Five Ways Blaine Could Have Met Kurt because Cooper Got Married, and What Really Happened

by luckie_dee

Summary

It's exactly what the title says. :)

Notes

Originally posted to LiveJournal June-August 2012. Anything aired through the end of S3 may be mentioned. It's a little cracky.
It could have been at a bakery

It turns out that the only thing more frightening than Cooper being completely in love with himself is Cooper being completely in love with somebody else.

Maybe it’s strange that Blaine hasn’t met Emily before now, home for spring break during his first year of college, but he’s been at school in New York and she and Cooper have been chasing the scent of success all over Los Angeles. He’s heard a lot about her, of course, most notably *she’s a model, Blaine* over and over again, and she certainly is very pretty with her long dark hair and high cheekbones. Blaine knows now that she’s appeared in three Farm and Fleet catalogs, that she moved to L.A. two years ago, and that she and Cooper met in the restaurant where she waits tables. He’s also coming to understand that Cooper will do everything in his power to give her anything she asks for. Anything.

Which, currently, is blueberry flavored frosting.

They’re sitting in a small room at The Sweet Life — Cooper and Blaine and their mother and Emily — sampling slices of wedding cake while the owner of the shop waits expectantly nearby. Emily has a forkful of lemon sour cream cake in one hand and a laminated list of options in the other when she says, “You know what would be delicious with this? The blueberry infused buttercream frosting.”

While most people might do what Blaine and his mother do — make quiet, polite noises of acknowledgement or agreement — Cooper’s eyes light up. “What a wonderful idea, honey! Can we try that?” He swings to face the owner, an anxious man by the name of Mr. Spencer.

“Oh! Well! I’m afraid that wasn’t on the list of samples you requested when you made the appointment,” he says with a smile that looks more like a wince.

“Don’t you have some in the back?” Cooper asks, waving a hand airily in the direction of the kitchen.

Mr. Spencer shifts his weight from one foot to the other. “I’m afraid it’s not a standard flavor, so I don’t generally make it every day, no.”

Cooper hums. “Well, that really is too bad. My Emily loves blueberries, and I’m sure we can find someone else who would be only too happy to let her sample whatever frosting she wants…”

Blaine groans and buries himself in his taster slice of chocolate fudge with coconut pecan filling. He’s really just here for the cake samples, but he’s starting to think that even getting to try The Sweet Life’s finest free of charge isn’t worth being a part of this display. Cooper is fresh off a wave of success — his episode of *The Walking Dead* had aired less than three weeks prior, a fact that he hasn’t stopped throwing in poor Mr. Spencer’s face since they arrived. *It’s a bit part, Blaine! A speaking role,* he’d said, and although Blaine still isn’t sure that garbled, inhuman moans count as speaking, he’d tuned in to watch as a zombified Cooper tried to attack one of the main characters and took a shotgun blast to the face.

Mr. Spencer had made the mistake of professing his love for the show upon their arrival, but had admitted that he didn’t recognize Cooper. “Of course you don’t,” Cooper replied smoothly, and then added, as though he was revealing a grave secret while simultaneously pointing out something that should have been perfectly obvious, “I was in zombie makeup.”
Now, Mr. Spencer hurries to the door of the sitting room and shouts, “Kurt! Kurt, can I see you in here for a moment?”

After a few seconds, a young man appears, and Blaine’s next bite of cake falls abruptly off his fork, jolted off when his hand freezes halfway to his mouth. The man — Kurt — has beautiful hair and skin and eyes. He’s lean, and his apron makes his waist look slim and his shoulders look broad. “Yes?” he asks, sounding equal parts annoyed and confused, his voice high and clear.

“Do we have any of the blueberry frosting in the back?” Mr. Spencer asks, as though he doesn’t already know what the answer is going to be.

A tiny crease appears on Kurt’s forehead. “No,” he responds, his voice cautious, like he wants to say more but he can’t.

“Could you please mix some up? Quickly?”

