoned her. She had a right to be angry with him.

She had so much to look forward to now. She would be auditioning shortly for the role she’d been dreaming of her entire life. She had an amazing man back in New York who understood her aspirations and wouldn’t hold her back. She could feel that her life was about to change again in an amazing way.
But looking at the picture of her high school boyfriend in her hand, and seeing the love in his face as he looked the younger version of herself, she couldn’t help from wondering if just maybe she was changing, and maybe not for the better.
Chapter 4

Finn walked into the kitchen yawning loudly and hoping that someone had already put up a pot of coffee. He’d woken up quite a bit earlier than he’d planned to and after having had trouble sleeping, he wasn’t in the best frame of mind. His talk with Adam had given him a lot to think about, both regarding Rachel and his future and he just hadn’t been able to turn his brain off. But he was able to start making some long overdue decisions.

The tantalizing aroma of freshly brewed coffee greeted his entrance, and he wasn’t overly surprised to see that Kurt and Adam were already awake and having a light breakfast of toast and Greek yogurt.

“Hey,” Finn greeted.

“Good morning,” Kurt chirped, far too cheerful for Finn’s taste this early in the morning. “There’s a fresh pot.”

“Thanks guys,” Finn said gratefully, getting his favorite mug from the cabinet and pouring himself a cup. He added a generous portion of cream and sugar and sipped at it, hoping that the dose of caffeine would start to perk him up a bit. “Have you two been up long?”

“No too long,” Adam assured him. “We wanted to have a bit to eat before we went out.”

“Where are you going?” Finn asked curiously. With the wedding that afternoon, he hoped that they didn’t have any major plans.

“We just thought we’d get a few miles in this morning,” Adam explained.

Finn looked to his stepbrother and noticed that Kurt was wearing a warm up jacket and athletic pants. “What? You mean running? I didn’t know you were into that,” he said, more than a little surprised.

Kurt chuckled and sipped at his coffee. “I started a few months ago,” he admitted. “One of the guys at Vogue suggested that I give it a try if I wanted to lose the last of the baby fat, and it’s good for helping me build up endurance for dancing and singing at the same time. But it’s also great for helping clear my head.”

All of that made sense, but then Finn remembered who he was talking to. “But you hate getting sweaty,” he pointed out. “You used to argue that Glee should count as your phys ed requirement.”

“You get over that awfully quickly working with some of our dance instructors,” Adam explained. “If you’re not absolutely dripping by the end of class, then you’re obviously not working hard enough.”

Kurt nodded in agreement. “I’ve seen my dance teacher absolutely blast people more than a few times for not sweating enough. Not sure if she really wanted them to work harder or just wanted to scare the shit out of them.”

Finn cocked his head thoughtfully. It made sense in a weird way.

“But we’ve got the wedding later on,” he reminded them. “Do you really have time?”

“We’ve got a few hours before we need to leave,” Kurt stated. “We won’t be gone long.”
“Finn, why don’t you join us,” Adam invited. “We just want to get a few kilometers in.”

Finn brightened visibly at the prospect. As someone who’d been active all his life, he’d admittedly let his exercise team fall by the wayside in the past few weeks. “You won’t mind?” he asked, not wanting to intrude on them if they really didn’t want him around.

Adam smiled cheerfully. “Of course not. We’d enjoy the company.”

“Great!” Finn crowed, quickly chugging down the last of his coffee. “Give me five to change!”

Kurt smiled and shook his head at Finn’s mercurial shift in mood. Just yesterday he acted like his life was over and now he seemed very much more his old self. He was so glad that talking to Adam seemed to have had such a beneficial effect, and that Finn and his boyfriend seemed to be getting along so well.

His stepbrother met them by the front door and after a quick stretching to loosen up, the three set out. Kurt and Adam kept an easy, steady pace and even though Finn had been lax about his exercise since returning to Lima, he had no problem keeping up with them. It felt good to really stretch his muscles and slip into an activity that let him turn off his brain for a little bit.

The whole time, Kurt and Adam kept up a steady conversation about plans for their choir back in New York. Occasionally Kurt would break into song, trying out something to get Adam’s opinion. Finn was surprised at what good shape the both of them were in to be able to carry on talking the whole time. He remembered back when he was doing football that the team would barely be able to talk after one of Bieste’s exercise sessions. But neither of them seemed to be straining at all and were able to carry on talking through their whole run.

By the time they returned to the house, the three of them were a bit out of breath but not totally exhausted. Kurt was still able to speak fairly normally, which really showed Finn just how much stamina he had now. It was so strange to see Kurt wearing exercise clothes and his face shining with perspiration. Not all that long ago it would have been difficult to imagine Kurt willingly engaging in any kind of serious athletic activity, but now he really seemed to enjoy pushing his body.

And it wasn’t hard to see that his body had changed a lot as well. Kurt was a lot leaner and more muscular than he’d ever been before. The angles of his face were more defined and Finn thought that Kurt looked like some kind of model. He’d always thought that Kurt was kind of good looking, even back when they first joined New Directions and he still looked like a kid. But now? Finn didn’t think that one needed to be gay to recognize that Kurt was totally hot and he could easily see why a man like Adam would be so into him.

But even more importantly, to Finn, was that he just looked so much happier. It was clear that he was finding opportunities at NYADA that he never would have gotten at McKinley and Kurt was flourishing. Finn was happy to have a chance to see for himself these changes in Kurt. He seemed so much more comfortable in his own skin and finally coming into his own.

The three of them were laughing, feeling loose and mildly tired from their exertion. Finn had forgotten how much better he felt after really pushing his body and promised to himself to keep up on his exercise.

Kurt opened the refrigerator and tossed bottles of water to his boyfriend and step brother. Taking a long sip, he warned Finn, “I’d shower first if I were you. Adam and I will need a bit more time between the two of us.”

“Especially if you shower together,” Finn chuckled, earning a shocked look from his stepbrother.
“What? I mean, you’re boyfriends so that means that you’re having sex,” Finn acknowledged. “Which is totally cool.”

“But you just don’t blurt it out like that!” Kurt exclaimed.

“I’m just trying to be supportive,” Finn protested. “I mean, hot guys like you should be having sex.”

“Finn, there are times when I can’t even talk to you…”

Adam just chuckled at their antics, sipping at his water and wisely staying out of the line of fire when Kurt began to swat at his stepbrother with a dish towel.

Burt and Carole walked into the kitchen and found the collections of sweaty young men. “All right… all of you need to clear out before you completely stink up my kitchen,” Carole ordered. She then turned to his son. “And Finn… no teasing Kurt, please? We’d like him to be able to come home once in awhile.”

“Sorry mom,” Finn said with astonishing sincerity given the glint of humor in his eyes.

She just shook her head and looked to the other young men apologetically. “Honestly, I did try to teach him manners when he was growing up, but I think it’s a lost cause now.”

“No worries,” Adam assured her, not offended at all. “We’ve got a bunch in New York that are equally bad at respecting boundaries.”

“So what time are you all heading out?” Burt asked, helping himself to the coffee pot.

“The ceremony is at five, so I figure that we should leave at noon,” Kurt suggested. “That will give us plenty of time to drive to the hotel and check in. We can get ready there before heading to the church.”

Finn nodded in agreement. “That sounds like a good idea. Will you help me get ready?” he asked his stepbrother. “You always look good and I could use the help.”

Kurt just beamed at the request, and Adam wondering if Finn knew what he was letting himself in for.

“Well, I’m glad that you boys are being smart and staying at the hotel tonight,” Burt said agreeably, pouring a cup of coffee for his wife. “I feel better knowing that you won’t be trying to drive home late. Especially if you have anything to drink.”

“It’ll be fun,” Finn insisted. “Like a big New Directions slumber party.”

“Still, if you run into any problems, I want you to call,” Burt insisted. “We’re not that far away.”

Kurt just smiled, knowing that his father would never be able to completely lose his protective streak. It didn’t matter if they were just a few miles away or halfway across the country. At one time, Kurt might have bristled against that kind of overprotectiveness. But now, it was a warm comfort.

Two hours later, once all of them had a chance to shower and Kurt had personally approved of Finn’s clothing choices for the ceremony, Adam helped Finn load their bags into the car. Burt and Carole stepped outside to see them off.

“Don’t forget that we’re supposed to meet for lunch tomorrow,” Burt reminded them.

“We’ll be back after breakfast,” Kurt assured him, giving his father and stepmother a quick hug.
Carole then turned to her son and pulled him into his arms. “Have a good time, sweetheart.”

“I will, Mom.”

Finn was glad that he would be going in with Kurt, and now Adam. He’d been very apprehensive about facing Rachel again, but Adam’s pep talk did a lot to cheer him up and gave him a new perspective on things. He knew that he still loved Rachel, and a part of him probably always would, but it had reached a point where he was just no longer able to overlook her shortcomings. Her selfishness and inability to see how her actions affected others just could no longer be ignored. He knew that he had done the same at times, and maybe he was kind of a jerk for ignoring it until that kind of behavior was directed at him, but better late than never.

He knew that he had a few more weeks with New Directions, and the he had some decisions to make. Adam had given him some interesting ideas about using this time to get some direction in his life and he planned not to squander the opportunity. Now that he was freed of Rachel’s gravitational pull, he could actually focus on himself for a change.

The hotel hosting the reception was one of the better ones in the greater Lima area, and it didn’t take long for them to check in. Once Finn had dropped his overnight bag in his room, he joined Kurt and Adam in theirs so they could get ready together. Finn figured that Kurt was relieved that he would be able to make sure that Finn was presentable, but he didn’t mind it. He wanted to spend as much time with Kurt while he was in town as possible, and he really liked Adam. He felt comfortable joking with them and he really liked seeing how Adam treated Kurt. With respect, like Kurt was completely his equal.

Kurt ordered Finn to sit down so that he could make some sense out of his hair. “I thought I told you to stop going to SuperCuts,” he griped as he was trying to tame Finn’s wayward style with a judicious application of pomade.

“I’m sorry! I was in a rush and the place you told me to go to doesn’t take walk ins!” Finn protested.

Adam had already been personally groomed by his boyfriend, his normally messy curls tamed into a pleasantly tousled style. “Darling, take it easy on him,” he advised, watching the pair with mild amusement. “Finn looks fine.”

Kurt stepped back with a huff, looking at Finn’s hair. “Well, I supposed it’ll be okay.”

Finn took a look in the mirror and had to admit that Kurt did a good job. Whatever it was Kurt worked into his hair got the frizz to lay smooth and smelled something like birthday cake. “It looks great. Thanks, dude,” he said sincerely.

Kurt gave him a warm smile. “Well, I can’t have you doing the best man toast looking like some kind of hobo, can I?”

That was Kurt, Finn mused. Always taking care of someone. But now he also had someone to take care of him too. Adam got their suits out of the garment bags while Kurt styled his own hair into a tall swoop and sprayed it liberally with some kind of fancy hair spray that probably cost more than Finn would spend on grooming supplies for a year.

Once they were all dressed, Finn had to admit that they looked really good. The tie he was wearing had been a present from Kurt, who’d been taking liberal advantage of his access to the Vogue fashion vault with his boss’s blessing. Kurt was wearing a dark blue suit from some fancy British designer with a waistcoat. The front of the jacket fasted with decorative gold chains rather than buttons. Adam was dressed more conservatively in a dark grey pinstripe that also looked expensive.
“Adam, did Kurt pick out your suit?” Finn couldn’t help from asking. Going by how casually Adam seemed to dress normally, the suit didn’t look like something he would have chosen for himself.

The British man chuckled. “He most certainly did, right down to my shoes. He took one look at my only suit and was on the phone, begging his boss for help. The next thing I knew, I was at his office trying on things that she had selected for him.”

“There was no way I was going to let you wear that rag,” Kurt sniffed imperiously, adjusting Adam’s pocket square. “Not when you’ve got a body that was made for designer clothes.”

“I rather like it,” Adam admitted. “It’s very Savile Row. And admittedly, a lot better than I could afford on a poor student’s budget.”

“Wow,” Finn marveled. He turned to his stepbrother and noted, “You really did get a lot of stuff from Vogue.”

“Well, designers are sending us stuff all the time, and after it gets used in a photo shoot, it just goes into the vault,” Kurt explained, not at all embarrassed about enjoying some perks from his job. “Pretty much everyone in the office gets a few things from the vault every now and then. And heaven help anyone who gets in Isabelle’s way when new shoes arrive. She always gets first dibs.”

“Well, you two look fantastic,” Finn complimented. “Kurt, give me your phone. You need a picture of yourselves.”

The pair posed with Adam wrapping his arms about Kurt from behind and holding him close while Finn snapped a few pictures. When Adam playfully kissed Kurt’s nose, Finn couldn’t help from taking another picture.

He knew that he shouldn’t compare, but he could never remember Blaine ever being this physically affectionate with Kurt in front of other people. And the last time Kurt had dressed at all flamboyantly for an event with Blaine, it was for prom and Blaine was not at all comfortable with Kurt’s fashion sense. He was glad that Kurt had found someone who appreciated him for who he was and wasn’t going to try to change him to suit his own tastes.

“Let me get a picture of you two handsome men,” Adam insisted, motioning for them to stand together.

Finn grinned and quickly pulled Kurt to him, placing his arm around Kurt’s shoulders while Adam snapped a few pictures. He was genuinely happy at that moment. He had his amazing stepbrother, who somewhere along the line had become one of his best friends. And he had Adam who was well on his way to becoming a friend as well.

Kurt insisted on getting a picture of the three of them together, saying that he needed one of his favorite guys and that just made Finn feel all warm inside. He genuinely loved Kurt and was so happy that they reached this point in their relationship. It took him too long to realize just how lucky he was to have Kurt in his life.

They left for the church a bit early since, as best man, Finn was supposed to help Mr. Schu get ready. “I’ll see you both inside,” Finn promised, leaving them at the parking lot.

Once alone, Kurt looked coyly at Adam. “You know, we’ve got at least a half hour before we need to be inside,” he advised.
“Oh?” Adam asked blithely, one eyebrow cocked archly.

“Mmm hmmm. In fact, if we don’t mind sitting in the back, we should probably stretch it out to forty five minutes,” Kurt claimed.

Adam didn’t miss the teasing tone in Kurt’s voice. “Whatever shall we do to pass the time?”

Kurt sighed dramatically. “Well, There’s a Starbucks across the street. I suppose we could go get a cup of coffee.”

Adam nodded agreeably. “We could do that. You like coffee.”

“I do, don’t I? We could also stand here and play fashion critic,” Kurt suggested playfully. “I mean, there should be some very awkwardly dressed individuals since this is Ohio.”

“That is also an option,” Adam agreed. “Though it might be a bit nippy to stand out here so long. Any other suggestions?”

“Well… Finn did leave me the car keys. We could sit in the car where it’s warmer.”

“That does sound nice, but what will we do there?” Adam asked, his eyes twinkling mischievously. “I get bored so quickly.”

“We could listen to music. And we could talk,” Kurt said. He paused, trailing a finger slowly down the lapel of Adam’s suit. “Or we could make out like horny teenagers.”

“In a church parking lot?” Adam gasped in mock astonishment. “Kurt, I am completely scandalized that you would suggest such a thing!”

Kurt opened the car’s back door and grinned slyly. “Coming?”

* * *

“So you see him?” Blaine asked urgently, craning his head about to look about the church. “He should have been here by now.”

Tina sighed and tried not to snap at her friend. Almost from the moment they arrived, every other word out of his mouth had something to do with his ex-boyfriend. “No, not yet. Don’t worry… he’ll be here soon. He’s just being fashionably late,” she assured him. “You know how he is.”

Blaine turned to her, giving her a thankful smile. “I don’t know what I would do without you, Tina,” he said gratefully. “You’ve kept me sane though all this.”

She gave his arm a gentle pat. “Honey, it’s going to be okay.”

Blaine sighed deeply, trying to keep his nervousness in check.

Tina bit her lip. This was getting out of hand and she needed to redirect Blaine’s focus, otherwise he would just sit there fretting until Kurt arrived. “You look so handsome,” she complimented sincerely. The dark suit and red tie complimented him so well and she was again struck by just how handsome he was.

“You really think so?” Blaine asked, his brows furrowing uncertainly.

“Of course!” she insisted. “Blaine, you’re sweet and charming and handsome… anyone would count themselves lucky to be with you. I know that I am.”
“Aww..” He pressed a gentle kiss to her cheek. “I’m the lucky one to have you.”

Tina preened and snuggled close to him, wanting to enjoy the fantasy for as long as she could.

* * *

They ended up being interrupted twenty minutes later by Mercedes rapping insistently on the car window. By then, Kurt was sprawled over Adam, doing his best to gnaw at his boyfriend’s throat without totally messing his gorgeous suit while Adam hand his hands gripping Kurt’s ass and grinding their hardening cocks together. What had started as a harmless make-out session had gotten a lot more heated than they’d originally planned.

“Oh no!” she exclaimed. She grasped the door handle and found to her relief that they had not locked it. Kurt looked up at saw her affronted expression as she glared down at them. “Do not tell me that you two were getting it on in the Lord’s house!”

“Well, technically the Lord’s parking lot,” Kurt corrected as he and Adam carefully disentangled. Apparently all of Lima was in on the conspiracy to interrupt them in as embarrassing a manner as possible.

“Kurt, that is just so trashy,” she accused, noting in amusement at how both men were trying to use their coats to cover up any embarrassing evidence of what they’d been up do. “What happened to my sweet boy who was always so prim and proper?”

“He got himself a hot man that he can’t keep his hands off of,” Kurt informed her proudly. He turned to his boyfriend and reached up to gently brush one of Adam’s curls back into place “Am I a complete mess?” he asked.

“Perfect and stunning as always,” Adam assured him. Some of the stiffness had come out of Kurt’s hair, but Adam liked it better with a slightly softer look.

Kurt adjusted his suit jacket and turned to take in Mercedes’s outfit. “Let me see,” he commanded, motioning for her to do a fashion turn to which she happily complied.

“Very nice,” he approved. Mercedes was born to wear bright, cheerful colors and the fuchsia colored gown with its artful ruching suited her perfectly. Unlike many full figured girls, she knew what worked with her body and could dress exceptionally well for any occasion.

“And you two look very handsome,” she cooed appreciatively. She took their arms so that she stood between them. “I could get used to this… walking in with two amazingly gorgeous escorts. It’s very L.A.” she giggled.

“Not nearly as dazzling as you are,” Adam protested. “You must be breaking hearts all over Los Angeles.”

She positively beamed at that compliment. “Oh, you definitely are a charmer,” she chuckled, turning a sly eye to her friend. “You’d better be keeping this one, because if you don’t then I’m laying claim.”

Kurt laughed and shook his head. “That’s not going to happen, because first, you don’t have the right equipment. And second, I’m not letting him go,” he promised, giving Adam a smile and a wink. “Besides… weren’t you telling me about that hot session drummer that you were drooling over.”

Mercedes’s cheeks flushed when she realized that Kurt had her in a corner. Time for a quick diversion strategy. “Hey, did Kurt ever tell you that I had the worst crush on him when we were
younger?” she asked Adam. “I mean, I was totally head over heels for him.”

“No, he didn’t mention that,” Adam said, amused at Kurt’s dramatic eye roll. “But I can understand why… I was completely besotted when I met him too.”

“He was just so adorable then, even if he still had those baby cheeks,” Mercedes sighed, giving the former object of her affection a playful nudge. “And he dressed like something out of a magazine. He could have had half the girls in the school if he’d been straight.”

“Not letting it go,” Kurt warned her, seeing right through her tactics. “You’re going to tell me all about Mr. Gorgeous with the arms once I get a few drinks into you.”

Stepped into the church together and they paused to take in the sight of the beautifully decorated congregation space. The flower displays were ornate but tasteful arrangements of white roses and pink orchids and it was obviously due more to Ms. Pillsbury’s influence than their former teacher’s.

Kurt spotted Rachel sitting in the second row of pews and she waved to make sure she had his attention. Noting the empty places by her, he mused, “Looks like Rachel saved us seats.”

Mercedes gave him a kiss on the cheek. “You boys go sit down. I’ve got to warm up for the procession.”

“Break a leg,” Kurt urged, and she turned a glowing smile on him before heading into the attendants’ room.

Rachel slid over so they could sit down, Kurt placing himself in the middle. “You two look great,” she complimented.

“Thanks, so do you,” Kurt said to be polite, even though he didn’t particularly like Rachel’s dress. It was too short and the bright shade of pink just didn’t seem to go with her overly tanned complexion. And maybe it was his imagination, but her hair seemed to be getting bigger.

“Isn’t this wonderful?” Rachel gushed, leaning into Kurt’s space and hugging his arm. “They waited so long and now they’re finally getting married.”

Kurt nodded. “It’s always nice to see people end up happily together. I intend to let my inner romantic free rein today.”

Adam nodded agreeably, but then got a prickling feeling running up his spine. Like they were being watched. As subtly as he could so that Kurt wasn’t alerted, he turned his head to look about and noted the pair sitting several rows behind them staring intently.

* * *

“Tina! Look!” Blaine whispered urgently. “He’s here.”

Tina turned her head to see Kurt stepping into the church with Mercedes. Damn, but Kurt looked amazing. Where did he get that suit? But then she saw the elegantly dressed man with them and her jaw dropped.

“Oh my God… they’re so gorgeous,” she said breathlessly. Kurt’s suspected boyfriend was just as hot as he was, in a mature older man kind of way.

Blaine’s face visibly fell when he saw the British man at Kurt’s side, walking to the row where Rachel was sitting. She greeted them cheerfully and it was pretty obvious that she was familiar with
this Adam guy. And Kurt was sitting between them, indicating that he wanted to sit near Adam.

But it was seeing Adam putting his hand gently on Kurt’s shoulder in a familiar, caring manner that spoke volumes. And the way that Kurt seemed to lean into his touch, his hand reaching up to touch Adam’s. It was a response that implicated a familiarity that caused the acid in Blaine’s stomach to churn.

There was no doubt about it. Kurt was indeed romantically linked to this man and has been for some time for Kurt to be so at ease with him. The quiet intimacy between the two men just confirmed that Blaine’s plans to win Kurt back were that much more complicated.

The man at Kurt’s side turned to meet his eyes and Blaine found himself caught by a cool, knowing stare that froze him in his seat. The older man was clearly taking his measure and finding him lacking, and Blaine could only feel the anger rising up in him. How dare this stranger come here and mock him like this.

And Kurt was just sitting there, talking with Rachel and ignoring what was going on. Ignoring that Blaine was even in the room with them. Blaine felt his stomach tighten painfully at seeing the love of his life apparently not care at all that he was anywhere near. Instead he was laughing softly at something Rachel said and turning to give his boyfriend a warm smile.

And that bastard… he just gave Blaine a challenging smile and as if to add insult to injury, leaned in to give Kurt’s hair a gentle nuzzle.

“Blaine…” Tina started, wanting to comfort him but he wasn’t inclined to be comforted. He was furious and if this creep wanted a challenge, then Blaine was more than inclined to give him one.

“I’m fine,” he snapped. But then he remembered that it wasn’t Tina he was angry with and quickly turned to soothe her.

“I’m sorry,” he said sincerely, upset that he had put such a hurt look on her face. “I shouldn’t be taking it out on you.”

She nodded and forced her hurt feelings aside, reaching over to take her hand in hers comfortingly. “I’m sorry, Blaine. I know that you were looking forward to seeing him.”

“It’s like he’s forgotten me,” Blaine whispered despondently. “Like I don’t mean anything to him at all.”

Tina knew that there was nothing she could say to Blaine to comfort him, but this was hardly over. While her heart broke over Blaine not being able to love her the way she loved him, she would prove her love to him by helping him get back the one he wanted. Kurt might think he was beyond Blaine now, having moved on with his new man but she would teach him the error of his ways. That he should consider himself lucky to have had Blaine and that he should be crawling on his knees to have him back.

Kurt might have been her friend at one time, but he had changed so much since he left Lima. He needed to be reminded of who he really was and what was important. And she was just the person to do that.

* * *

The ceremony was absolutely beautiful. Mercedes was magnificent as she sang “Le Vie En Rose” for the processional march, her voice gloriously filling the church. For once, an event that New Directions was involved in was devoid of drama or mishaps. Mr. Shuster was beaming as Emma
walked down the aisle, looking absolutely radiant in her vintage inspired gown. Even Sue Sylvester was on her best behavior, sitting in the back and watching the ceremony with a bemused expression.

The minister spoke about love being a passage that often didn’t seem to have a clear destination but was still vital and worth the risks, citing the long journey the bride and groom had taken to reach this moment. When it came time for the bride and groom to speak their vows, they talked about their life journey to find one another. That life wasn’t perfect and they would have challenges to face but were going to face them together. When they kissed, the entire group in attendance was on their feet and applauding.

Kurt couldn’t resist stealing a look at Adam, his boyfriend smiling broadly as he applauded the newlyweds. His life had certainly taken more than its fair share of twists and hit more than a few dead ends before he found a path that he felt he could walk to its conclusion. Maybe he was just being taken in by the romance of the day, but he really was starting to think that he was finally moving towards something really wonderful.

Adam has been so wonderful, patient and gentle with him because of all his myriad issues. He knew that he had come to care deeply for Adam in the weeks that they’d been together as a couple, but he’d been so afraid of opening himself up completely. He’d done that with Blaine and ended up repeatedly hurt as a result.

He never felt like that with Adam. He felt secure in a way that he hadn’t felt with anyone since his father before. Adam encouraged him and urged him to be the best that he could, but never demanded that he be anything other that who he actually was. He didn’t want to change Kurt, or force Kurt into a mold that didn’t suit him. He’d earned Kurt’s trust.

Was he in love? He was almost afraid of the answer. Because so often in his experience, love meant leaving himself open to being hurt. And he was so tired of being hurt. But he was more tired of being afraid. He was tired of holding back on something that could be wonderful out of fear that it would blow up in his face.

Adam seemed to sense that Kurt was thinking too hard and looked down at him, the expression on his handsome face mildly concerned that Kurt seemed distracted at such a joyous moment. Kurt gave him a smile of reassurance and took his hand, giving it a squeeze. He looked back at the happy couple kissing for the first time as husband and wife and felt the tears welling up in his eyes. They were his proof that love could exist after heartbreak.

He just needed to be brave enough to take it.

* * *

Rachel couldn’t help from watching Finn during the ceremony, distracting her from actually watching the bride and groom. He looked so handsome standing at Mr. Schuster’s side, the expression on his face quietly joyous for their old teacher and friend and it was hard not to get swept up in the moment. He carried out his duties as best man perfectly, producing the rings at just the right moment for them to be slipped into the hands of the newlyweds, signifying their union together.

At one point, she had expected that for herself. She had worn Finn’s ring on her finger and had planned to spend her life with him. Until he’d thrown it all away.

Now she was an outsider in his life. They barely spoke any more. She had no idea what he was doing, or what his plans were for the future. What was making him happy now or even if he regretted how things had ended between them. But getting answers to those questions would open up a box that she wasn’t sure could ever be closed again once she did.
Not for the first time since she came back to Lima, she wished that she had been able to convince Brody to come with her but he had been too busy with school projects. Few of their former classmates seemed all that interested in speaking with her at any point, and Kurt was too busy with his family and Adam to spend much time with her. Having Brody there would have given her a reminder that her life in New York was what she had dreamed of, even if her old classmates weren’t at all interested in her new life. He was the one who seemed to recognize what she was on the verge of accomplishing.

Seeing Mr. Schuster and Ms. Pillsbury marry just reminded Rachel of the things that she had lost. This was a life that she just couldn’t return to and the more she tried, the more it was clear that she’d burned her bridges here.

But looking up at Finn’s handsome face, her former fiancé smiling and acting as if he didn’t have a care in the world while he stood up with Mr. Schuster just struck a chord in her that she couldn’t ignore. He didn’t seem at all bothered by her presence, or the fact that he could no longer have her. There were no longing glances in her direction and it would have been impossible for her to miss her sitting right in the front.

She bit her lower lip in frustration, not sure of what she really wanted. She was the one who made the decision to end their relationship once and for all. So why did she have this lingering feeling of unfinished business that she just couldn’t shake? Why did she want his attention if she had already moved on?

She glanced over at Kurt, who seemed so content with Adam and she had to admit that the older man was very good for her friend. He didn’t seem to have any lingering doubts about Blaine. So why was she still torn up over Finn?

Well, she wasn’t going to let him just ignore her. At the very least, they were going to talk so she could get him out of her system once and for all. Brody wouldn’t hold anything she did against her and it would give her a chance to figure out just what it was that kept pulling her back here.

* * *

Kurt and Adam walked into the ballroom at the hotel where the wedding reception was being held and chuckled as he looked about the space. As tastefully decorated as the church was for the ceremony, the reception was just the opposite. It was a garish mishmash of hearts and flowers and every romantic cliché one could possibly think of.

“Wake me up… I’m in a Valentine’s Day nightmare,” Kurt joked with his boyfriend, playfully trying to shield his eyes from the onslaught of tastelessness as he clutched Adam’s arm dramatically.

Adam grinned. “It is a bit out there,” he admitted.

Kurt looked to Adam and gave him a knowing stare. “Admit it… you like it.”

Adam looked about again, taking in the bright lights and the mylar streamers everywhere. “No, it’s absolutely tragic and you know it,” he laughed, pulling Kurt in for a side hug. “I’m surprised you haven’t spontaneously combusted upon entering the room.”

“I’m immune to camp,” Kurt claimed loftily, pressing a quick kiss on Adam lips. “And while I wish that they would have hired a proper wedding planner and not roped Finn into helping because my brother has no taste whatsoever… it’s a really happy day and I’m not going to snark all over everything.”
“Well, this place will probably be easier to tolerate after a stiff drink or two,” Adam claimed. “Let’s find our table and the bar.”

The cocktail hour was pleasant as everyone chatted and enjoyed the hors d’oeuvres being passed about while they waited for the happy couple to arrive. They met up with Mercedes, Quinn and Santana by the bar and were having a pleasant time critiquing the ceremony (which they all admitted was very sweet), the bride’s dress (gorgeous) and that half of Ohio had no clue how to dress.

“And what is going on with Rachel?” Quinn asked as she sipped at her white wine. “She looks like she’s auditioning for ‘New York’s Next Top Stripper’, not Funny Girl.”

Santana cackled loudly at Quinn’s dig, hand waving away Kurt’s look of disapproval. “Aw, ease up, Hummelicious,” she begged playfully. “It’s not your fault that she turned her makeover into a horror show.”

“Guys, can you cut her some slack?” Kurt asked. “She’s got a lot of pressure on her at NYADA, and she’s got a serious audition coming up.”

“Which she talks about to whoever has the misfortune of standing still for five minutes,” Quinn pointed out. “Kurt, I know that she’s your friend but let’s be honest. She’s at best tolerable in small doses.”

Kurt wanted to defend Rachel, but seriously… he was having a difficult time doing so. As unkind as Quinn and Santana were being, they weren’t entirely wrong.

“I thought you guys were all friends,” he protested, knowing that the argument sounded weak even to his own ears. “I mean… you even came to New York to talk her out of that project.”

Quinn just shrugged. “We’re trying, but she’s not an easy person. More often than not, our friendships are about supporting her in some way. It gets rather tiring after awhile.”

Kurt couldn’t argue with that, especially not with how he’d been withdrawing from Rachel the past weeks. He hadn’t gone with her to sign up for the Funny Girl and he’s so far refused her requests for his help in selecting audition material or helping her practice. And at least a few days every week found him staying at Adam’s place rather than returning to the loft. If he was completely honest with himself, the odds were that next semester would find Rachel and him living apart.

And that saddened him. He had a lot invested in his relationship with Rachel and seeing their friendship fading made him feel like he’d failed in some way. But it shouldn’t be this hard to justify why they were friends. Or to explain just how he benefited from it.

He looked up at saw Mercedes studying him with concern in her warm eyes. “Baby, I know that you two have been close for a long time, but you know Rachel better than anyone. She can be sweet as sugar when she wants to, but she really does need a lot of hand holding.”

“That’s putting it mildly,” Santana added. She sipped at her cocktail and snorted at Kurt’s despondent expression. “Oh, lighten up Hummel. You’ve been her punching bag almost as much as Finn has been and at least he got some very uptight missionary-position sex out of having to deal with her. Unless she’s unclenched enough to put on a strap-on for you…”

“Oh my God!” Quinn quickly slapped her hand over Santana’s mouth to cut off her tirade. “You have not had enough to drink to start saying things like that,” she laughed.

Kurt just shook his head at his friend’s antics. “Santana, I’m revoking your speaking privileges for the rest of the evening,” he proclaimed. “Rachel and strap-on should never be used in the same
Santana pulled Quinn’s hand away from her face and smirked at him. “Bite my clit, Hummel.”

“No thanks,” he quipped. “I’ve got bigger and better things to put in my mouth.”

The three women seemed genuinely shocked to hear something so course coming from Kurt. Santana’s smirk would have done a she-devil proud and Quinn raised a coolly appraising eyebrow in response. Mercedes’s mouth dropped into an adorable “o” and then all three girls turned their knowing gaze to Adam, who snorted in amusement at their antics and shook his head. He was going to need another drink if they kept this up.

There it was again… the feeling that they were being watched. Adam glanced about and spotted Kurt’s ex along with that pretty Asian girl he’d attended the ceremony with, sitting at a table across the room from them. The look the younger man was giving them was strange and mildly disturbing. There was longing there, but also a lot of anger. Adam wasn’t sure if that anger was directed at him or at Kurt, but it made him very uncomfortable and concerned for Kurt.

The expression on the girl’s face was positively venomous and she was not bothering to mask her feelings. She would whisper insistently in Blaine’s ear, gesturing at them and glared at Kurt with a fury that had Adam very, very disturbed. He couldn’t imagine Kurt having done anything to warrant an old classmate to be so obviously angry with his mere presence. Though her constant presence at Blaine’s side certainly hinted at the root of her resentment towards Kurt.

He’d expected at least a little drama with Blaine, but it appeared that Blaine would have a proxy to do some of his dirty work for him. Adam glanced at Kurt, enjoying himself and having an animated conversation with his friends and knew that there might be no way to totally insulate him from any unpleasantness.

Noting that Kurt was busying verbally sparring with Santana, he got Mercedes’s attention. “Love, that girl sitting by Blaine,” he started, gesturing subtly. “She looks ready to skin Kurt alive.”

Mercedes’s mouth drew into a thin line when she saw who he was talking about. “Tina… I swear, that girl has lost all sense.”

“Why does she appear to be so angry at Kurt?” Adam asked.

“Oh, who knows?” Mercedes answered, exasperated. “She’s been an absolute mess since she and her boyfriend broke up.”

Adam nodded, taking in that bit of information. “Are she and Blaine close?” he asked carefully. “The few times I’ve seen them, they always seem to be together.”

Mercedes shrugged. “I don’t really know. I mean, I haven’t been around much the past few months. But I wouldn’t put it past Blaine to be trying to use her because she was Kurt’s friend. He can be awfully sneaky.”

Adam’s mouth drew into a disapproving frown. He’d seen this kind of thing before and it always bothered him to see friends turned against one another by a third party. And given how manipulative Blaine had been with Kurt, he wouldn’t be at all surprised to see him doing the same with others if it benefited him in some way. Especially someone who was probably vulnerable as this Tina girl seemed to be.

“Do me a favor,” Mercedes asked, giving the pair at the table a hard glare. “Keep an eye on my boy. I don’t want to see him upset by all this. He and Tina were tight for awhile.”
“Of course,” Adam agreed, without hesitation.

“Of course what?” Kurt asked, overhearing the tail end of their conversation. He looked up at his boyfriend with a questioning tilt of his head.

“Nothing important, darling,” Adam assured him, immediately plastering a cheerful smile onto his face. He pulled Kurt into his arms and pressed a lingering kiss to Kurt’s lips, hoping to distract him from pressing too much. “Just promising Mercedes that I’m treating you the way you deserve.”

“God… any more sweetness here and I’m going to barf,” Santana quipped, finishing off her drink and motioning for the bartender to pour her another. She turned her sharp eyes to Kurt. “We’re going to get enough of that from the happily marrieds, so could you and Masterpiece Theater here refrain from throwing more sparkles on the fire?”

“Hey, all of you… hush now,” Mercedes ordered, noting that the band had stopped playing and Finn was taking his place on the stage. “Looks like the festivities are really about to begin.”

* * *

“Can I have everyone’s attention?” Finn asked politely as the guests turned to the stage. He felt a bit self-conscious standing there, but knew what a big honor he was being afforded. Not just to introduce the newlyweds, but to sing for the first dance.