That makes Kurt’s eyebrows quirk up a fraction of an inch, and Blaine realizes he’s staring, fascinated by the subtle but oh-so-telling shifts of expression. “I’m right in the middle of making the cookies for the Zimmermans’ order —”

“Yes, yes, you can put that dough right into the refrigerator. It will keep just fine. This is a priority.”

Kurt’s eyes run around the room then, all the way from Cooper’s Cheshire-cat grin to Blaine’s embarrassed, twitching face. He’s trying to smile, but he just wants to avert his eyes. It is his spring break, after all, so he’s been taking advantage of every opportunity to sleep late. As a result, his hair is a mess, and instead of wearing anything that looks decent, he’s in a faded Dalton Academy fencing t-shirt, even though he graduated months ago. Oh god, what if he assumes that I’m still in high school?

Blaine does think that Kurt lingers on him for just a moment, but when he turns back to Mr. Spencer, his face clearly shows that he doesn’t know why he’s being asked to rearrange what he’s doing just for them. Blaine’s pretty sure that it has something to do with the pages that Emily has cut out of magazines — this is most likely going to be the biggest, most expensive cake (well, series of cakes, really) that Mr. Spencer will be asked to make in a year. Blaine’s father has given Cooper an extravagant tab for the wedding, and Blaine has the impression that Emily’s family has also contributed generously to the cause.

“Of course,” is all Kurt says, but he doesn’t sound thrilled about it.

“Maybe you can put it on the unfrosted lemon poppy seed cake I made earlier?” Mr. Spencer suggests in an extremely pointed manner.

“The unfrosted…” Kurt starts, and then a put-upon look settles over his face. “Right. I’ll do that.” Blaine suddenly envisions Kurt scraping perfectly good frosting off an already-completed cake and fights the urge to throw his fork straight at his brother, who is giving Kurt a smug oh, thank you so much while he squeezes Emily’s shoulder.

Blaine has to tune him out after that, because sometimes the only way to deal with being Cooper Anderson’s brother is to ignore his existence completely. So he scrapes all the leftover frosting off his plate with the edge of his fork, sucks it into his mouth, and pays no attention to the conversation Cooper and Emily are having with Mr. Spencer about decorations and display tables and just how
much this monstrosity is going to cost. He snags the cake menu off the table and pretends to read it while he muses about Kurt.

Blaine guesses that he’s gay, but he might not be, and Blaine doesn’t want to make any assumptions. It probably doesn’t matter — surely someone like that would have a boyfriend (or a girlfriend) if he wanted one. Maybe he doesn’t want one. But even that thought doesn’t stop Blaine from wondering what he’s like, where he’s from, whether or not it’s his life’s dream to become a successful bakery chef, and if it is, would that mean that Blaine would get free, top-quality baked goods for the rest of his life if they got married? He would definitely need to start working out more. Blaine Anderson, you are so far ahead of yourself that if you turned around, you wouldn’t even be a speck on the horizon.

This proves only too true when Kurt does reappear, almost half an hour later, bearing four fresh slices of cake. Blaine is fairly sure that no matter how heartfelt the glance that accompanies his quiet thank you is, it doesn’t really convey I think you are very handsome and I would like to get to know you better. Because even though he thinks that Kurt holds his eye for a beat longer than necessary, it all still ends with Kurt turning briskly away and asking Mr. Spencer if he needs anything else.

When Mr. Spencer says no, Kurt announces, “Anita’s leaving for lunch, so I’ll man the counter. Let me know if you need me,” before he sweeps out of the room.

So, Blaine’s going to have to talk to him. Without an audience, if possible. The thought makes him wish that he hadn’t eaten quite so much cake, because it’s sitting like a sickly, sugary lump in his nervous stomach.

“Mr. Spencer?” Blaine asks when it seems like things are winding down. “Is there a restroom here that I can use?”

“Of course,” Mr. Spencer says, the strain of the morning evident in his voice. “Just go out the door and turn left. It’s past the counter. You can’t miss it.”