Fortunately there were a lot of familiar faces in the crowd. Kurt and Adam were back at the bar with the girls and his stepbrother was giving him a double thumbs up for encouragement. The younger kids were seated at tables and he spotted Blaine and Tina being joined at their table by Sam, Brittany, Puck and Rachel.

The gang’s all here. Better get the show on the road.

“We’ve got a lot of people who traveled a very long way to celebrate these two very special people,” Finn reminded the crowd. “Which shows just how much they’ve come to mean to many of us. Whether you’re here as family, or a friend, or a student whose life was touched in a meaningful way, I don’t think that anyone can deny that these are two remarkable people who will share a remarkable life together.

“So it is an enormous privilege for me to introduce for the first time, as husband and wife, William and Emma Schuster!”

Ushers opened the back door of the ballroom and the band began to play “Celebration” while the happy couple danced into the hall. Emma had discarded her veil and was positively glowing as she came in on her husband’s arm. And Finn couldn’t ever remember their old teacher looking happier. Not even when New Directions won Nationals.

He couldn’t help from smiling as the married couple greeted their guests, hugging their loved ones and just bubbling over with happiness. When they came to the center of the dance floor, a spotlight found them and the music faded.

“Will… Emma… sharing this day with you as your start your lives together is a joy and a privilege for all of us,” Finn told the couple. “We’ve gotten to see your love grow and we know that it will continue to grow as you move forward in your lives. This is our way of showing how much you both mean to all of us.”

He nodded to the band and they began to play the song Finn had chosen for their first dance. The couple smiled as the familiar chords began to play and stepped into one another’s arms.
“Don’t go changing to try to please me,” Finn sang, his voice steady despite the emotion he was trying to keep hold of. “You never let me down before. Don’t imagine you’re too familiar. And I don’t see you anymore.”

The couple waltzed around the floor, lost in one another’s eyes as the crowd watched them happily. Finn felt himself smiling broadly, glad that everyone had been able to share this with them.

“I would not leave you in times of trouble. We never could have come this far. I took the good times. I’ll take the bad times. I’ll take you just the way you are.”

He couldn’t resist looking at the other guests, watching the newlyweds dance and seeing the joy on their faces. Couples stood close to one another and he felt his gaze drift to Rachel, who was watching him and not Will and Emma. She was still so beautiful, but nearly unrecognizable. Why she felt the need to try to change herself so greatly troubled him. He’d always thought that she was so special, flaws and all.

“I said I love you, and that’s forever,” he sang, sincerely meaning the words. He would love Rachel, but saw that their lives had moved in two different directions. He loved her so much that he was willing to let her go. He loved her so much that he wanted her happiness more than his own. He’d kept his promise as best he could. “And this I promise from the heart. I could not love you any better. I love you just the way you are.”

The guests applauded enthusiastically, with the loudest cheers coming from his old classmates. Finn stepped off the stage and accepted a hug from Mr. Schuster and a kiss on the cheek from Emma. Finn handed him the microphone and stepped back so that the couple could address their guests.

“Thank you, Finn,” Will said sincerely. “That was wonderful. This was the best way we could think of to start off this celebration, and I can’t think of people that we’d rather be sharing it with.”

“We’re so thankful that so many of you came to share this day with us,” Emma added, all but glowing with happiness. She wiped away a tear that escaped from her eyes.

“So without further ado… everyone please join us!” Will encouraged, gesturing with his arm for others to join them on the dance floor. “Because we have some serious partying to do!”

Finn handed over the microphone to Marley and Jacob, who took their places on the stage to start their portion of the set and get everyone dancing, and then joined Kurt and the others at the bar.

“I have to give you credit, Hudson… that was pretty nice,” Santana granted. “Even though I am completely immune to sentiment and weddings make me break out in hives.”

“Which is why you were totally tearing up while they were dancing,” Quinn reminded her archly, giving her a playful nudge.

Mercedes pulled him in for a quick kiss on the cheek. “You were so good up there. And you owe me a dance,” she insisted.

Finn smiled, giving his friend a warm hug. “I’d love to. Shall we?”

As the two of them walked off the join the dancers, Adam looked over to Kurt and offered his arm. “I’m in the mood to show off my gorgeous boyfriend if he’s so inclined.”

Kurt smiled and placed his empty glass down. “You might be able to convince him.”

He took Adam’s offered arm and couldn’t help from grinning widely as they joined the other
dancers.
Santana snorted in irritation at being abandoned. “Well this blows. We’re the two hottest women here… well, at least I’m the hottest… and we’re the ones left standing here alone while everyone else is paired up.”

Quinn finished off the last of her wine and cocked her head thoughtfully. “You know… no one thinks twice about two women dancing together. So long as you don’t get too excited…”

Santana turned to her in surprise, seeing the curious look in the other young woman’s eyes. “Hey, I’m not the one you need to worry about getting excited, because you’re so not my type. You, on the other hand, will have to keep your hormones under control around me.”

“Oh, you wish. Let’s just dance if you think you can handle it,” Quinn challenged, heading for the dance floor.

Santana watched her walk away, her eyes drifting down to Quinn’s shapely rear. She might not have a thing for ice queens, but it hadn’t escaped her notice that Quinn did have a spectacular ass that Santana could at least admire for the aesthetics. She was going to enjoy this even if just for a friendly dance because she deserved to have something gorgeous on her arm for the night.

And if it made Britts the tiniest bit jealous… well, she wouldn’t feel too badly.

* * *

“Blaine? Are you okay?” Tina asked tentatively. He’d been very quiet since the reception started and had been unable to draw his eyes away from his ex-boyfriend the whole time. Tina had tried to distract him, but he was completely transfixed on Kurt and the man who was dancing with him. By now, they were sitting alone, Brittany having pulled Sam up to dance with her. Puck had eventually given into Rachel’s unsubtle hints that she would like to dance. She offered to dance with Blaine, but he was too busy sulking over his ex.

It wasn’t as if she really expected Blaine to be a proper date to the wedding. Well, maybe she’d hoped. That they could have pretended a little bit and found some comfort in one another. She knew rationally that Blaine would never be for her what she wanted, but they were friends. He’d asked to escort her to the reception, but now he seemed to forget that she was even there.

Tina sighed in exasperation and turned to watch the two men that had Blaine so fixated. She hated to admit it, but Kurt looked really happy. He was held closely against his boyfriend as they danced slowly together. The older man said something in Kurt’s ear, causing him to laugh and cuddle closer to him. Adam was touching Kurt’s hair, an act that Tina knew would normally warrant Kurt turning on the offender like an enraged honey badger. Instead Kurt seemed to purr and enjoy the gesture. Part of her knew that she should stay out of this, but it was killing her to see Blaine so despondent. She knew that he would never really seek her out for the kind of comfort he needed so the only way to make Blaine happy would be to help him win Kurt back. No matter how happy Kurt seemed with this interloper, she had a responsibility to try to get through to him. Kurt was nothing if not stubborn and she had her work cut out for her.

“Blaine, do you think sitting here and pouting is going to make things better?” she demanded. “All you’re doing is hurting yourself. The best thing you can do is get up there and show him that you’re stronger than this.”

Blaine turned to Tina and nodded. “You’re right,” he admitted. “I have to stand up for myself.”
He stood up and adjusted the lay of his jacket, steeling himself for what he was going to do. Tina grinned and got to her feet, ready to take Blaine's hand and join the rest of the dancers but was left stunned when Blaine marched to the dance floor by himself, leaving her behind.

She watched, stunned, as he headed straight for Kurt and his boyfriend and found herself biting her lip. This was not going to end well.
Chapter 5

Blaine walked determinedly towards the dancing couples who were swaying gently in one another’s arms and contentedly looking into their partner’s eyes. He watched angrily as Kurt drifted along in Adam’s arms with a dreamy expression on his face, like he was caught up in some kind of spell. Blaine knew that this Adam character had to have done something underhanded to ensnare Kurt like this because he could never remember his boyfriend looking so totally lost in another person. Not even with himself.

Summoning up his courage, Blaine took a deep breath and cleared his throat loudly to get their attention.

“Excuse me,” he said politely, giving the pair his most winning smile. “Do you mind if I cut in?”

The look on Adam’s face was perplexed and mildly concerned, but rather than refusing Blaine outright, he looked to Kurt. Kurt’s face was strangely blank at first, as if not quite believing what he was being asked. But then Blaine saw the unmistakable tightness of Kurt’s jaw that he immediately recognized as irritation.

“Actually, we do mind,” Kurt answered, the sharpness in his voice unmistakable.

“But Kurt… I really…,” Blaine started, only to be quickly cut off by his ex-boyfriend.

“No, Blaine,” he said firmly. “Now please leave us alone because you’re only embarrassing yourself.”

Blaine felt his cheeks burning in humiliation when Kurt turned back to the man he’d been dancing with, firmly turning his back to Blaine and leaving him standing there like a fool. He knew that people around them were watching the interaction curiously, but he didn’t care. Not when Kurt was slipping further out of his reach.

“Kurt, don’t ignore me!” Blaine said insistently, realizing sickly that his worst fears were coming true. Kurt was really turning away from him. And that bastard, Adam, was holding Kurt in his arms and giving Blaine a look of derision that made Blaine’s fists tighten reflexively.

“You told me that you’d never say goodbye to me,” Blaine reminded Kurt plaintively, causing his ex-boyfriend to inhale deeply, as if struck.

Kurt turned around to glare at Blaine. “Don’t you dare throw that back at me!” he spat. “Not after what you did. You don’t have that right.”

Blaine felt his eyes watering, his sight starting to waver when he realized what Kurt was really saying to him. He couldn’t let it be over! Not now.

“Kurt, please…” he pleaded, but the hard stare in Kurt’s eyes warned that it would be for naught.

He didn’t see Sam coming up behind him, reaching out to put a comforting hand on his shoulder. “Hey, man… maybe you should let this go for now,” Sam advised, gently trying to draw Blaine away. “Come on.”

Adam wrapped his arm about Kurt’s shoulders and drew his close, offering his comfort as he gently pulled Kurt away from the confrontation. “Come on, love,” he said softly. “Let’s get away from here for a bit. I think we both could use another drink.”
Kurt nodded and following willingly, his back firmly turned in Blaine’s direction and walking away, Adam’s hand at the small of his back in a supportive gesture. Seeing another man giving Kurt the comfort that he should be wanting from Blaine just dug the knife in deeper. Blaine wanted to run after them and pull Kurt into his arms and force him to listen to him for once. But reluctantly, he let Sam pull him aside, trying to find some comfort in the softly spoken words of encouragement from his friend.

From the sidelines, Tina watched the whole confrontation and bit her lip anxiously, knowing that she needed to do something to try to fix this.

* * * 

Adam watched Kurt carefully as the younger man sipped at the glass of whisky that Adam had procured for him. The liquor was bracing, but a lot stronger than Kurt was accustomed to drinking straight. Kurt still looked a bit shaken and angry after his altercation with Blaine and Adam was at a bit of a loss at how to help him.

His first instinct was to punch the young interloper right in his smug face, but getting arrested for assault wasn’t going to help Kurt in the least. And he didn’t want to be the kind of boyfriend who treated his lover like some damsel in distress. Not when Kurt was so excellent at caring for himself. It wasn’t something that Kurt would appreciate once he regained his composure.

One thing this encounter was revealing to Adam was just why Kurt carried so much baggage from his past relationship. This clearly wasn’t just a relationship that ran its course or one ending on a sour note due to Blaine’s unfaithfulness. There were a lot of underlying issues and being on the wrong end of a lot of manipulative behavior that Kurt was struggling to get past. It was startlingly clear why Kurt always seemed so surprised to be treated with kindness and consideration.

“Feeling better?” he asked gently, careful to give Kurt enough space so that his boyfriend wouldn’t feel overshadowed by his presence.

Kurt put the half-finished glass aside and nodded. “I don’t know why I’m so upset,” he admitted sheepishly. “You’d think that I’d never dealt with a difficult confrontation before.”

Adam took Kurt’s hand in his, rubbing it soothingly. “You want to tell me just what’s bothering you? Because you handled him just fine.”

Kurt inhaled deeply. “He’s never going to just leave me alone, is he? He’s going to follow me to New York and ruin everything I’ve got just because he can.”

“Now that’s not going to happen,” Adam promised him. “Even if he gets into NYADA, and there’s no surety of that happening, he’s not going to be in a position to hurt you there. You’ve built a strong reputation with the other students and faculty. But you also have some real friends who are going to stand by you.”

“I had friends here,” Kurt said bitterly. “Tina was my friend, and so was Sam. Now I only seem to exist to them as Blaine’s ex. He shows up and suddenly people who knew me for years and seemed to barely tolerate me were flocking to be with him because he was ‘one of the guys’.”

“From what I can see, you still have friends,” Adam reminded him gently. “You’ve got Finn and Mercedes and Noah. Santana seems to care about you in her own way, and so does Quinn. You’re not alone here.”

He reached up to gently cup Kurt’s cheek, his thumb rubbing the high crest soothingly. “You
definitely have me,” he promised. “There is no way that I would throw you over for Blaine.”

“I don’t know why I let him get to me,” Kurt said softly, his hand reaching up to cover Adam’s.
“You think I’d be past this by now.”

Adam didn’t want to say what he’d been thinking about Kurt’s past relationship, but he’d become increasingly convinced that Blaine’s behavior wasn’t so much as mindless inconsideration, but more deliberate. To have so completely dominated Kurt’s circle of friends without seeming to notice that the man he’d claimed to love was increasing being shut outside of it, or to constantly seek his own enrichment even if it came at Kurt’s expense. It would be hard to understand how someone would be so blind to how he was hurting someone that he was supposed to care about.

Finn came hurrying over with Mercedes in his wake. “Are you okay?” he asked, looking very concerned.

Kurt sighed and nodded. “Yeah… I’m just tired of him always putting me on the spot like that.”

“Blaine has been… rather pushy,” Adam explained gently. “And he does have a way of pulling people round to his side, especially because Kurt was in New York and not around to tell his side of the story.”

Mercedes nodded knowingly and turned a saddened expression to her friend. “Baby, why would you think that I wouldn’t side with you?” she asked, gently placing her hands on his shoulders.

Kurt hated to bring up old hurts that probably everyone else had forgotten about, but those old hurts still stung. “Back in senior year, Blaine accused me of cheating on him because some guy I met was sending me flirty texts. It didn’t matter that I wasn’t flirting back, but Blaine called me out in front of everyone and you all pretty much sided with him,” he reminded her.

Mercedes had the good grace to flush in embarrassment at the reminder. “You’re right,” she admitted. “I was a real jerk then because I didn’t know what the story was and I didn’t ask for your side of things. I just got caught up in all the scandal.”

Kurt took her hand in his. “It’s not your fault,” he assured her. “I didn’t tell anyone what was going on and Blaine decided to air our dirty laundry in public. It’s just… you all knew me and it really hurt to think that most of you thought that I was capable of cheating.”

“I know that you’re not,” she said soothingly, sitting down in the chair next to him. “We were stupid kids then. I know that’s not an excuse for how we behaved, but you would have to have some serious screws loose if you think that I would side with Blaine when he was the one blowing someone else’s horn.”

Kurt snorted back a laugh and hugged her back, the tension broken much to Adam’s relief.

“Now you cannot let that pint sized hustler chase you out of here,” she insisted. “Not when you’ve got Mr. Gorgeous here waiting to dance. So get back out there and enjoy yourself.”

“Seriously,” Finn insisted, all but pulling Kurt from his chair and physically shoving him into Adam’s arms. “Don’t let him ruin your night.”

Kurt looked up at Adam and forced a smile onto his face. “Well, this can’t be any worse than being crowned prom queen,” he quipped with a bit of strained humor.

Adam didn’t miss the tension in the back of Kurt’s voice that he knew came from his trying to mask another old hurt. “That sounds like another story you’ll have to tell me,” he said gently.
Kurt inhaled deeply and nodded. He straightened out his jacket and Adam could see the determination in his eyes. “Not today, but soon,” Kurt promised, taking Adam’s offered arm. “I like this song and I’m in the mood to show off a little bit.”

Adam smiled and led him to the dance floor, ready to give Kurt what he needed to get through this. Even if it was just to be a supportive boyfriend.

Kurt was glad the song was a slow one, because he really wanted to feel Adam’s closeness and to take comfort in his presence. Adam wrapped his arms about Kurt and pulled him close.

“Mind if I lead?” he asked, a gentle smile crossing his handsome face.

Kurt chuckled and settled into his embrace. “Feel free,” he said agreeably, Adam’s broad hand a reassuring presence on the small of his back. He rather liked it when Adam took control, letting him relax because he knew that the older man would take care of him. His hands drifted upwards, one settling on Adam’s upper arm and the other cradled in Adam’s own hand as they moved slowly with the beautiful, familiar music.

“I love this song,” Kurt sighed, letting Adam guide him through the music.

“Me too,” Adam admitted, his cheek pressed gently against Kurt’s.

“And can you feel the love tonight? It is where we are,” he sang softly. “It’s enough for this wide-eyed wanderer that we’ve gone this far.”

Kurt smiled and looked into Adam’s gentle eyes. “And can you feel the love tonight,” he sang in return, a smile touching his face. “How it’s laid to rest. It’s enough to make kings and vagabonds believe the very best.”

Adam chuckled and held Kurt close as the moved about the dance floor, surrounded by other happy couples. But for him, the only thing that mattered was the man in his arms who allowed him to lead him through this dance and trusted him to keep him from mishap. Adam guided him before other pairs of dancers, turning Kurt gracefully and even bending him into a dip, earning a bright laugh from his boyfriend.

They might have gotten a few odd looks from others being a male couple, but neither of them cared. Not when they were together and Adam could see some of the shadows fade from Kurt’s eyes.

* * *

“Blaine, you’ve got to stop this,” Sam said adamantly as he pulled his friend outside the reception call. He’d sent Brittany back inside so he could try to talk some sense into his friend.

“Sam, you saw them!” Blaine said frantically, pointing back at the room that he’d just been dragged out of. “Kurt was…”

“Dancing with his boyfriend,” Sam said firmly. “Dude, you’ve got to accept it. Kurt’s moved on.
And I’m starting to think that he’s doing the right thing.”

“Sam!” Blaine exclaimed, a look of horror crossing his face. “I thought you were on my side!”

“I am! But that doesn’t mean that I think you’re right about this,” Sam insisted. “Dude… you two broke up months ago. Did you think he wouldn’t move on?”

Blaine slumped down on a bench and held his head in his hands, messing his carefully styled hair.
Sam paused before sitting down next to him and placing a comforting arm about his shoulders. “Look, bud… I know it hurts seeing him like this, but you’re not doing yourself any good chasing after him if he doesn’t want it. He and that Adam guy seem pretty tight.”

Blaine looked up at Sam with tears in his eyes, his brows furrowed in anguish. “We’re supposed to be together,” he reminded his friend. “We had it all planned out. We’d move to New York and make music and art and be happy. Instead it’s all fallen apart. He’s left me behind and won’t even look at me.”

Sam didn’t answer immediately, seeing that his friend was missing a very important part of the equation here. “Dude… you did cheat on him,” he reminded Blaine gently. “I know that you regretted that, but I know Kurt. This isn’t something that he’s going to forget about.”

“I’m not expecting him to forget it,” Blaine snapped impatiently. “But not that he would hold it against me forever! He’s only gone a few weeks and all of a sudden he doesn’t have time for me or care about me.”

He looked down at his shoes, polished so brightly that he could almost see his reflection in the Italian leather. “I’m sorry that I sent him to New York,” he said softly, unable to hide the bitterness in his voice.

Sam gave him a long hard stare. “You don’t mean that,” he insisted. “Blaine, he was miserable here.”

“But he would have been with me,” Blaine reminded him, as if it made perfect sense. “He could have waited until I graduated and we could have gone together. He could have survived a year more.”

Sam just shook his head, remembering how lost Kurt seemed those weeks. “Dude, I don’t think so. You saw how he was. You told him to go because you loved him. You wanted him to be happy.”

“And what did it get me?” Blaine demanded angrily. “I sent him off to live out his dreams and he forgets all about me. Did I deserve that?”

“No,” Sam said, a bit uncertainly because he wasn’t quite sure what Blaine was talking about. “But cheating on him… I mean, Quinn cheated on me when we were dating and I couldn’t forgive her afterwards. I get what Kurt is feeling. Blaine, you need to let him go.”

Blaine shook his head. “I can’t do that, Sam,” he said adamantly. “I love him. I have to get him back.”

Sam didn’t know what to say. Blaine was his best friend, but Kurt was his friend too. It was hard to see them at odds like this. Especially with how torn up Blaine had been since Kurt ended things. Of course, it would be easier for everyone if Kurt could just forgive Blaine and get back together with him but that wasn’t going to happen. And all Blaine’s efforts seemed to doing nothing more than pushing Kurt further away.

He might not be the smartest guy in the room, but he knew well enough when to give up. He wasn’t going to change Blaine’s mind and he wanted to see both of his friends happy. But Kurt seemed happier without Blaine. He couldn’t remember seeing Kurt this happy in a long time. Trying to make Blaine happy would ruin that.

He just didn’t know what to do anymore.

* * *
Finn had managed to avoid Rachel for much of the evening so far. She’d tried to talk to him before the salad course was served, but he’d managed to break away from her, using his best man duties as an excuse. He didn’t know what she was after but he wasn’t inclined to find out. Rachel could twist things to her own advantage and he didn’t want to give her the opportunity.

Fortunately Puck made for a good diversion and Finn wasn’t shy about asking him to get Rachel to dance “for old time’s sake”, which allowed him to make a quick escape. Mercedes was willing to dance with him, as was Marley. If he kept moving, then Rachel wouldn’t get an opening.

“Finn, do you have a moment?”

Sighing in relief that it wasn’t Rachel yet again, he turned to find Emma standing there, looking a bit pensive.

Wondering what wedding-related disaster needed his attention now, he nodded. “Sure. Is everything going okay?”

Emma appeared a bit nervous about asking what she wanted to, but visibly steeled herself. “I was kind of hoping that you could ask my cousin to dance. Amy’s rather shy and she’s been sitting by herself all evening.” Emma gave him a warm smile. “I was hoping that you wouldn’t mind keeping her company.”

Well, that wasn’t what he’d been expecting to do with his evening but he could count it as an extension of his best man duties. And it would give him a perfect excuse to avoid talking to Rachel. “Sure,” he said agreeably. “I’d be happy to.”

“Oh, that’s wonderful,” Emma exclaimed, taking Finn by his arm and pointing to one of the tables where a young woman in a bridesmaid gown sat alone. She had the red hair and delicate features that Finn knew was pretty typical with the women in Emma’s family.

“Thank you, Finn,” she said gratefully. “Amy is a lovely girl, but she doesn’t much like these kinds of gatherings. She’s not the most social person and having someone around her age might make her feel a bit better.”

Well, this couldn’t be any worse than dodging Rachel all night. Hopefully this girl wouldn’t be insane because Finn just didn’t feel up to dealing with crazy on top of a wedding. Making sure that he looked presentable, he put on a cheerful smile and walked over to the young woman who was apparently nursing her second Cosmopolitan.

“Hi… Amy, right?” he asked to get her attention. “I’m Finn.”

She looked up from idly stirring her cocktail. “Let me guess… Emma asked you to check up on me, right?” she sighed.

“Umm… well,” Finn stammered, not quite sure how to respond to her but her confusion put a soft smile on her face.

“It’s okay,” she said gently. “I know that I haven’t been the most cheerful person. She’s just worried.”

Finn nodded. “Mind if I sit down?” he asked.

She shrugged. “Suit yourself. But I’m probably not going to be the best company,” she wanted.

“I don’t mind,” Finn assured, her, taking the chair next to hers. “Emma said that you don’t like
Amy sighed and shoved her half-empty glass away from her. “I love her, but Emma is a real busy body.”

She looked at Finn with a frustrated expression. “You know, she’s probably the last person to talk about other people’s problems.”

“Yeah, I know,” Finn agreed. “But she usually means well. There’s got to be a reason that you’re sitting back here all alone instead of at least trying to enjoy the party.”

Amy sighed and looked down at her perfectly manicured hands. “It’s just… I just broke up with my boyfriend a few days ago. He was supposed to be here and… well, it kind of killed my mood for the whole romance thing.”

“Oh,” Finn responded, immediately sympathizing. “I mean, I broke up with my girlfriend months ago and I’m still really down about it.”

“I mean, I thought that Steve and I would be together for good,” Amy explained. “We were talking about getting married and how many kids we’d have… he even picked out names for our children. And then one day… ‘Sorry, but I just don’t feel that way anymore,’” she said, imitating her ex’s voice mockingly.

Finn nodded knowingly. “Well, with us, it was all about her dreams. There’s no way she would bend enough to accommodate anyone else. You either went along with what she wanted, or you were gone. So I let her go.”

Amy shook her head sadly and carefully dabbed at her eyes with a napkin so she wouldn’t mess up her makeup. “I just feel like I wasted a whole lot of time with him and now what do I have?”

“Does it ever stop?” she asked. “Well, I know that I did the right thing,” Finn insisted. “Staying together just because we thought we were supposed to be together when everyone around us could see. And it still hurts.”

Amy looked at him with a quiet intentness in her blue-green eyes. “Does it ever stop?” she asked. “It hasn’t for me yet. But I look at my brother…” He gestured out to the dance floor where Kurt was dancing as if he didn’t have a care in the world with Adam. He was giving a little shoulder shimmy, much to Adam’s appreciation.
“He had his heart broken about as badly as anyone possibly could, and he’s found happiness again,” Finn explained. “I see him and I see that there may be hope me too.”

Amy sighed and gave up tearing the napkin she held in her slender hands. “Well, I suppose that sitting here and feeling sorry for myself is kind of rude,” she admitted. “I mean, it’s Emma’s day and she shouldn’t be worrying about me.”

Finn offered her a gentle smile, knowing that she was trying. “You want to dance? As friends,” he asked, clarifying his intentions quickly.

She looked up at him and a shy smile began to touch her face. “You know? I think I’d like to.”

Finn grinned and stood up, gallantly offering his arm to her. “Then please allow me to escort you, milady.”

Amy giggled and accepted his arm. “Thank you, Finn,” she said sincerely. “I really do appreciate this.”

Finn looked down at her. “It’s a pleasure, Amy. Believe me.”

* * *

Mercedes finished her set to a round of applause from the other guests, and looked about for her replacement. Seeing him waltzing in boyfriend’s arms, she gestured to get his attention. “Kurt, get that fabulous backside up here,” she ordered.

Kurt grinned at her and joined her on the stage, giving her a hug and a kiss on the cheek as she relinquished the stage to him. “It’s time to kick this party up a notch,” he announced, giving Adam a grin and saucy wink. He nodded to the band to start playing and a thudding bassline filled the room as Kurt took his place at the center of the stage.

“Once is never enough. Never is and never was, uh huh,” Kurt growled, his hip shaking in time with the music. “Here and now is all that counts. Here and now in large amounts, uh huh!”

He found his boyfriend in the crowd, watching Kurt with a wide grin on his face and Kurt blew him a flirty kiss. “Be beautiful but shut up. The going can be real tough, uh huh.”

He glanced about and saw Blaine dancing with Tina and couldn’t resist throwing the next lines in his direction. “You can keep your fancy bars. Clubby friends and fast cars, uh huh.” he all but snarled, remembering the times when Blaine seemed to go out of his way to pick on something about Kurt, whether it was his knowledge about cars or how he never quite seemed to fit in with the other Dalton students. “And when the going gets hard, you can eat your credit cards, uh huh.”

He began to pace the stage, using the mic stand as a prop, turning it in time to the music. “I really tried to fight it, but what the hell I like it. Uh huh.”

“There is always room at the top. Don’t let them tell you there is not.” He looked to Adam and gave him a wink. “Made in England born and bred. An eighteen century brain in a twenty first century head.”

The other guest seemed to be enjoying the song, filling the dance floor even if it wasn’t the most typical song for a wedding reception. Kurt could see Will and Emma at the center of things, really cutting loose. And there was Finn, dancing with one of the bridesmaids and looking like he was enjoying himself.
It felt good to perform for an audience that wasn’t going to judge him on hitting a note just so, or thinking that his range was abnormally high for a male performer. He could peacock a bit and play up his showmanship. This wasn’t an audience looking for fine nuance, and he took the opportunity to show the other aspects of his performance ability.

And Adam considerately remained well within his line of vision to give him someone to play off.

“If some of this fits some of you, or like the things that you might do, uh huh,” Kurt sang, spinning the mic stand like a dance partner. “It’s the pleasure and the pain that makes us do it all again, uh huh.”

“They say ‘Be beautiful and shut up.’ The going can get real tough, uh huh.”

He grinned as Mercedes grabbed Adam’s hand and dragged him to the dance floor, apparently not wanting to let Kurt’s singing go to waste. And wow… there was Santana and Quinn dancing up a storm together. Kurt could feel the power, that they moved at his command and it was enthralling.

He launched immediately into another energetic number, not wanting to lose the grasp he had on his audience. Even his ex and Tina seemed caught up in the spell he was weaving. He quickly launched into his second song, glad that he had taken the time to select a rather eclectic mix to keep people dancing.

Adam Ant and Adam Lambert might be an odd combination, but it worked for him.

He had finished his third song when he motioned for Adam to join him on stage. His boyfriend might not have felt it appropriate to take over the stage at the wedding of two people that he didn’t know, but Kurt had convinced him to join him for a duet or two. If there one thing that Adam was helpless in resisting second to listening to Kurt sing was getting to sing with Kurt.

It didn’t hurt to have the perfect song to sing together.

“Live in my house, I’ll be your shelter,” Kurt crooned to him, not bothering to slip into the character that originated the song. Not when he meant every single word of it to Adam. “Just pay me back with one thousand kisses. Be my lover, I’ll cover you.”

Adam smiled broadly and looked deeply into Kurt’s eyes as he sang. “Open your door, I’ll be your tenant. Don’t got much baggage to lay at your feet. But sweet kisses I’ve got to spare,” he promised. “I’ll be there and I’ll cover you.”

Their voices harmonized perfectly on the chorus, the brightness of Kurt’s pitch contrasting beautifully with Adam’s warmer tone. “I think they meant it, when they said you can’t buy love,” they sang gently to one another. “Now I know you can rent it. A new lease, you are my love. On life, be my life!”

Adam couldn’t resist sweeping Kurt into his arms and dancing him around the stage as the joyous music played around them. It was all Kurt could do not to laugh in delight, feeling those strong arms around him.

“Just slip me on, I’ll be your blanket,” they sang as they returned to the center of the stage, Adam standing behind Kurt and holding him in a gentle embrace, pressing his cheek to Kurt’s. “Wherever – whatever – I’ll be your coat.”

“You’ll be my king, and I’ll be your castle,” Kurt sang, his voice gently lilting along with the music.

“No, you’ll be my prince, and I’ll be your moat,” Adam vowed, and Kurt felt his heart nearly burst at
hearing the slight change in lyrics. Adam had remembered Kurt’s distaste with being referred to in
the feminine, and adjusted the lyrics without Kurt even asking him to.

“I think they meant it when they said you can’t buy love,” their voices flowed harmoniously together.
“Now I know you can rent it. A new lease you are, my love. On life – all my life.

“I’ve longed to discover something as true as it seems,” they sang, and for the first time, Kurt
honestly could sing those words from his heart. How long had he waited for a love that was more
than just the illusion of love? He finally felt like he’d found it.

Adam smiled gently and hugged Kurt to him, pressing his body up behind him. “So with a thousand
sweet kisses.”

“When you’re cold and you’re lonely,” Kurt sang in return, one hand holding up the microphone, the
other clutching at the arm fixed about his body.

“With a thousand sweet kisses…” Adam sang, pressing one to Kurt’s cheek. “I’ll cover you.”

“You’ve got one nickel only,” Kurt answered back, not bothering to hide his smile. “With a thousand
sweet kisses.”

“When you’re worn out and tired,” Adam promised.

“I’ll cover you. With a thousand sweet kisses,” Kurt sang gently, no longer even seeing their
audience. All that he wanted to see was this lovely man holding him close.

“When your heart has expired,” Adam sang, spinning Kurt so they could face one another for the
finish. Kurt didn’t know if he’d planned this in advance, but their performance nearly looked
choreographed, it was so effortless.

“Oh, lover… I’ll cover you,” they sang together, holding one another close. “Oh lover… I’ll cover
you…”

Kurt closed his eyes and felt Adam’s large hands gently holding his face, pulling him into a gentle
kiss that left his breathless. When he opened his eyes, he could only dimly hear the applause of the
other guests. All he could see was Adam, standing before him with a gentle smile on his face and the
love shining warmly in his eyes.

They stepped off the stage together, holding hands. “Darling, I do you mind if I find the men’s
room?” Adam asked.

Kurt smiled. “Of course not, silly.”

Adam made no move to move away, not releasing Kurt’s hand. “This may sound silly, but I’m rather
reluctant to leave you alone,” he said, chuckling ruefully. “I’ve gotten rather attached to your
presence.”

“Go…” Kurt urged, giving him a bit of a playful nudge. “I think you can pee without me.”

Adam just smiled and kissed Kurt again, taking his time before finally breaking away and heading
towards the doors. Kurt watched him leave with a dreamy expression on his face. He couldn’t
remember the last time he’d been this happy and not have a foreboding concern that something was
going to screw it up.

The band began to play quietly, indicating that the dinner course was being served and Kurt turned
to find their table, only to have an angry young woman in a red dress blocking his way.

“Tina,” he greeted cautiously, wary about the kind of response he was likely to get given the anger in her eyes.


Kurt could only look at her in confusion, wondering if maybe she had too much to drink, but she quickly came to her point.

“Meanwhile, Blaine is here. Lonely,” Tina emphasized, as if that should be Kurt’s concern and responsibility to alleviate. “And yes, he cheated but we’re all human, Kurt. We all deserve to be loved back.”

Kurt felt his jaw clench. It was bad enough having Blaine’s infidelity all but completely handwaved away as if unimportant, but to have someone who had once been his friend discounting his justifiable hurt in favor of Blaine’s self-pity… that just hardened something in him.

He looked down at Tina, holding her fast with nothing more than his sharp gaze. “Okay, Tina… I say this with total love, but the moment we all saw coming is finally here. You’re a hag. You’re haggled out. You’re in love with Blaine and it’s creepy. Stop.”

Part of Kurt wanted to feel sympathy for Tina. That she had gone from being so confident in herself to chasing after a boy who would never return her affection the way she wanted him to. Breaking up with Mike had clearly damaged her, but having her turn on him like this was more than he was willing to tolerate.


“My responsibly to Blaine ended when he cheated on me,” Kurt reminded her sharply. “Maybe you seem to think that I don’t deserve to be happy if Blaine isn’t, but our break up was his fault. Completely. Because he couldn’t keep his dick in his pants.

“So maybe instead of complaining that I won’t forgive him and take his undeserving ass back,” Kurt snarled. “Maybe you should worry about yourself. Chasing after a gay man when you know that he’s never going to give you what you want isn’t cute. It’s pathetic.”

Tina’s cheeks flushed angrily at Kurt calling her out on her behavior. “How dare you?” she all but spat. “I don’t know what happened to you, but you changed, Kurt. You never were so hard before.”

“Well, having your boyfriend fuck someone else exactly two weeks before he was supposed to come visit will do wonders for your demeanor,” Kurt said flatly. “It’s amazing that he suddenly found the wherewithal to move up his visit right after he cheated instead of beforehand. But then, he wouldn’t have been able to punish me for no longer being around to give him my undivided attention. You know, having a job and rent to pay.”

Tina seemed taken aback a bit by Kurt’s angry response, which truly indicated to Kurt that she really hadn’t considered any of this from Kurt’s perspective. She had been so caught up with Blaine’s pity party for one that she’d totally ignored that there was another person in this equation whose wellbeing mattered just as much.
“I spent the past few months not having a single one of my friends in Lima who knew what Blaine did check to see how I was doing,” Kurt reminded her. “I was the one who was cheated on, but you and everyone else here seems to think that it’s my fault that Blaine is upset because I won’t get back together with him.

“And to be honest, Tina… given your history, you are the last person to be throwing stones about ending a relationship.”

“What are you talking about?” she demanded, startled at being put on the defensive. She had clearly not expected Kurt to go on the attack, not just about Blaine but now herself.

Kurt stared down at her, his arms crossed over his chest. “That summer you broke up with Artie. I don’t think that he thought your relationship was over when you started seeing Mike,” he reminded her. “Now, I didn’t give you any grief over that, so the least you owe is the courtesy to know when I need to end a relationship that’s not good for me. Let alone support me as the friend that you used to be.”