Past the counter, Blaine thinks. This is good. That means that he’s way less likely to chicken out entirely. He thanks Mr. Spencer and takes a deep breath as he makes his way out of the room.

Oh.

Kurt is waiting on a customer, and there’s another one in line behind him, a woman holding the hand of a girl with bright-blonde hair who’s pointing excitedly at the rows of cupcakes behind the glass. Blaine gulps and, after one strange stuttering step toward the counter, makes tracks for the bathroom.

When he emerges again, he’s fresh off four minutes of lamenting his appearance in the mirror, which is not improved when he wrinkles his nose at the scent of stale air freshener permeating the room. He’s never really done the walking-up-to-someone-he-barely-knows thing before — at least not without a show choir behind him, and he can’t help but shudder at that memory — and he’s surprised at how nerve-wracking it is. Of course, it’s entirely possible that the last few months have taken their toll on his self-confidence, he reasons.

So he straightens his spine and walks back into the bakery just as the woman ushers the girl — face already smeared with chocolate — out the front door. Kurt glances over at him, and Blaine gives him a tiny smile and almost veers right back into the room where his family is waiting. He pauses for just long enough that it feels awkward, and then approaches the counter anyway.
“Hi,” Kurt says as Blaine draws closer. “How can I help you? Is there another kind of frosting you want to sample?”

Blaine can hear the wryness in his voice even though Kurt maintains a veneer of perfect politeness, and he finds himself stammering a little. “No! No. It was nice of you to make the blueberry though. I appreciate it. Um, we all do. It was delicious.”

Kurt looks slightly mollified. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” Blaine says, and he smiles.

There’s a pause that’s odd and distinct. Kurt watches him, the corner of his mouth curling up for just a second, before he clears his throat. “So, can I help you?”

“Right!” Blaine exclaims. “Yes. Um…” He shoots a look down at the display case, making a mental note to come up with an excuse beforehand if this doesn’t work out and he ever has to submit to this torture again. “Muffins. I wanted to grab a couple of muffins for breakfast tomorrow.”

“Great.” Kurt rustles open a bag and slides the door of the case aside. “What can I get you?”

“What do you recommend?” Blaine asks, his eyes restlessly scanning the selection.

“Oh, well, our banana nut and zucchini nut muffins are both good, and so are the apple spice. If you liked the cake, we have some lemon poppy seed today. I’m not sure if you like rhubarb or not, but Mr. Spencer finally let me try out a rhubarb muffin recipe —”

“Those,” Blaine says immediately.

“Rhubarb fan?” Kurt inquires, his eyebrow arching as he scoops a muffin out of the case and nestles it into the bag.

“I don’t know.” Blaine laughs and ducks his head briefly. “I’ve never tried it.”

Kurt’s face does another one of those tiny shifts, and his teeth find the edge of his lips for just a moment. “Oh,” he says, and clears his throat quietly. “How many would you like?”

“Um, I’ll take two of those, two banana nut, and two lemon poppy seed.”

“You got it.” As he busies himself assembling the order, Kurt asks, “So, Mr. Spencer tells me that someone in your group is famous, but I’m afraid I don’t recognize any of you.”

It’s not a subject that Blaine really wants to delve into, but he doesn’t want to be rude. “Do you watch The Walking Dead?”

“No, I mostly watch reality TV,” Kurt says, like it’s a challenge and an admission, “and movies.”

“Me too!” Blaine exclaims as his heart trills a little in his chest, and he does not imagine cuddling up to watch Cupcake Wars — or maybe Kurt wouldn’t want to watch something that reminds him of his job? Anyway, there’s a small smile on Kurt’s face now, and Blaine has to force himself to remember what they were talking about in the first place. “Anyway, that’s okay. You wouldn’t have recognized him in that. What about — free credit rating today dot com… slash savings,” he sings,
ending with a subdued flourish.

Recognition lights up Kurt’s face at that. “Oh, yeah! I remember those commercials.”