Kurt’s harsh words seemed to take the wind out of Tina’s sails. She couldn’t remember him every lashing out so harshly at her. Hell, at anyone. Kurt usually was less direct with his criticisms, using a more subtle edge to get his point across. Now he was just laying into her with a forcefulness that she had never seen out of him before.

“Kurt… I…” she stammered, only to have Kurt turn and walk away from her. She watched numbly as the boy who she’s always thought was one of her best friends, who’d protected her and stood by her, walked away without a single backwards glance.

Had she really been that bad a friend to him? Had she gotten so caught up in Blaine’s drama that she lost sight of that? Yes, after breaking up with Mike, she got totally caught up in her crush on Blaine, but when had it turned her so much against Kurt.

Slinking away, she felt every one of the emotional cuts Kurt had leveled on her. Knowing Kurt as well as she did, she was well aware that he would not forgive her for this. If there was one thing that Kurt would not tolerate was betrayal. He gave his trust so begrudgingly, and when it was lost, that was it. Blaine had learned that, to his sorrow. Now she was learning it as well.

She felt her eyes begin to water when she realized what she had thrown away. And if she was at all honest with herself, she knew why she had lashed out at Kurt so strongly. It had hurt her that Blaine would never want her the way she wanted him, so instead of being a mature woman and accepting that, she took her frustration out on the one that Blaine wanted but wouldn’t have him. And lost probably the best friend she ever would have as a result.

Tina took a deep breath and tried to regain her composure before joining Blaine and Sam at their table. She had some serious thinking to do, and hopefully if Kurt was at all willing to listen to her, an apology to make.

* * *

Amy looked to her dance partner with a gentle smile. “I’d better go join the others,” she said. “But maybe we could dance some more after dinner?”

Finn nodded. “I’d really like that,” he said sincerely. Maybe Amy wasn’t the kind of woman that he’d want to see romantically, but he could see them being friends after this. She was a bit older and apart from her break up drama, had her life very much in order. She would get through this.
He saw Rachel coming towards him and knew that his chances at a peaceful dinner were pretty much over with. Not with the look of determination on her face. Inhaling deeply, he thought that it would better to get it over with now and hopefully leave him able to salvage the rest of the evening.

“Finn… can we talk?” she asked, her tone soft but with that underlying steel that betrayed her irritation. Finn could see from the tightness of her stance that she was trying to hide being very upset.

Well, he’d been putting this off all night. Maybe if he let her get this out of her system, he could go enjoy his dinner.

“Not here,” he said firmly, determined to take control of the situation and not let her steamroll him the way she usually did. “Let’s go someplace more quiet.”

He found a spot in the hallway outside the reception room near a storage area where they shouldn’t be disturbed. Steeling himself for the confrontation, he turned to face his ex. “Okay, so what did you want to talk about.”

Rachel looked up at him with a perplexed expression at his cool tone. Finn had completely closed himself off from her in a way that she had never seen before. Finn knew this had to be confusing for her, given how during the entirety of their relationship he had always been so receptive to her. This had to be difficult for someone who was accustomed to being the center of everything to accept.

She wrapped her arms about herself, as if trying to self-soothe. Looking up at him with a poignant expression on her face, she seemed to prepare herself for an argument. “Why are you avoiding me?” she asked plaintively. “All day… you haven’t said a word to me.”

Finn’s first instinct was to use the wedding and his best man duties as an excuse, but that wouldn’t work here. Not if he wanted some peace when this was over.

“You’re right,” he admitted. “I have been.”

The confused look on her face was almost comical. “But… why? You’ve never done that to me,” she insisted.

Finn sighed, knowing that he was about to hurt her very badly but there was no way to avoid it. They needed to end this merry-go-round that they seemed trapped on.

“Rachel, we’re not a couple anymore,” he reminded her.

“I know,” she said impatiently. “But that doesn’t mean that we have to act like total strangers.”

Finn looked down at her, in her tiny dress and sky high heels and couldn’t escape the feeling that she was a stranger to him now. He knew her probably better than anyone else, but he barely could see the woman he loved in the person standing in front of him. It wasn’t just the hair and the makeup. It was a change that went a lot deeper than that.

“How do you want me to treat you?” he asked carefully, wanting to get a sense of what exactly she was looking for.

She didn’t answer immediately, and Finn had a pretty good idea that she didn’t know either.

“I thought that we were at least friends,” she finally answered. “That we could talk to each other. After all, we’ve meant a lot to each other for a long time.”

Finn inhaled deeply. ‘I don’t know… the last time I actually saw you, you made it very clear that
you didn’t want anything to do with me. Which wasn’t really necessary. I mean, you’d already broken up with me and then you came back a few weeks later like I needed the reminder.”

She blushed a bit at the memory of how she’d torn into him after the New Directions musical performance.

“I know I came across badly, but Finn… we’ve been through a lot together,” she reminded.

He nodded slowly. “Yeah… we have been through a lot. And a lot of that wasn’t particularly good. Especially towards the end.”

She couldn’t deny that. “I know… but I always thought that we would be close.”

“Well, I wouldn’t be able to tell that from the last time I saw you, when you reminded me that we were over,” Finn stated. “But since then you’ve gone out of your way to contact me whenever you needed someone to talk to. Or to brag to. So which is it?

“And last I heard you did have a boyfriend in New York. ‘Shacked up’ with, I think was how you put it. So why you keep trying to pull me into things?” he asked.

“Finn, you’re important to me,” Rachel insisted. “You always have been.”

“And your boyfriend?”

She paused before answering. “We have an open relationship. It’s a mature way to handle things.”

Finn could only stare at her. She stared back defiantly, as if daring him to make some kind of comment. He found himself shaking his head in bemusement.

“Wow… he really has you snowed. This coming from the girl who was pissed off that I ended our engagement and send you off to live out your dream?”

“It’s not like that!” Rachel insisted. “Things are different in New York.”

Finn looked at her in shock. “Rachel, do you even hear yourself? It’s like anytime you hear something you don’t like, you come up with these bullshit excuses. Kurt’s not in an open relationship and he’s ten times more mature than you are. What, the only way you can have a hot New York boyfriend is to let him screw around on you?”

Rachel’s face flushed red with anger. “That’s not in at all,” she exclaimed, outraged that she would even suggest such a thing. “Do you think that I need to put up with something like that if I didn’t want it? I mean, look at me!” she insisted, gesturing at herself. “Brody is lucky to be with me.”

“Then where is he?” Finn asked, one eyebrow raised in question. “If he’s so thankful to be with you, why isn’t he here with you?”

Rachel seemed surprised by the question. “He’s busy with school. I mean, he’s a junior and has projects to finish.”

“Well, Adam’s a senior and he’s working on his senior project,” Finn pointed out. “But he felt it was important to meet his boyfriend’s family and come with Kurt. But Brody… that’s his name, right? He’s too busy to come with the girl that he’s lucky to be with.”

He nodded to himself. “Yeah, that makes perfect sense,” he said mockingly.

Rachel didn’t seem to have an immediate answer to that. “I… I told him it was okay to miss the
“wedding,” she insisted. “I figured that it would be more comfortable for you not to have to see me with someone else.”

“Except that I already did see him with you,” he reminded her. “So maybe you want to rethink that answer.”

She looked up at him with a pleading expression on her face. “Finn, why are you looking to fight with me?” she asked. “He’s not here. But you and I are.”

“So what is that supposed to mean?”

She inhaled deeply and put on a hopeful expression. “I missed you, Finn. I wanted us to be able to talk to one another, the way we used to. Maybe have a little of what used to be between us.”

Finn pursed his mouth, looking down at her and not at all liking what he was seeing. “Rachel, I’m not some toy that you can drop and then pick up later when you’re bored. You made it pretty damn clear in New York that I didn’t fit into your new life. So what is this? Slumming?”

“Finn, I don’t mean that at all!” Rachel claimed, realizing that she had completely lost control over their conversation. “I’m just trying to fix what you did when you shipped me off and then vanished without a word.”

Finn wished that he had taken a drink with him because he definitely needed one. Rachel was all over the place with her finger pointing. She was completely blind to whatever didn’t fit in with her personal narrative.

“I mean, one minute I’m being driven to my own wedding, and the next you’re putting me on a train,” she ranted, her hair flinging wildly about her shoulders. “Then you take off and vanish for months. What was I supposed to do? Not try to move on with my life? I was willing to wait for you.”

Finn leaned back against the wall and looked down at her. “Were you?” he asked. “Honestly? You really would have been happy deferring NYADA to stay in Lima for another year and miss out on everything that you’re doing? To wait for me? You honestly could say that you wouldn’t have been resenting me a week later for holding you back? For once, be honest with me.”

When Rachel didn’t answer, Finn knew that he had been right.

“You know, when I went to NYADA with you, it just made clear that I wasn’t going to be a part of your life anymore. Not without you being willing to bend so I could be. And we both know that you weren’t capable of doing that.”

“So what happens now?” Rachel asked. “We just become strangers to one another? Act like we never meant anything to each other?”

“No, but we accept that what we had is over. Stop trying to pick up the pieces because it’s not going to work anymore,” Finn said with more certainty than he’d thought he was capable of.

He looked at her and gave her a sad smile. “You’ll go on with your life and I’ll go on with mine. We’ll see each other every now and then, but we’re not going to keep looking back. Because I loved you, but I deserve a lot better than to be your bit on the side for those moments when you’re feeling nostalgic.”

He looked away from her, shutting out the distraught expression on her face. “I’d better be getting back,” he said. “I probably won’t see you before you head back to New York, but good luck there,” he said sincerely.
Rachel watched him walk away from her without a backwards glance and felt tears running down hr face. “Finn…” she called out, her voice wavering but he didn’t respond.

Standing there alone, Rachel realized that it really was over between them. Finn had made the decision that she had been unable, or unwilling, to make. And he firmly closed the door on her.

Part of her wanted to hate him, for walking away from her when she should have considered himself fortunate to have had her. But she knew that she couldn’t hate him. Not when he had given her the chance to fulfill her dreams.

Maybe it was better this way, she thought sadly as called her fathers and asked them to pick her up. She was sure that in hindsight he was probably right and someday in the future, she would probably be grateful that he had the wisdom and strength to do what she wouldn’t. The past was the past and it needed to remain there.

But she just didn’t feel much like celebrating anymore.

* * *

Blaine had barely been able to eat a bite of his dinner. He’d been waiting impatiently all night to catch Kurt alone for a moment, but it seemed like that English boyfriend of his was always around, cutting off his access. It was so frustrating. And the one time that Adam wasn’t around, Tina had to butt in and only managed to totally set Kurt off. Now any chance that Kurt would be at all receptive to him were slim at best.

Hopefully Kurt had enough time to defuse. Now that dinner was winding down, he was hoping that Kurt would be at least a little bit willing to talk to him. If he was fortunate, his ex-boyfriend would be able to see his sincere remorse for the mistake he made, and that Kurt might be receptive to the idea of reconciling. After all, Kurt could only have been dating the Englishman a few weeks and they couldn’t be that serious. Blaine could forgive Kurt’s lapse in reason. After all, the older man took advantage when Kurt was emotionally vulnerable. Blaine couldn’t hold that against Kurt, could he?

Admittedly, he could do without Kurt going out of his way trying to make him jealous. Like now… Kurt was sitting at the table and talking to Adam, holding hands with the older man and looking extremely content with the world. If Blaine didn’t know Kurt so well, he might think that Kurt was sincerely happy. But he knew how manipulative and what a subtle actor his ex-boyfriend was. Dragging Adam to the wedding was clearly about trying punishing Blaine for his past mistake.

He had to reach out to Kurt. Be willing to be the bigger man and get Kurt to see reason. Yes, he’d made a horrible error and Kurt did have a right to be upset with him. But to throw out their entire relationship and not be willing to even give him the chance to try to fix things? That was a bit melodramatic, even for Kurt.

Obviously, trying to be a gentleman and not as direct as he could be didn’t serve him well earlier, so Blaine knew that he had to be a lot more straightforward this time around. And if the Englishman thought to stand in his way, then Blaine would have to prove that he was more than willing to fight for the one he loved.

He straightened out his jacket, wanting to look his best before approaching Kurt, and confidently walked up to the chatting pair. Adam had said something that got Kurt laughing, his eyes sparkling with humor and seeing Kurt happy in the company of someone else cause Blaine’s stomach to tighten painfully. He hated the other idea that another man could put a smile on Kurt’s face and he had to make his ex-boyfriend see that there was no one more capable of making Kurt truly happy than himself.
“Kurt,” he said, trying to sound self-assured without coming across as too arrogant. “I need to speak with you. Alone.”

Kurt turned an annoyed look to Blaine, not releasing Adam’s hand. “Blaine, you really are getting on my last nerve,” he warned. “I have nothing to say to you.”

“Kurt, please,” Blaine said insistently. “After everything we’ve been to each other, you owe me at least talk to me for a minute.”

Blaine’s demand seemed to strike a nerve in Kurt and Blaine nearly back peddled at the flash of anger in Kurt’s eyes.

“I owe you?” Kurt all but spat. “I stopped owing you anything the instant we broke up.”

“So you won’t even talk to me?” Blaine asked. “After telling me that you forgave me, you can’t spare five minutes to talk to me without hiding behind your new boyfriend.” He couldn’t help from giving Adam a venomous glare.

Kurt inhaled deeply, visibly struggling to keep a rein on his temper while others could see him, then looked to Adam. “Do you mind? I need to deal with this,” he asked.

The older man didn’t look at all happy with Blaine upsetting Kurt so, and for a second Blaine thought that he’d have an angry Englishman to deal with. Instead Adam nodded, lifting their joined hands to press a kiss to Kurt’s knuckles.

“You do what you have to, love,” he said gently. “I’ll wait for you here.”

Kurt smiled to him thankfully, then turned an irritated glance to his ex. “Let’s get this over with,” he commanded. He walked out of the room without a backwards glance and Blaine had to scramble to catch up with him.

The instant that Blaine had set foot outside the reception hall, Kurt turned on him. “Blaine, you have to stop this,” he said firmly, keeping control of his anger. “We are not going to be doing this every time we’re in the same place.”

“Kurt, let me…” Blaine started, only to be cut off.

“No! I have a right to be able to come home and visit my family without being harassed by you,” Kurt snapped. “It’s bad enough that you managed to turn what few friends I had in this town against me, but I will not let you chase me away form visiting my family. Have I made myself clear?”

“Kurt, just listen to me!” Blaine exclaimed, shocked at the level of anger Kurt was displaying towards him. He could never remember Kurt being this angry with anyone that wasn’t an outright enemy of his.

“You’ve been shutting me out for months! I’ve been trying to speak with you, to maybe fix what happened but you just won’t listen to me,” Blaine said adamantly. “I mean, I even came to see you in New York and you barely said a word to me the whole time I was there.”

“Oh yes… you did come to see me. After you lied to my father about why we broke up so that he’d bring you when he was there to tell me that he has cancer!”

Blaine flushed angrily. “I didn’t lie to him!”

“Then what was the bullshit you were trying to feed him?” Kurt demanded. “Some crap about the
distance being too much and we couldn’t deal with the separation… you certainly didn’t tell him that I broke up with you because you’d fucked someone else. Because you know that there would be no way in hell that he would have let you anywhere near me if he knew that you cheated on me.”

“Kurt, what I did isn’t the point now,” Blaine insisted. “I know that I fucked up. But I am trying to fix this and you’re not helping at all. I can’t make this better if you won’t work with me.”

Kurt inhaled deeply to steady his temper, running a hand through his carefully styled hair in frustration.

“Because there’s nothing to fix,” Kurt stated as firmly as he could manage. “It’s over between us. That’s not going to change, no matter how much you harass me. I’m not taking you back.”

Blaine’s mouth contorted angrily at Kurt’s pronouncement. “It’s because of that man you’re with, right? If you weren’t seeing him…”

“We still wouldn’t be getting back together,” Kurt cut in sharply. “Adam has absolutely nothing to do with me not wanting you back. Even if I was single, I’d rather be alone than in a relationship with someone that I can’t trust. When you cheated on me, you proved that I could never really trust you again, and I can’t be with someone that I can’t count on to be faithful.”

He looked at Blaine with an expression of sadness and anger. “There was a lot that was wrong with our relationship. Maybe at one point we could have tried to fix things, but the instant you were with another man?”

Kurt shook his head. “I can’t live my life wondering what would happen the next time I upset you, or don’t live up to your expectations and you decided that I deserve to be punished.”

“Kurt, if you just gave me a chance…” Blaine could hear the pleading tone coming out in his voice, but Kurt shook his head firmly.

“What?” Kurt asked. “For you to tell me another reason about why it was my fault? That I wasn’t charting my every waking moment of life around your needs? That because I had to focus on myself for a novel change that it was reason for you to fuck someone else? I won’t go back to that. I can’t.”

“I wasn’t trying to punish you!” Blaine insisted. “I…”

Kurt shook his head angrily. “Then what the hell was it about? You were whining that you couldn’t come visit me sooner because you were so busy with school, but you somehow are fly in to ‘surprise’ me right after you fucked your random? I’m supposed to think that it wasn’t about paying me back for not showing you enough attention?

“And even then, I had to press you to find out what was wrong. Were you even going to tell me if I hadn’t asked?

Blaine looked at his ex-boyfriend helplessly, trying desperately to think of some way of breaking through to Kurt. “But you said that you forgave me,” he reminded, the justification sounding weak even to his own ears.

Kurt signed and nodded. “I had to… because staying angry with you was eating me up inside.”

He leaned against the wall and his head tilted back tiredly. Despite how unhappy Kurt looked, Blaine couldn’t help from admiring how beautiful he was. He looked like a figure out of a classical painting. And just as unattainable to Blaine as a painted figure.
“I spent weeks barely able to eat or sleep, or focus on my job. I was falling apart at the seams and if I wanted to move forward with my life, I needed to let my anger at you go. For my benefit. But Blaine… was never about wanting to get back together with you,” Kurt insisted.

“Kurt, I love you,” Blaine insisted. “I never wanted to hurt you.”

Kurt looked at his first love, and for the first time in what seemed like forever, it didn’t hurt. “I wish that I could believe that,” he said gently. “But I don’t. I don’t think I will ever get past the fact that because you thought that I was too focused on my own needs and goals that I deserved to be punished by cheating on me. And it’s impossible for me to see what you did as anything other than trying to punish me.

Kurt looked to Blaine with a resolute expression. “It’s not like it was the first time you decided that I needed to be punished over something you felt I was doing that bothered you, but it’s going to be the last. You hurt me in a way that I will never forget. You broke my trust that we can’t just go back to what we were before.”

Blaine felt his eyes starting to burn from tears that he was barely holding back. “Kurt, I would give anything to be able to go back and undo what I did. Please… you’ve got to give me a chance to make things right with you.”

“But that’s the point!” Kurt exclaimed in exasperation. “You can’t undo it. You can’t go back in time and erase what happened. That bell’s been rung.

“Maybe someday we can be friends again,” he granted, obviously reluctant to even offer that. “When we’ve had a few years and both of us grow up some more and we move on with our lives. But now? I just can’t be around someone who was so incapable of letting me focus on myself for even a little bit that he goes out of his way to cause me pain. I don’t deserve that.”

Kurt looked away from Blaine and took a steadying breath to soothe his agitated nerves. “I can’t stop you from attending NYADA,” he allowed, knowing full well how stubborn Blaine was. “But seriously… if you’re only applying because I’m there and you think it’s a way of getting me back, you probably should rethink your plans. Because forcing me to be around you isn’t going to change how I feel.”

Blaine looked down at the floor, tears streaming down his face. “So that’s it? You’re just going to walk away from me? From us?”

Kurt’s mouth curled into a tense smile and he nodded. “Yes, I am. Because there is no more ‘us’. There hasn’t been since you touched that guy and made it about me ignoring you. All I know is that for my own sake, I have to move on.”

He looked at Blaine one last time, no longer feeling even the slightest pull in his ex-boyfriend’s direction. The hurt at even looking at him was finally gone. “You’re always going to be my first love, and I’m going to cherish that. But I would appreciate it if you don’t try to contact me for awhile. I’ll let you know when and if I want to speak with you, but for now… if you really loved me, please do me the respect of doing what I ask. I think, given everything, it’s the very least you can do.”

Blaine could only watch helplessly, tears streaming down his face, as Kurt walked out of his life for what might well be the last time.
Chapter 6

Finn watched as guests slowly began to make their way out of the reception hall as the party wound down. It had been a lovely evening and Finn was glad that things went smoothly for Will and Emma. After all they’d been through they deserved this wonderful day to start of their lives together, and Finn was proud to have help them in some small way.

At one time he had imagined a night like this for himself and Rachel, but that dream was over and the acceptance of that fact was a lot less painful than he would have expected. After talking with Rachel, he found it surprisingly easy to enjoy the rest of the night, surrounded by his friends.

Now the bouquet had been thrown, caught by one of Emma’s very enthusiastic cousins who looked like she was ready to body slam anyone who got in her way, and the cake had been cut. Finn knew that his duties were nearly completed. He took one last bite of wedding cake and wondering how much longer he should plan to hang around. It had been a long day and he was tired.

Most of their group had begun to drift away for the night. He had no clue where Quinn and Santana were. Kurt and Adam had already bid Finn goodnight and disappeared up to their room. Blaine and Rachel seem to have vanished into thin air and Mercedes was finishing her last song of the night. Amy finally reached her wedding limit and headed up to her room to get some sleep, promising that she would see Finn at breakfast in the morning. The younger kids were starting to head home, having had a wonderful evening.

Puck flopped into the chair next to him and gave him a broad grin. “Good party,” he complimented sincerely.

“Yeah, it was. Glad it went off well. You heading out soon?” he asked, biting back a yawn. It had been a long day and he was exhausted.

Puck shrugged. “Well, I was planning to see who I could hook up with. I mean, weddings always mean horny, desperate bridesmaids but… I’m just not in the mood. It seems kind of stupid.”

Finn nodded. “Well, if you want, we can hang out tonight,” he offered. “I’ve got a room and I was just looking to get some rest. I’ve got a lot of thinking to do.”

Puck looked at him strangely. “I kind of figured that you would be with Rachel tonight,” he said. “I mean, you and she were always going to be together. I figured that a wedding would be the kind of thing that would make her think about getting back together.”

Finn suspected that was exactly what Rachel had in mind, but he shook his head. “Rachel and I are over,” he stated. “For good.”

Puck appeared genuinely surprised at Finn’s firm pronouncement. “But, you and she…”

“We’re moving in different directions,” Finn admitted. “Even if I’m not really sure what direction I’m going in. It’s just not going to be the same as hers.”

Puck nodded, surprisingly in complete understanding of what Finn was trying to say. “Man, that totally sucks,” he offered in sincere condolence. “I mean… I know you loved her. Like, really loved her.”

“It’s okay. I’ve had enough time to accept it,” Finn assured him. “So now I have to figure out what I want for my own life. It’s about time I gave that my attention.”
“You and me both,” Puck admitted with a bit of embarrassed reluctance. “Let’s be real… I’m never going to write anything that’s going to get filmed or anything. I’m just spinning my wheels. With everyone else doing important stuff, it’s kind of embarrassing to have nothing on my plate.”

Finn gave his friend a reassuring smile. “Well, maybe we can brainstorm and come up with some ideas together,” he offered. “You and me… we always made a pretty good team.”

The offer brought out a bright smile onto the other young man’s face. “Yeah… I’d like that,” he answered.

“Cool. Look, you go up to my room,” Finn said, handing over his key card. “I’m going to check with Will and Emma and see if they need anything and I’ll meet you there.”

Puck’s smile grew even brighter. “Yeah… this is going to be great. I’ll see you in a few.”

Finn smiled happily as Puck went to his car to retrieve his overnight bag and head up to the room, and then turned his attention to the fading party. Will and Emma were having a last dance together, completely lost in each other’s eyes but Finn knew that this night would only be the start of a long and happy life together.

Maybe this night could also be a new start for him too.

* * *

Adam bit back a gasp as Kurt all but shoved him against the door of their hotel room, his long body pressed up against Adam’s and his mouth pressed hard against his own. One of Kurt’s hands was frantically trying to get Adam’s jacket off his body while the other was trying to get the door open.

“Mmmth… darling, let’s get inside before we give the whole floor a show,” Adam managed to stammer out. Kurt responded by vacuum sealing his lips to his boyfriend’s again, the swelling erection pressed into Adam’s hip telling him precisely what Kurt was focused on at the moment and made it difficult to deny him.

Somehow they did manage to get the hotel room door open and the two of them inside before they could commit any acts of public indecency and Adam could completely focus on the young man in his arms. Kurt was always a creature of intense passions and when aroused to this level, it was all but impossible to refuse him.

Not that Adam wanted to, by any stretch of the imagination. But he had some surprises for his boyfriend and after dealing with his obnoxious ex, Kurt was well deserving of a treat.

“Darling, take a look,” he urged, guiding Kurt over towards the bed.

Kurt couldn’t help from smiling at what he found. The bed had been turned down invitingly, and someone had sprinkled red rose petals all over the bedspread in a heart-shaped pattern. A bottle of champagne waited for them in an ice bucket, along with two flutes. On a plate was a small selection of pastries and confections for them to enjoy.

“You missed dessert dealing with Blaine, so I had room service send something up,” Adam said softly in Kurt’s ear, causing the younger man to shiver deliciously. “And because you deserved a reward for dealing with all this so well.”

He smiled a bit mischievously. “I might have let it slip that we would be celebrating a romantic milestone and the hotel arranged a few extras for us to enjoy.”
Kurt turned to look at his boyfriend… no, his lover, he amended mentally. Because Adam had come to mean so much more than the word boyfriend could encompass. “You are amazing,” he whispered breathily, wrapping his arms around the older man. “I can’t believe that you arranged this.”

Adam just smiled and trailed a finger down the line of Kurt’s jaw. “Because I love you,” he said gently. “I don’t get too many opportunities to show it the way you deserve because you’re so good at taking care of yourself.”

He gently touched Kurt’s hair, running his fingers through the soft locks and relishing the way Kurt leaned into his touch. “You are so remarkable. The way you stand up for those you care about… and now you stand up for yourself. You didn’t allow Blaine to get into a position to keep hurting you. You are showing others that you are every bit the man that I always knew you were.”

Kurt felt something in his chest that felt almost like pain, but it wasn’t. It was a heavy tightness that nearly overwhelmed him. Looking into Adam’s azure eyes, he felt something that he hadn’t felt since another boy took his hand to show him a shortcut at a stuffy private school. It was nearly overwhelming and frightening and Kurt knew that he was helpless against it.

This wasn’t something he’d actively sought when he started dating Adam, back when he was still emotionally bleeding from what Blaine had done. But being with Adam, being treated with kindness and love and seeing the kind of man Adam was… This could destroy him if things turned out badly, but he didn’t want to deny it any longer. The fear that had held him back, that kept waiting for the other shoe to drop and Adam would decide that Kurt wasn’t worth his time was gone.

He reached out to pull Adam to him, pressing their lips together passionately. Adam’s mouth parted, allowing Kurt’s tongue to flicker inside and touch his, causing him to gasp. They held one another closely, the kiss becoming more fervent until Adam pulled back gently.

“Why don’t you get that fantastic suit hung up before we ruin it?” he suggested, fingering the decorative chains holding Kurt’s jacket closed. He slipped off his own jacket and tossed it over the back of one of the chairs. “I’ll open the champagne and we can relax a bit.”

Kurt nodded, a bit breathless, licking his reddened lips. He shed his suit and carefully hung it up so it wouldn’t get too wrinkled. He heard Adam popping the cork on the champagne bottle and while Adam was getting their refreshments set up, he ducked into the bathroom to retrieve the supplies he’d tucked into his toiletries kit. Adam had insisted that they would behave themselves while sleeping under the same roof as Kurt’s father out of respect, but Kurt had no intention of denying himself Adam’s body when they had a hotel room and plenty of privacy for themselves.

He looked at himself in the mirror, standing in his boxer briefs and for once not feeling the need to cover himself up. He knew that Adam loved his body as it was, and was very complimentary of Kurt’s increasingly toned and leanly muscled form.

Adam had shed his shirt and tie, but the slim cut slacks from his suit clung to his hips, displaying the sharp line of his abdominal muscles. Kurt had always loved Adam’s body, with its cleanly defined muscles that made him want to sink his teeth into them. The feeling definitely seemed mutual with the way that Adam’s eyes light up at the sight of Kurt wearing nothing but his underwear, his gaze taking in Kurt’s form from head to toe. He handed Kurt a flute of champagne and raised his glass in toast.

“To my beautiful sweetheart,” he said softly, raising his glass to Kurt. “A man who knows who he is and can battle any dragon, no matter how fearsome.”

Kurt felt himself blushing, the redness spreading down his throat and across his chest but managed to
keep from protesting Adam’s praise of him. He sipped at his glass, the tart bubbles tingling on his tongue. Adam lowered his glass after tasting his wine, his eyes never leaving Kurt.

“Come here,” he said gently, placing his glass down.

Kurt stepped forward, letting Adam take his glass and put it safely aside. Strong arms pulled him close and Kurt shivered at the feel of Adam’s bare chest pressed up against his. There was something comforting about the way Adam’s body just seemed to surround him, and made him feel safe rather than overwhelmed. It was such a strange but wonderful contrast, that he could be physically strong, but so soothing in the way he expressed that strength.

And there was something absolutely tantalizing about Adam still being partly clothed while Kurt was all but naked before him. The soft wool of Adam’s slacks rubbed against Kurt’s bare legs in a manner that should have made Kurt feel a bit vulnerable. Instead it just aroused him further.

His fingers found the buckle of Adam’s belt and undid it deftly, pulling the leather free from the loops and letting it fall to the floor behind him. He then carefully undid the button and unzipped the fly, drawing a soft moan from the older man.

Their lips found one another again, and Kurt found himself crushed against Adam’s body as the older man pulled him close. Kurt sank into the embrace, letting the other man’s mouth devour his. Adam’s hands roamed over Kurt’s back, sliding down to his ass and grinding their hips together. Feeling Adam’s growing hardness pressing up against his made Kurt want to rip those very fashionable pants that he’d so carefully selected for his lover right off him. Adam had often complimented Kurt on his passion for all things, including love making, but this level of arousal almost frightened Kurt with its intensity. Their kisses grew more intense, tongues warring and hands caressing more aggressively. Kurt’s hand slipped into the front of Adam’s pants and found the hardness of his cock, giving it a gentle squeeze through his briefs.

Adam groaned at the caress and slipped his hands inside the back of Kurt’s underwear, his fingers giving his ass a firm squeeze. Kurt pressed closer against Adam, his mouth trailing from Adam’s to bite along Adam’s throat, nibbling on the pulse point beneath his ear.

Adam hissed when he felt Kurt’s teeth sink lightly into his skin and responded by pulling Kurt to him as tightly as he could manage. “Bed… now!” he gasped as Kurt’s hand continued to stroke his hardness through his underwear. He maneuvered them around so that they could fall safely onto the king sized bed safely, scattering rose petals in their wake. He shifted enough to let his pants slip down his legs to fall carelessly to the floor.

Kurt took advantage of the brief distraction and managed to gain the upper hand, flipping Adam onto his back and straddling his hips. Adam seemed surprised, but not displeased by Kurt's aggressiveness, using his position to his own advantage. His hands found Kurt’s ass again and slid his underwear down over his hips, not quite pulling them off but revealing the tempting crest of his ass and teasing Kurt’s hard cock with the promise of freedom.

“Tell me what you need, love,” Adam urged. “Whatever you want tonight.”

Kurt was never more thankful for having a lover as versatile as he was. Adam was just as happy to bottom as he was to top and they had learned to take their cues from one another. What one needed, the other would provide. After Blaine’s customary selfishness, it was refreshing to have a lover as interested in Kurt’s needs and pleasure as his own.

Kurt leaned over Adam, covering him with his own body. “I want you inside me,” he said softly in
Adam’s ear, feeling the man’s grip on him tighten in response. “I want you to fuck me until I barely remember my own name.”

“That we can do,” Adam rasped, scraping his nails down the length of Kurt’s ribs. “Because you know how much I love to feel this gorgeous body, inside and out.”

Adam suddenly surged up and caught Kurt in his arms and reversed their positions so that he covered Kurt. Rather than being frightened by Adam’s sudden display of physical strength, Kurt found himself growing even more aroused. He watched through narrowed eyes as Adam paid homage to his body. They had been intimate often enough for Adam to have learned what all of Kurt’s physical triggers were, and how to utilize of them to the best advantage.

And Adam took advantage of each of them ruthlessly. Kurt gasped as Adam’s teeth sank into the tender lobe of his ear, the older man’s breath coming in hotly against his dampened skin. Adam slowly worked his way downward, nibbling at Kurt’s throat, his teeth sharp against Kurt’s pulse point, soothing the sting with a swipe of his tongue.

Adam paid close attention to Kurt’s cues, feeling the younger man begin to groan and writhe beneath him. He tightened his grip to hold Kurt still as he continued to physically tease him. His mouth trailed down over Kurt’s shoulders to his nipples, gently mouthing one to a sharp point and then the other, causing Kurt to cry out. He drew back slightly to blow over the stimulated flesh, causing them to pucker before returning to nibbling at them with his teeth.

Kurt moaned at the sensation Adam was drawing out of him seemed to go right to his cock. He needed something… Adam’s hand or his mouth… there now! But Adam seemed content to continue teasing him, keeping him on the knife’s edge of arousal masterfully. He played Kurt’s body like a concert violinist, wringing the most beautiful sounds from him.

Adam smiled to himself as he drifted lower over Kurt’s body, feeling the quivering muscles beneath his fingertips. He traced his fingernails down Kurt’s ribs, gently scratching the skin as they traced the line of his body down to his hips. Adam’s mouth continued its torturous journey down Kurt’s body, his tongue tracing slow spirals around the neat indentation of Kurt’s navel, dipping in and drawing a low moan from the man beneath him.

Adam playfully lipped the neat line of hair leading him down to his real objective. With a gentle tug, he slipped Kurt’s underwear down his hips, revealing his long, beautifully arched cock that stood tall and proud. Kurt gasped when the cool air hit his most sensitive part, but Adam continued to tease, leisurely pulling Kurt’s underpants down his legs before tossing them aside.

Kurt barely had a chance to collect his wits before Adam was on him again, taking his cock in hand and giving it a long stroke. “Gorgeous,” he complimented, causing Kurt to groan as he admired the long, hard organ and the firm balls drawn up tight against his body. “It suits you so well. Elegant and such a lovely color.”

He looked up at Kurt impishly, seeing the almost pained expression on his lover’s face. “I hear that aubergine will very much be a popular color this fall. Maybe we should paint the loft in that color.”

“I’m sure that Rachel will love having our home painted the color of my cock,” Kurt ground out, trying his best not to laugh. “Can you please do something before I explode?”

“Oh, poor darling,” Adam cooed playfully. “Let me take care of you.”

Kurt bit his fist to keep from screaming when Adam’s tongue licked a long, wet stripe down up and down his length. When Adam took him into his mouth, Kurt honestly felt like he was going to die.
There was something to be said for older men who had a bit of experience under their belts. Adam was very skilled, and better, actually enjoyed orally pleasing his lover. It was taking every ounce of Kurt’s control not to climax the instant he felt the warmth of Adam’s mouth engulfing his hardness, swiping his tongue over the crown in a way that had Kurt’s eyes rolling back.

“Adam…” he groaned. “Please…”

Adam took his cue knowing that Kurt was so on edge that he wouldn’t last long. Inhaling deeply, he took Kurt down to the root, opening his throat with well-practiced experience and began to suck, causing Kurt to shout. He used his grip to keep Kurt from thrusting upward, keeping firmly in control as he felt Kurt begin to come apart. Kurt groaned and tried to thrash, his fist gripping on the comforter beneath him to keep from tearing at Adam’s hair. He struggled to hold on but the sensation became too much, and with a cry poured himself down Adam’s throat.

Adam gently sucked Kurt down, his mouth now soothing on Kurt’s oversensitive organ. Gently releasing Kurt from his mouth, he looked up at his lover, seeing the younger man gasping for breath, the flush coloring his skin nearly down to his navel. Kurt lay bonelessly on the bed, looking totally wrecked and Adam smiled, happy to have had such an effect on the younger man.

Hoisting himself up so that he could lay next to Kurt, he gathered the younger man up in his arms as Kurt began to recover from his intense climax. He smoothed Kurt’s hair back, gently kissing his forehead and holding him close. Kurt looked up at Adam from under his lashes, his expression one of wonderment at the man holding him.