Blaine smiles, but it feels tight on his face. “Well, that’s my brother.”

“Huh,” Kurt says. “He seemed different on TV.”

“That’s because he was trying to sell you something,” Blaine responds before he can help himself. His eyes widen as soon as the words are out. “I mean —”

But Kurt is smirking. “That’ll be ten ninety-nine,” he interrupts, passing the bag across the counter.

While Blaine fishes a twenty-dollar bill out of his wallet, he searches desperately for ways to keep the conversation alive. “So,” he asks finally, “do you go to culinary school?”

“Me? No, no,” Kurt says, punching a few keys on the cash register. “I needed a job, and Mr. Spencer is a friend of a friend of my stepmother’s. I’ve always been handy in the kitchen, so I thought I’d give it a try.” He gestures to the bag of muffins. “I’d take those out of the bag if you’re not going to eat them until tomorrow. Either cover them with a towel on your counter or put them in an airtight container with some paper towels to keep them fresh.”

“Thanks,” Blaine says, happily accepting his change and the slight brush of Kurt’s fingers that came with it.

“You’ll have to let me know how they are.” Kurt nods toward the bag now clasped in Blaine’s damp hands. “Muffins are hard to get just right.”

“I will. Thanks again.”

“You’re welcome. Have a nice afternoon.”

They’re still watching each other as Blaine takes the first few steps away from the counter backwards. When he turns, he finds his family waiting at the door to the tasting room, Cooper eying him speculatively.

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Once they’re outside in the parking lot, Cooper slides his sunglasses on and slings an arm over Blaine’s shoulder, which Blaine shrugs off because he’s still irritated. Cooper is undeterred. “Did you like him?” Emily is leaning around him while they walk, and Blaine can see her raised eyebrows over the rims of her own sunglasses. His mother isn’t paying any attention as she walks a few steps ahead and chats on her cell phone in animated fashion.

“No,” Blaine says petulantly.

“You like him,” Cooper declares. “You should ask him out.”

“I don’t even know if he’s gay,” Blaine reasons, although he doesn’t have as much doubt on that score as he once did. They’d been flirting a little, hadn’t they?

Cooper handwaves his excuse. “He’s gay.”
Blaine glances over at him suspiciously. “Cooper, if you’re saying that just because of the way he looked or sounded —”

“Relax,” Cooper cuts him off. “I work in the industry, Blaine. My gaydar is exceptional. He’s gay, and you like him, and you should go back in there and ask him out.”

Blaine wants to argue the point, but it’s true. Cooper’s gaydar is freakishly accurate. Even though Blaine is fairly certain that the shock of his coming out had taken years off his parents’ lives, Cooper hadn’t been even the least bit surprised. “I’m only here until the end of the week,” he finally protests, his voice lacking sufficient heat.

There’s no way to tell, but he thinks that Cooper is side-eying him through his mirrored lenses. “Blaine, it’s been months since the breakup.”

“That doesn’t have anything to do with it,” Blaine protests, and Cooper gives a thoughtful hum.

Blaine’s mother turns suddenly, cocking her phone away from her mouth. “Emily, look at that blouse.” She gestures to a storefront across the street. “You would look lovely in that color, dear.”

Emily drops Cooper’s hand at once. “Let’s go look at it!” she exclaims, already leading the way across the street as she shoots a significant look at Blaine and Cooper over her shoulder.

Cooper ambles toward a bench, and when he reaches it, he turns to Blaine and snaps his fingers. “I know! I could get him an agent!”

“Not everyone wants an agent, Cooper,” Blaine says with a roll of his eyes. He’s pretty sure that Cooper just acted at him.

“Are you kidding?” Cooper asks. “That guy was practically crying out for one.”

Blaine squints at him as he drops down onto the bench. “I can’t decide whether or not you’re being offensive right now,” he finally admits.

“Offensive? No! I’m being opportunistic. Huge difference.” Cooper beams at him.

“Cooper, I really don’t think —”

He’s interrupted by Cooper’s sharp, “No. Listen to me. Sometimes you just have to grab the bull by the horns. Do you think I would have gotten a callback for that Fresh Step commercial if I hadn’t taken advantage of every opportunity that presented itself?”

“I don’t know if opportunistic is really the right word for that.”

“Well, I still maintain that I found that cat on the way to the audition.”

Blaine sighs and scans the sky overhead as though the passing clouds might save him from hearing this particular pep talk again. “Then why did you have a carrier?”

“I didn’t,” Cooper replies easily. “I bought it after I found the cat.”

“That doesn’t change the fact that you brought a cat to an audition for a kitty litter commercial.”
“Blaine, Blaine, Blaine. Commercial acting is all about living the reality of the character you’re portraying. I had to make them believe I could be a cat owner. Mittens stumbled into my path at exactly the right moment, and you know what? I seized that opportunity. Besides, did you want me to let him starve to death in the street?”

“Obviously not,” Blaine mumbles.

“And now Mittens has a very nice home with one of Emily’s friends, and in the end, I got the callback based on my talent. No one could have possibly made cleaning that litter box look easier and less disgusting than I did.”

“He should have gotten the part,” Emily says, appearing suddenly on Blaine’s other side. “He read the line for me, and it almost made me wish I wasn’t allergic so that I could have a cat to clean up after.”

“I still think there was something going on between the casting director and that woman who got it,” Cooper grumbles. Then he brightens considerably and points at Blaine. “Just like there should be something going on between Blainey and the bakery guy!”

“Look, I’ll think about it, okay?” Blaine pleads.

“That’s Blaine code for I don’t want to talk about it anymore,” Cooper says.

“That’s everyone code for I don’t want to talk about it anymore,” Blaine mutters.

Blaine’s mother interrupts them all. “Our meeting with the caterer is in less than an hour,” she points out. “We have to get a move on.”

In the car on the way home, Blaine is too stuffed full of cake and residual nerves to even consider eating a whole muffin. He does, however, reach down into the bag, break off a chunk of the rhubarb, and pop it into his mouth. It’s tart and sweet at the same time, with a crispy, sugary crumble on top, and the texture is perfect.

Somehow, the days pass and he’s back at school and he finds that he never told Kurt that. I’m leaving town in a few days and so are you. It’s just not worth it, he tells the butterflies in his stomach every time he thinks about going back to the Sweet Life.

Still, when he’s unpacking his clothes into the tiny closet in his dorm room, he wishes he would have.

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Blaine tries not to dwell too much on the missed opportunity. Before he knows it, he’s swept up in the last few weeks of school before the summer break, full of tests and papers and performances, the last time going here or there with his friends until they reconvene in the fall. Then he’s home and Cooper’s wedding is less than a month away, but first they have to hold a small, tasteful gathering for their mother’s forty-eighth birthday.

For which they need a cake. One that Blaine hastily volunteers to order. For once in his life, Cooper decides — wisely — not to say a word, even though the look on his face shows that he clearly wants to.
Blaine is perfectly aware that he could call in the order. There’s really no reason to go to The Sweet Life to place it, but he has a summer job right down the street now and it’s just as convenient to stop in.

Unfortunately, when he walks in, almost shaking with nerves — what if Kurt doesn’t want to see him again? Blaine thinks Kurt could be mad and that he might deserve it — Anita is behind the counter reading a book and the rest of the bakery seems deserted. Still, he can’t help the way his eyes dart around as she takes down his order (a large sheet cake, frosted in buttercream with flowers and flowing script in his mother’s favorite colors), and finally she asks, “Are you looking for someone in particular? Mr. Spencer is in the back in his office, but I can get him if you’d rather speak with him about your order.”

“No,” Blaine says quickly, looking down at his hands clenched lightly together on the countertop. “No, thank you.”