“I’m sorry,” he apologized, feeling suddenly very young and clumsy next to his skilled lover.

Adam’s brow furrowed in confusion. “Darling, whatever for?” he asked, plucking off a few rose petals that clung to Kurt’s skin.

Kurt felt his blush deepening. “I came like a teenager right there.”

Adam chuckled, soothing Kurt with a gentle kiss to his mouth. “You were wonderful,” he said softly. “We’ve got all night and I wanted you to have a chance to take the edge of a bit. I want to see how often I can make you come tonight.”

He felt Kurt’s cock twitch interestingly against his leg and looked down with amusement to see it starting to fill again. “And there is that lovely young recovery time that I knew we’d get to enjoy.” He turned his gaze back to Kurt’s face, giving him a gently pleased expression, causing Kurt to laugh.

Adam chuckled, kissing Kurt again. He was in no rush to hurry their night along. After all, they could always nap on the plane going home.

* * *

Blaine looked despondently about the hotel room, feeling like the walls were closing in on him. He’d all but pleaded with Tina and Sam to stay with him so he wouldn’t be alone all night. But Tina had begged off, insisting on going home. She seemed very unsettled about something. As for Sam… he was in his own room fucking his girlfriend. Neither of them seemed interested in helping Blaine during his moment of need. They had completely abandoned him.

The entire room seemed set to deliberately remind him of just how badly his plans had fallen through. The wine bucket sat alongside the bed with its melting ice and warming champagne and the box of French chocolates sat untouched. He had tossed the rose arrangement he’d purchased into the
Blaine flopped onto the bed and ground his fists into his eyes, trying not to imagine what Kurt was doing at that moment. His mind kept painting images of Kurt in the arms of that Englishman in another room at that very hotel, just a few floors away. He could almost imagine that he could hear Kurt’s moans of pleasure, but knew rationally that was impossible.

With a snarl, he flung the chocolates across the room, the box hitting the wall and the confections spilling across the floor. He flung open the closet door and grabbed his bag. He couldn’t spend another moment in that room. He would go home and try to put this awful night out of his mind. There were other boys who would be happy to have him, he insisted to himself. Kurt would be the one to regret this one day.

It would be telling that for a very long time, the smell of chocolate and roses would be one of loss and failure.

* * *

Kurt laughed as Adam teased him with a very appetizing looking petit four, holding the treat that he was feeding to Kurt just out of reach. Kurt leaned up to try to seize it with his teeth, but Adam pulled it away just as he was about to get a taste.

“No fair!” Kurt complained, stretching up to try to get a bite of the pastry that Adam was dangling tantalizingly out of reach. Adam just laughed and pulled it a bit further away, taunting his lover mercilessly.

Kurt finally grabbed Adam’s arm and pulled the petite four down to his mouth, his teeth crunching through the icing.

“That’s cheating,” Adam criticized, laughing aloud. He popped the other half into his own mouth.

“As if there are any rules when it comes to cake,” Kurt answered with a proud smirk as he swallowed the sweet cake. “Besides, it’s not nice to tease when I’ve got something that you want.”

“Oh? And what’s that?” Adam asked, raising an eyebrow in query. “I’m the one with the pastries.”

Kurt’s smile turned wicked and his hand trailed down Adam’s chest, fingers trailing through the light dusting of hair, slipping down his body to Kurt’s real objective. Adam bit back a gasp as Kurt’s long fingers wrapped lightly around his hardening cock, playing with the give of his foreskin.

“Oh, am I?” Kurt grinned, leaning close so that his and Adam’s noses nearly touched. “I’ve never been able to stay out of trouble,” he bragged.

“You, my lad, are courting serious trouble,” Adam hissed, trying not to be overcome just from the feeling of Kurt’s hand wrapped about his length.

“No, I’m not,” Kurt grinned, leaning close so that his and Adam’s noses nearly touched. “I’ve never been able to stay out of trouble,” he bragged.

“That I believe,” Adam answered, trying to keep a rein on his arousal. “But I think we have better uses for that.”

Adam’s mouth captured Kurt’s in a powerful kiss and pressed him back into the soft bedding. He felt his younger lover wriggle beneath him, his legs falling apart so that Adam could settle comfortably
between them. Kurt sighed as Adam’s weight pressed him into the bed, cradling Adam between his powerful thighs as the older man plundered his mouth ruthlessly.

Kissing Kurt was one of Adam’s favorite pastimes, and one that he would happily spend hours of the day enjoying. A pity that there were always mundane annoyances, like eating and breathing that sometimes got in the way. He loved listening to the sounds Kurt made, the mewls and gasps and moans when they made love, but it was rare that he was able to enjoy the full range of sounds that he could wring from his lover. With the decided lack of real privacy at the loft, it wasn’t often that Kurt could be so completely unconstrained, lest his roommates know exactly what he was doing.

It was only in the quiet of Adam’s own studio apartment that he got that opportunity. But now that they had a private room for the night, he was going to take advantage that the opportunity presented. He wanted to hear Kurt scream down the walls and see him come completely apart. He would knock down that last wall of inhibition that made his lover hide himself away from those around him.

Kurt had thoughtfully placed the supplies on the night table next to the bed where they were in easy reach. Adam picked up the bottle of lubricant and right before Kurt’s wide eyes dribbled a healthy amount onto his fingers. He held his hand up before Kurt, deliberately letting him see the sheen of lube on his long fingers before lowering his hand behind Kurt and watching him arch as he was breached by one nimble finger.

Adam carefully worked the tight ring of muscle to relax enough for him to slip a second finger inside, smiling at Kurt’s gasp as he was gently but methodically stretched. “You open up so beautifully for me, love,” he complimented, his accent thickening in his increasing arousal. He pressed a deep kiss on his lover as his fingers pressed deeper inside.

Kurt couldn’t help from writhing on his lover’s talented fingers as they gently scissored within him, coaxing his opening to stretch wider. A third finger joined the others inside him and he knew that he was ready. “Adam, please…” he all but begged.

Adam nodded, kissing his lover gently and carefully withdrawing his fingers. “Get me ready,” he urged, sitting up on his knees so that Kurt had full access to his body.

Kurt grabbed one of the little packets from the box and tore it open with his teeth. Adam bit his lip to keep a rein on his arousal as Kurt’s slim hand took hold of his hard length and expertly rolled the condom down over him. He settled back, letting Adam position his legs about the other man’s waist and lifting his hips. Carefully positioning himself, Adam began to press in.

Kurt groaned as he felt the head of Adam’s cock penetrate him, the delicious burn of being stretched around Adam’s thick length. Adam took his time as he slowly pressed deeper, gently rolling his hips and taking extra care not to hurt his lover in his eagerness.

“Oh God… you feel so good,” Kurt groaned. Ever nerve felt afire as he felt every millimeter of Adam’s length slowly pushing into him.

Adam sighed happily as he sank in deeper into his lover’s body, feeling that hot tightness all around him. It was like riding a young colt, barely broken to the bit with the way Kurt thrashed and shuddered beneath him, barely able to keep a grasp on his control. He heard the sharp intake of breath from the younger man as he sheathed himself that last bit, his groin pressed tightly up against Kurt’s ass.

As always, Adam first checked to make sure that his lover was okay. “Sweetheart? Ready?” he rasped.
Kurt’s eyes were dark with arousal and he nodded. “Move,” he ordered. He needed more…

Adam nodded and gave an experimental thrust, causing Kurt to cry out and arch as he felt Adam’s length driving inwards. Despite being nearly overwhelmed by the tight heat of Kurt’s body, Adam restrained himself and watched Kurt’s responses carefully until he saw that his lover was ready for more. Kurt’s breath hitched as Adam’s thrusts became harder and more forceful. The sensation was nearly overwhelming and he began to moan as he felt Adam rutting into him. His lover’s hands grasped his buttocks tightly, helping to move Kurt’s hips in time with his thrusts.

It all felt almost too much, feeling Adam’s cock deep within him brushing against his prostate. But Adam was hardly done with him. The older man slowed to take the sharp edge off his arousal and looked Kurt in the eye. “I want you to ride me,” he said.

Kurt quickly nodded. It was one of their favorite positions, allowing Kurt the best of both worlds. To be thoroughly filled while still completely in control. And Adam loved having full access to all parts of Kurt’s body while Kurt was astride him.

Adam carefully withdrew and rolled over so that he lay on his back. Without hesitation, Kurt quickly straddled him, lowering himself onto Adam’s erection until he was fully seated. He gasped, feeling so incredibly full as gravity worked to press Adam’s cock into him deeper than he ever thought possible.

“Oh, fuck…” he hissed. “I feel so much of you…” He gave an experiential roll of his hips, feeling Adam’s cock pressed tantalizingly against his prostate.

“Love, you’ve got to move,” Adam groaned, struggling to keep from thrusting upwards.

Kurt nodded and with his strong thighs, began to lift and lower himself, each time seating himself more firmly on his lover’s cock. Adam’s hands roamed over his body, flicking his nipples and stroking the hard cock rubbing against his stomach. Kurt groaned at all the sensations, nearly overwhelmed as his movements became more erratic and his body began to shudder.

Adam felt Kurt’s rhythm start to falter and placed his hands on Kurt’s buttocks to help steady his movements, pushing upwards to meet him but he felt that Kurt would not last much longer. He was so on edge that it would take the least thing to nudge him over.

Adam suddenly sat up, with Kurt fully seated on his lap. He wrapped his arms around Kurt, holding him close and trapping Kurt’s straining erection between their bodies. “Let’s finish this, love,” he urged, his hands on Kurt’s ass, holding him in place. He thrust upwards, Kurt grunting in response.

The younger man was beyond speech at that point, and could only nod. Adam held him and they moved together, Kurt’s thighs trembling with the strain of moving on Adam’s cock while the other man thrust up into him. Their movements began to grow less coordinated until Kurt was completely overcome by the feeling of Adam deep inside him, brushing hard against his prostate.

Kurt bit his lip, grinding down on Adam’s cock until he came with a loud shout, spurting across Adam’s chest and belly. Adam continued to thrust into his lover, riding out Kurt’s orgasm until he came, biting hard against Kurt’s shoulder to muffle his scream.

They sat together, bodies still joined and breathing heavily. Kurt felt his body shuddering from the aftershocks of his intense orgasm, Adam gently petting his hair and skin to soothe him even though the older man wasn’t much better off. Adam had the wherewithal to gently roll back so that they could lay on their sides, holding each other.
Kurt shifted to free his legs and gave a low whine when he felt Adam’s softening cock slip from his body, not wanting to lose the connection and feeling strangely empty. Adam shifted enough to get rid of the used condom, then gathered up his lover in his arms.

He kissed Kurt gently on his sweat-streaked brow, overwhelmed by his feelings for the younger man. This beautiful, otherworldly creature that rightly should have any man he wanted and he wanted Adam. That left the older man awed and grateful the he was the one that Kurt chose, and he would never forget how fortunate he was.

Kurt shifted slightly, looking up at Adam from under his lashes and wrinkled his nose adorably. “I’m all sticky,” he complained mildly.

Adam chuckled tiredly, kissing Kurt again on the little crinkle on his brow. “You and be both, sweetheart,” he said softly. “Wait here…”

It took Adam a moment to get the jelly feeling out of his legs enough to make his way to the bathroom where he got a washcloth and soaked it in warm water. After washing Kurt’s drying semen from his body, he made his way back to their bed. He carefully cleaned his lover so that Kurt could rest more comfortably, afterwards tossing the stained cloth to the floor.

Kurt settled happily in Adam’s arms, feeling safe and sheltered. He pressed his face into Adam’s shoulder, breathing in the sharp scent of his lover and feeling his cock give a half-hearted twitch of interest. Later, he promised the organ that clearly had a mind of its own.

He didn’t know when he dozed off, but when he woke, Adam was still holding him and gazing at him adoringly. The older man smiled when he saw that Kurt was awake and gently smoothed back his tousled hair. “You are so beautiful,” Adam said softly, gazing at Kurt with what looked like awe in his eyes.

Kurt wrinkled his nose again. “I’m a mess,” he insisted. “And I smell.”

Adam leaned in breathed in deeply, nuzzling Kurt’s neck. “You smell like us when we make love,” Adam corrected, pressing a gentle kiss against a deep purple love bite on Kurt’s throat. “I’m getting rather addicted to that particular aroma.”

Kurt snorted, giving his lover a playful nudge. “Go on, you…”

“’M serious,” Adam insisted. “If I could bottle it, I’d wear this scent every day.”

“Oh, that would go over really well at NYADA,” Kurt laughed. “I can just see Madam Tibideaux walking around with her nose in the air, sniffing and trying to figure out who’s been fucking in the Round Room.”

Adam chuckled, pulling Kurt as close to him as possible, nudging his thigh between Kurt’s so that their groins were pressed together. Kurt felt Adam hardening against his leg.

“What say we take this into the shower,” Kurt suggested, his thigh rubbing teasingly at Adam’s growing erection. “I really need to get clean. And there’s something I want to try.”

Adam gave him a slow grin as his eyes glinted with renewed passion. “I do love it when you get experimental.”

Kurt pressed a long, deep kiss on him, then pulled away and with a laugh, slipped from the bed and darted into the bathroom.
Adam listened to the sound of the shower being turn on, and Kurt’s voice lifting in song to lure him in. He gave a long stretch to work out any kinks from their earlier exertions, and then eagerly followed his lover into the bathroom. He was curious to see what Kurt had in mind. One thing was for certain… he was going to enjoy it.

* * *

“Seriously Hummel… you look like a grizzly bear mauled you,” Santana quipped as they gathered in the hotel lounge for the complimentary breakfast. After a long night of partying, they needed to replenish their energies. Besides… when had a group of young adults ever turned down complimentary food, even if it was primarily bagels, muffins and coffee?

There was no sign of the happy newlyweds, and Kurt didn’t expect to see them. Finn had mentioned that they would be leaving for their honeymoon that morning, so the odds were that they were already heading to the airport. Which was probably a good thing, he considered, since it allowed them to miss the sight of their former students looking considerably disheveled after a night of hard partying.

Kurt snorted as he dished up some cut up fruit onto his plate. Yes, he was well aware that he looked less than his usual neatly put together self, and he was quite sure that he was probably the last person that his old classmates would expect to see walk out of a hotel room looking like he’d been ridden hard and put away wet. But part of him was rather proud to have completely shed his Ice Prince persona and he even left off the scarf he’d planned to use to hide the love bites that Adam had scattered across his neck.

Mercedes gave him a knowing smile. “Well, at least you weren’t out in the car this time,” she chuckled, sipping at her glass of orange juice.

“So where’s the British man candy?” Santana asked, giving Kurt a playful nudge. “Doing the walk of shame all the way back to New York?”

“No shame here,” Adam quipped, coming up behind her to give the dark skinned woman a quick hug. “Good morning, gorgeous.”

Santana preened at the greeting. “I have to commend you, Sherlock. Anyone who can take the starch out of Kurt’s shorts should be saluted. I’m going to end up starting to like you,” she warned teasingly.

“I shudder in fear,” Adam chuckled. He looked to his lover. “I put our bags in the car, love.”

“Thanks, babe.” Kurt gave him a quick peck on the cheek and handed him a cup of coffee prepared the way he liked.

“Thank you,” Adam said appreciatively, sipping at the strong coffee. After last night, he was going to need a potent dose of caffeine if he was going to be at all fit for the rest of the day. Neither he nor Kurt got any real sleep.

“You two are just so sweet together,” Mercedes cooed appreciatively. “Now what can’t I find one of these for myself? I seem to land all the duds.”

“Grow a penis and you’ll be all set,” Kurt snorted, causing his friend to nearly choke on her muffin when she started laughing.

Mercedes gave Kurt a punch in the arm that wasn’t quite pulled back and Santana nearly doubled over laughing. Adam just shook his head and pulled Kurt close, pressing a kiss to his temple.
“I saw Finn checking out,” he informed Kurt. “He’s going to join us after he drops off his bag. When were we supposed to meet your parents?”

“Around eleven,” Kurt answered, taking a bite of his bagel. It wasn’t anything close to what he got from their corner shop back in Brooklyn, he noted in disappointment. He really was getting very spoiled. “That’ll give us a few more hours to see them before we have to head to the airport.”

“Well, I hope that you have a scarf at the ready,” Santana chuckled, giving Kurt a knowing grin. “Because all it’s going to take one look at those hickeys and Papa Bear is gonna forget that he likes Dr. Who here.”

“Speaking of hickeys…” Adam drawled, looking at Santana’s throat. Her long hair almost hid it, but there definitely seemed to be a dark mark on her throat. “It looks like we weren’t the only ones enjoying ourselves last night.”

“You hooked up with someone?” Mercedes demanded, peering to get a closer look at Santana’s neck. “Here? Were you with Brittany?”

“Ugh… that would mean a threesome with Trouty Mouth, and unlike Princess Di here, I’ve got no use for dick,” Santana scoffed. “Those days of faking it are over.”

“Then who were you with?” Kurt asked, cocking his head curiously. “I don’t think the guest list was overflowing with convenient lady loving ladies.”

“Oh, I found someone my speed,” Santana assured him. She fished an ice cube from her glass with her fingers and gave it a lascivious lick with her tongue, giving Kurt a sly wink.

Kurt’s eyes opened widely. “No… you didn’t,” he insisted. The idea was too absurd to be taken seriously.

Santana shrugged. “What can I say? The cliché about experimenting coeds is apparently very true.”

“What are you talking about?” Mercedes demanded. “What coed?”

Santana smirked, dropping the ice cube back into her glass with a small splash. “I mean, she’s normally not my type. I don’t go for Ice Queens, but it was fun to watch her melt a little bit.”

Mercedes stared at her in stunned silence as what Santana mean finally dawned on her. “You didn’t… I mean… she stammered. Then mouthed “Quinn?” silently.

Santana’s smirk grew even more self-satisfied and she gave the other young woman a proud look.

“I don’t know if I’m supposed to be disgusted or impressed,” Kurt said with grudging admiration.

Santana shrugged. “It was a nice distraction. I mean… she’s not going to switch teams permanently so I’m not looking for anything more out of it. We’re cool. It’s not going to get weird between us,” she insisted.

“Good, because the two of you as a couple… think that would be one of the signs of the Apocalypse,” Mercedes chuckled. Santana snorted in amusement and gave her a playful shove. “She already left!”