When he glances back up, Anita has a look of dawning realization on her face and he feels his own start to heat. “Kurt’s not here,” she says, and Blaine forces himself not to let his disappointment show. Anita nods briskly and jots a few more notes on the order form. “Your cake will be ready on Friday. I recommend that you pick it up between one o’clock and close.”

Still feeling gawky, Blaine thanks her and beats a hasty retreat.

But no amount of embarrassment can keep him from following her instructions to the letter, and when he walks into the bakery at one thirty-five on Friday, he finds Kurt behind the counter, boxing up a dozen cookies for an elderly man with an ornate cane. He glances briefly over at Blaine when he enters, and Blaine didn’t miss the way his eyebrows shoot up, even though Kurt buries the expression quickly as he turns back to the customer to collect his payment.

As soon as the old man shuffles far enough away, Blaine approaches him, hoping that his eyes don’t look as wide as they feel. It’s just — the little things, he realizes, like how he remembered the color of Kurt’s eyes but not the exact (exquisite) shape. Blaine forces a wobbling smile onto his face as Kurt says, “Hi.”

“Hi,” he replies.

There is a moment of silence, and just when Blaine gets worried that it’s going to balloon into something unmanageable, Kurt speaks again.

“Long time no see,” he says, and then quickly presses his lips together. He looks rather unimpressed.

It spurs Blaine to start babbling. “Oh! I was just home for spring break last time, so I wasn’t here for very long.”

“I see,” Kurt says neutrally.

“I’m back for good now, though. Well, no, not for good, but for the summer. I’m sorry I didn’t tell you sooner, but I just wanted to make sure you knew that they were good.”

“What were?” Kurt asks, his brows drawing down over his eyes, but he looks more confused than angry.
“The muffins. You wanted me to let you know if I liked them. I did. They were delicious. Perfect, really.”

It’s hard to tell, but it looks like Kurt is actually on the verge of smiling now. “Thank you,” he says, and his voice is definitely warmer than it was before. Blaine beams in response, and Kurt’s expression softens before he clears his throat and asks, “How can I help you today? I’m afraid we don’t have any rhubarb muffins. Can I interest you in orange cranberry?”

Blaine is fairly sure that Kurt could interest him in just about anything at this point, but he does suddenly remember that he’s there for a reason. “That sounds delicious, but actually, I’m here to pick up a cake for Blaine Anderson.”

Kurt looks at him curiously. “Is that — you? You’re Blaine?”

Blaine barely manages to refrain from slapping his hand to his forehead. “Yes. That’s me. Blaine Anderson. It’s nice to meet you.”

“I’m Kurt Hummel. And likewise.” With an enigmatic smile, Kurt disappears into the kitchen. During his absence, Blaine forces himself not to fidget, to stand still at the counter like any other customer might — any customer who was taking deep, measured breaths and staring at a plate of snickerdoodles.

When Kurt reappears, he slides the long, flat box he’s carrying onto the counter and lifts the lid. “Everything look okay?”

For just a second, Blaine considers leaning across on his elbow, staring at Kurt, and saying something like everything looks amazing in a low voice, but he squashes the urge immediately. Instead, he looks down at the cake and says, “Looks… just great. Did you do this?”

“No way,” Kurt says with a chuckle. “Mr. Spencer made it very clear that he’s the only one who’s permitted to work on special order cakes for your family.” He slides the sales slip across the counter. Blaine rolls his eyes as he fumbles for his wallet, because somehow Cooper has actually managed to convince someone that his family should be treated like royalty, but then notices Kurt sliding open the display case and reaching for a bag. He gives Kurt a quizzical smile. “What are you doing?”

“Orange cranberry muffin,” Kurt says, sliding one into the bag and rolling down the top. “How much do I need to add…?” Blaine starts to ask, pulling another bill out of his wallet, but Kurt waves him off.

“On the house,” he announces, setting the bag on top of the cake box.

“You don’t have to do that!” Blaine exclaims.