Santana nodded. “Yeah… She and Chang had early flights today,” she explained. “It’s cool. I mean, the last thing she needs is all of you making a big deal out of this. It’s not like we’d be the first weird hook up in our bunch.”
“Odd that you do seem to be at the center of a good number of them,” Mercedes teased, but her tone was completely devoid of heat and Santana let the other girl pull her into a side hug. The black girl looked at them all fondly. “I’m really going to miss you guys. It’s a shame that we’re on opposite sides of the country right now.”

Kurt nodded, feeling rather bereft over it. He hadn’t really gotten used to not seeing his friends on a regular basis. Emailing and occasional Skype sessions just didn’t make up for not having Mercedes around when he needed his best girl’s support. And he had to imagine that she was pretty lonely too at times. He at least had Rachel, as difficult as she could be at times, and Santana. Mercedes was out in L.A. completely on her own. He could only imagine how lonely she must feel at times.

But this is the price that they needed to pay for chasing their dreams. He would never ask Mercedes to give up her opportunity in L.A. just so he could have her around. Hopefully they would find reasons to see one another more frequently and not let the distance pull their friendships apart.

Mercedes caught the melancholic expression on Kurt’s face and quickly pulled him into a warm hug. “I know, baby boy,” she said gently. “I really miss you too. All the time.”

“It’s a shame that you can’t record in New York,” Kurt mused, giving her a soft smile. “But you’re doing such great work there.”

“Well, there’s no law that says I can’t come visit,” Mercedes insisted. “I mean, I’m not in the studio every day. If I can find someplace to stay so I’d only have to pay for airfare.” She gave him a playful nudge.

“Of course you’re staying with us,” Kurt exclaimed. “Just let me know when you want to come.”

Santana nodded in agreement. “Sure… it’ll be good to have another bad bitch around to counteract all the Broadway that I’m forced to endure,” she complained. “Between Hummel and Babs, I’m going to snap from all the showtunes I’m forced to endure.”

“Oh hell, no,” Mercedes exclaimed, giving Kurt a sharp look. “Boy, I taught you better than that! I’ve got to come back and get some soul up in you all.”

Kurt just laughed brightly and gave her a warm hug.

Finn and Puck finally made an appearance, having dropped their bags off and checked out. “Great! Food!” Puck exclaimed, nearly shoving Santana out of his way to get to the buffet table.

“Puckerman! I’m going to gut you,” Santana barked, giving him a fierce glare.

“Hudson, control your boy,” Mercedes ordered, stepping aside so as not to be trampled by Puck’s rush to the food.

Finn just smiled and held up his hands placatory. “Sorry, ‘Cedes, but I’ve learned to keep out of his way. Puck, when there’s food around, is a force of nature.”

Puck looked up, his mouth full of banana nut muffin, and nodded. “Hell yeah!” he said, spraying those unfortunate to be near him with crumbs.

Finn shook his head in bemusement at Puck’s antics and the glare of disgust from Santana as she brushed off her clothes. His friend really wasn’t that much of an unmannered pig, but he played up the image just to get a reaction. And when Santana started to rant at him in Spanish, smacking him in the head with her napkin, it was clear that he got what he wanted.
“Hey, listen… Finn and I were talking last night.” Puck said.

“Why does that make me nervous?” Mercedes chuckled, giving Finn a fond look. “The two of you in cahoots? Should we alert the authorities?”

“It’s okay,” Finn assured her. “We’re just running some ideas about what we’re going to do after Mr. Schu gets back from his honeymoon.”

He looked to Adam and gave him a nod. “Adam here gave me some ideas and we’re going to take the next few months to figure some stuff out. We’re going to do some traveling and maybe some volunteering. I think by after the summer we’ll have something worked out.”

Kurt grinned happily. “That’s great! I’m so glad for you.”

“Yeah well… I don’t want to stay in Lima just because I don’t feel like I’ve got other options and I need to stop spinning my wheels,” Finn said seriously. “We might head down south or maybe head out to Texas. Austin sounds interesting and it’s got a great music scene. But whatever we do, it’s time to get away from McKinley.”

Kurt nodded in understanding. “I don’t know what it is about this place, but it does have a way of dragging us back. I mean… my family is here so I’m going be coming back on occasion to visit,” he explained. “But I think this is the last time I’ve going to come back for anything to with McKinley and New Directions. I mean… it’s always going to be important to me, but I’ve moved on. I had to.”

Adam reached out and pulled Kurt into a gentle hug, letting him know that it was okay for him to feel the way he did.

Santana nodded in agreement. “It’s hard, leaving this all behind,” she said with more emotion than they were used to hearing from her. “Leaving behind the people, even when we know that we’re supposed to… It hurts.”

No one said anything, but they knew what, and who Santana was talking about. Leaving Brittany behind once and all was a painful loss for her, and just another reminder of how much their lives had changed in less than a year.

“It’s part of growing up,” Mercedes said softly. “I mean, I miss all of you so badly. But I’m living my dream now. And so’s my boy here.” She gave Kurt a loving smile and took his hand.

“I mean, as much as I love Mr. Schu and I’m glad that I came here for the wedding, he wasn’t the best coach and he wasn’t really fair to a lot of us. Kurt and me… we’re succeeding despite this place, not because of it. It took me awhile to see that.”

“We’re all going to be okay,” Puck insisted. “Kurt, ‘Cedes… you’ve got your shit figured out. San, Finn and me… it’s just taking us a little longer, that’s all.”

Kurt inhaled deeply, feeling his eyes beginning to tear up. He let Adam hold him close, offering quiet support.“I don’t want to lose all this,” he insisted. “I mean… we’re all going in different directions and doing our own things. I’m not going to be seeing some of you for quite awhile and that scares me. We built these friendships and I don’t want to see them fade.”

“So we have to work at it,” Finn said firmly. “Just because we’re not seeing each other every day doesn’t mean that we have to completely lose touch. There’s such a thing and phone calls and emails. And I’m going to get to come to New York to see you perform, so you’d better get used to seeing a lot of me.”
“Hell yeah,” Puck said enthusiastically. He looked to the group with a supportive grin. “I mean, Kurt’s going to be a big star in New York and my girl here…” he gestured at Mercedes. “She’s got an album coming out. We’re going to have lots of reasons to get together that have nothing to do with high school.”

Someone came up behind Finn and tapped him on the shoulder to get his attention. He turned and nearly didn’t recognize the young woman standing there. “Amy!” he exclaimed happily. “Wow! You look different.”

Amy grinned. “This is a bit more me,” she said honestly. The sleek updo and makeup was gone and her red hair hung in long, soft curls about her shoulders. Instead of the fussy pink dress that Finn had seen her in yesterday, she was dressed in faded jeans, low Converse sneakers and a faded Ramones t-shirt.

Finn quickly made introductions to the rest of the group and then turned back to the young woman. “Listen, you want to join us? We’re just grabbing a quick bite before we head out.”

“I’d love to, but I’ve got to hit the road,” she said with genuine regret. “I’ve got a long drive back to Boston, but I wanted to have a chance to say goodbye. And thanks for last night. You really made it a nice evening for me.”

Finn smiled warmly. “I’m glad. You okay?”

She nodded. “Yeah… I going to be,” she assured him. “I already called my girlfriends and they’re going to take me out for a single ladies night when I get home.”

“That’s great!” Finn exclaimed. “I’m glad we met yesterday.”

“Me too. Listen, here’s my phone number and email.” She handed him a slip of paper. “I’d love for you to keep in touch. And if you’re ever in Boston, stop by. I’d love to see you again.”

“I will,” Finn promised. He gave her a quick hug goodbye. “You take care of yourself.”

She smiled at him again and then looked to the rest of the group, giving them a brief wave. “It was nice meeting you all.”

After Amy left, Santana turned an appraising look to Finn. “Well… that’s a decided upgrade from Berry. So congrats are in order.”

“It’s not like that,” Finn insisted. “We’re just friends. I mean… she just broke up with her boyfriend and Rachel and me…”

Santana just pursed her lips, not buying it at all.

“Speaking of Rachel, has anyone seen her?” Mercedes asked. “I haven’t seen her since yesterday.”

Kurt shook his head. “I texted her to see if she wanted to meet for breakfast, but she didn’t answer.” He gave a shrugged. “Well, she’s a big girl. She’s need me to babysit her.”

They lingered a bit over a last cup of coffee, not quite ready to lose their renewed connection, but it was starting to get late. Santana looked at her watch and gave a long sigh. “I’m going to have to book,” she said apologetically. “I promised I’d hang with my folks before I head back to New York.”

“Yeah, we’re going to have to meet our parents soon,” Finn said.
Mercedes sighed. “My parents are expecting me back home so we can spend some time together.”

Reluctantly, they accepted that the time had come to part again. There were hugs and tears and more promises that they would stay in touch. Kurt was struggling to keep his emotions in check when Puck shocked him by pulling him into a tight hug and all but lifting him off the floor.

“You take care of yourself, little dude,” he urged. He released the surprised young man and turned to Adam and held out his hand.

“It was great meeting you,” Puck said sincerely. “You’ll take care of Kurt for us, won’t you?”

Adam chuckled, shaking his head. “Kurt can take care of himself, as you well know. But I’m hoping he’ll see fit to take care of me.”

Puck laughed and nodded. “I like you, man,” he said. “You’re really good for Kurt. It’s good to see him happy.”

“Well, he’ll be especially happy if you all stay in touch,” Adam insisted. “You all mean a great deal to him.”

Puck did seem genuinely surprised at that. “Kurt and me… we didn’t always get along,” he admitted. “I wasn’t a good guy and made him pretty miserable.”

Adam nodded, not liking the reminder of someone being unkind to Kurt. “I know,” he said, trying to keep the judgment out of his voice. “Kurt’s told me a lot about it. I’m not going to say what I think about what you did then because it’s not necessary. But you’ve changed and Kurt considers you a friend.”

The pronouncement seemed to move something within Puck, who was so accustomed to being a disappointment to others. He grabbed one of the paper napkins from the breakfast buffet and quickly wrote out his phone number and email address and shoved it into Kurt’s hand.

“Listen, I don’t know where Finn and I are going to be in the next few months and I know that you’ll be in touch with Hudson, but this way you can reach me too,” he insisted. “I want to know how thinks in that fancy school of yours goes, so keep in touch. All right?”

Kurt had to admit that he was genuinely surprised by the gesture. Sure, they got along better now than they did back when Puck was casually pitching him into the school dumpsters, but Kurt had always related to him primarily as Finn’s friend. Even when Puck’s bullying ended, he never saw the as having much of a personal relationship of their own, as nearly all of their interactions revolved around Finn and New Directions. Kurt had never been “one of the guys” and he’d thought that Puck was rather at a loss at how to deal with him most of the time.

But now Puck was reaching out and showing real interest in Kurt’s life. And he realized that it was now as much on him as on the others to build relationships beyond what happened in that high school. He’d made the conscious decision to start moving past Lima and leaving the things behind. Puck had changed a great deal and was clearly trying.

He nodded, pocketing the napkin. He’d plug the information into his phone later. “I will. And you’ll let me know what you guys are doing,” Kurt insisted. “I know that you and Finn have something interesting in mind.”

They lingered as long as they could manage until one by one, they began to separate. Santana first, assuring Kurt and Adam that she would see them in New York in a few days. Then Mercedes, leaving with a last hug and kiss on the cheek for Kurt. Finally Puck, wanting to spend some time
with his mother, sister and brother, leaving with a brief wave. Finn clapped Kurt on the shoulder. “Ready, little brother?” he asked gently.

Kurt blinked his tears away and gave Finn a rather annoyed glance. “Really? I’m older than you,” he reminded.

“And I’m taller,” Finn insisted, giving Kurt a playful nudge. He looked to Adam for support and gave his brother’s boyfriend a playful wink.

“He’s got you on that one,” Adam confirmed, a mischievous glint in his eyes.

Kurt turned to his boyfriend and raised a warning finger. “Don’t side with him. Or I’ll make sure that I ‘forget’ my scarf and let Dad see what you did to me last night.”

“But sweetheart, you know that he’ll kill me,” Adam whined. “And just when he was starting to like me.”

Finn just laughed and shook his head. He was going to miss them when they left so he going to make sure that he enjoyed their company while he still had them around.

* * *

Kurt sighed in exhaustion as he opened the door to the loft. It had been a long day and their flight home got delayed due to a storm system that bogged down most of the Midwest. They had chosen to take a late flight so Kurt could spend as much time as he could with his family and with the delays didn’t get in until quite late at night. It was nearly midnight before Kurt was staggering into the loft, tiredly dragging his suitcase behind him.

After sleeping very little the night before, he was running on fumes now. All he wanted to do was fall into bed and sleep until classes started again.

He tossed his keys into the bowl by the front door and noticed that the TV was on. Rachel was sitting in on the coach, staring at the screen. She didn’t seem to be really aware of what she was watching and didn’t seem to hear him come in.

“Rachel?” he asked, getting her attention.

She blinked suddenly and looked up at him. “Kurt… you’re home.” She nearly sounded surprised.

“Well, I do live here,” he chuckled tiredly. “When did you get back? You kind of disappeared at the wedding. And we missed you at breakfast.”

She gave a soft shrug of her shoulders. “I wasn’t feeling all that well and went back to my fathers’, she said mildly. “And I flew home yesterday… I’ve got the audition coming up and wanted to have a chance to focus.”

Kurt sat down on the couch next to stretched out his long legs. He just wasn’t built for hours crammed into a coach class seat. “It was nice seeing everyone, but I’m glad to be home,” he admitted. “Going back to Lima just keeps reminding me that I don’t belong there anymore.”

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“Not the boy next door?” she quipped, giving him a fond smile.

Kurt smiled, remembering his first NYADA audition. How prophetic it was now in hindsight. “It’s true,” he acknowledged. “If I didn’t really fit in before, it’s even worse now. So much of the stuff
that seemed so important to me back then… I was starting to have trouble remembering why they were at the time. Except for my family, there’s nothing in Lima for me now.”

Rachel nodded knowingly. “Even most of the people…,” she began, her words trailing off wistfully.

“True. I have my friends… the ones that I’ll work to keep,” Kurt insisted. “But I’ll be honest… Blaine, Sam, Tina… they’re part of my past now. I don’t see them in my future at all.”

Rachel drew her legs up, wrapping her arms about them. “It’s hard,” she admitted. “Letting those relationships go. Even when it’s the right thing to do.”

Kurt knew that Rachel was talking as much about Finn as anyone else, but didn’t call her out on it. It wasn’t necessary. He just nodded.

“Things change. Our lives move in different directions and sometimes relationships just don’t survive those changes,” he said knowingly. “It’s not good or bad… if the relationships are meant to last, we’d be willing to put in the effort.”

She looked up at him, her large dark eyes nearly fathomless in the dim light of the television. “Do you ever regret it?” she asked. “Coming here? Knowing what you lost?”

Kurt didn’t answer immediately, taking his time to really consider her question.

“No,” he said with a certainty that still surprised him at times. Rachel seemed surprised by the finality in his answer and he tried to clarify. “I mean… there are things that I’m sad turned out the way they did. And I miss my family, and not seeing some of my friends as often as I used to.

“But coming to New York and doing what I’ve always dreamed about doing? That I don’t regret at all,” he insisted. And it was true. He had no regrets. “Life is all about change and we have to grow and change with it. I’m meeting new people and making new friends. I’m not the person I was when I left Lima. Neither are you.”

Rachel shrugged. “Am I? Sometimes I feel like I’m a thousand miles from what I was and others? Like I didn’t change at all.”

Kurt could understand her uncertainty. For all her bravado, Rachel was a much more fragile person than he was in some ways, and much more dependent upon the opinions of others. She was still trying to figure out just who Rachel Berry really was. It was a messy process and he was glad that she was at least questioning things about herself. So much of her bad behavior was a mindless rush to what she thought she wanted and seeing her at least willing to look inward gave him some hope for her.

He reached out to gently take her hand. “This is the part of our life that’s all about learning and growing,” he reminded her. “We’ve got the time to figure things out. We just have to be willing to do so.”

She offered him a soft smile that reminded Kurt why he was so willing to keep giving her chances when it might have been wiser to cut her loose. There was a vulnerability in her that made Kurt want to keep giving her the chances that he didn’t offer anyone else.

The young woman leaned into Kurt, taking comfort in his presence and sighed. “That’s the one thing that I always admired most about you,” she claimed. “Besides your talent, because that’s incomparable.”

Kurt smiled at the compliment, knowing that she really did mean it.
“You always knew exactly who you were,” she went on, letting him wrap his arm about her shoulders. “No matter what, you always knew exactly who you were and you never let anyone try to make you into anything else.”

Kurt bit his lip, knowing that wasn’t completely true but it had been a very, very long time since he’d allowed his fear to make him want to hide or be something he wasn’t.

“Rachel… no one can tell you what your dreams are or what you should want out of life,” he assured her. “You’ve got to figure that out for yourself. But you’ve got people who care about you and are willing to help. Don’t shut us out.”

She sighed and snuggled closer. “I don’t know what I would do without you, Kurt,” she sighed.

Kurt gave her another gentle squeeze. “Well, I don’t know about you, but I’m exhausted. Do you mind if I catch some sleep? It’s been a very long day.”

“Sure,” she said agreeably. “I’ll keep it down out here.”

Kurt smiled and gave her a kiss on the top of her head. He stood and gave a long stretch, his loud groan eliciting a giggle from Rachel. He playfully mussed her hair and ignored her squeak of outrage and retrieving his suitcase.

As tired as he was, he made sure to text his father and let him know that he’d arrived home safely. There was a text from Adam that brought a smile to his face, wishing him a good night and inviting him to meet for lunch when they felt awake enough. There was also a text from Blaine that he deleted without reading.

Kurt stripped off his clothes and tossed everything into his laundry basket before slipping into his favorite sleep pants. He thought about pulling Bruce out from under his bed, but he felt tired enough to fall asleep without any additional help. He still felt the lingering aches of being thoroughly made love to and it was enough to comfort him that he was loved and not alone.

Still, a little music to help him slip into dreamland wouldn’t hurt. He cued up one of his favorite singers on his phone and smiled at the first song that came up. How appropriate. Slipping into bed between the crisp, cool sheets, Kurt felt completely at peace. He was exactly where he was supposed to be.

He closed his eyes and felt himself drifting off to Edith Piaf’s incomparable voice. Non, Je Ne Regrette Rien. Indeed…

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