Kurt shakes his head a little. “I know I don’t have to, but here at The Sweet Life, we like to express our gratitude for our loyal customers. In hopes that we’ll see them again.” He’s not exactly meeting Blaine’s eyes now and his cheeks are pinking.

Blaine’s heart stutter-steps, and he stumbles out, “Oh! Well… you should let me pay you back.”

Kurt looks back up, confusion on his face, which is starting to fall.
“With coffee!” Blaine is quick to add. “I work at The Mug Shot. It’s about two blocks down?” He flicks his hand in the general direction of the coffee shop, and continues when Kurt nods. “I’ll be there until eight tonight. If you, um, if you want to come by after you close up here, I can offer you something in exchange, like maybe a…” he trails off, raising his eyebrows at Kurt.

“Grande nonfat mocha?” Kurt suggests, and he’s smiling in earnest now and his eyes are all lit up and happy.

“It would only be fair,” Blaine concludes.


“Okay,” Blaine knows his face must be ridiculous as he eases the cake off the counter, but he can’t bring himself to care. “I’ll see you then.”

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Back in the car, after Blaine has settled the cake in the backseat, Cooper glances over at him. “I’d ask how it went, but all I need to do is look at your face, Squirt.”

“Don’t call me that,” Blaine says, but there’s no bite in his voice. He curls his hands around the top of the bakery bag and doesn’t even try to stop grinning.

Cooper laughs and puts the car in gear. “Well, maybe you’ll have a date for the wedding after all.”

Blaine just keeps smiling as they pull into traffic. “Maybe.”

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*It could have happened that way. But it didn’t.*
Or maybe at a salon

From the moment he walks into the Aurora Salon, Blaine feels out of place. The woman sitting behind the huge counter with the faux marble finish is dressed to the nines, and her makeup is like a how-to picture in a magazine. The brittle-thin woman leaning against the edge of the desk is even worse; she could be posing for a fashion shoot and she all but ignores when Blaine walks up. The first woman gives him an apologetic look and a tight grin while she “mm-hmms” and gestures to her headset.

Blaine masks his discomfort with a smile, using the moment’s wait to bite down on the explanation that he feels he owes them — he’d barely had time to change out of the sweaty clothes he’d been wearing while he helped Cooper and Emily move boxes of decorations into a back room at the reception hall. *It’s just a haircut,* he’d reasoned as he threw on an old polo shirt and plain pants.

The receptionist finishes her phone call, greets him brightly, and directs him to a small sitting area while calling “I’ll let him know you’re here!” at his retreating back. The other woman — a stylist, maybe? — just watches, her face never shifting out of neutral. Blaine is only too happy to leave the desk and look around at the flat screen television and the selection of magazines and books full of hairstyles. Blaine considers paging through one, but he was here because apparently he needed an expert opinion. *This guy’s a genius,* Emily had gushed. *You let him tell you exactly what to do. If I didn’t already find my stylist months ago, I’d let him give mine a try.*

With a sigh, Blaine drops into a chair and dully watches the television, which is tuned to a home and garden show. Luckily, his wait isn’t long. Blaine watches out of the corner of his eye as a young man approaches the reception desk, leaning over to say a few words to the women there, who both greet him with much more enthusiasm than they did Blaine. *Some customer service,* Blaine thinks to himself, but he forgets his pique when the stylist calls his name.

He looks over, and his first thought is *wow.*

His second thought is *honestly though, is there a dress code I should have known about?*

Rather than articulate either of those sentiments, Blaine climbs to his feet and overcompensates with a cheerful, “That’s me!”

The stylist’s expression remains a bit reserved, but he does smile and hold out a hand. “I’m Kurt. It’s nice to meet you. Please follow me.” His eyes flicker briefly to Blaine’s shirt before he turns away.

*It can’t possibly be that bad, can it?* Blaine wonders, glancing down at himself. Maybe he’s not wearing a waistcoat and a fitted shirt with the sleeves rolled up and skinny pants and – okay, so he’s looking. He has to watch where he’s going if he wants to follow Kurt, of course, and he can’t help it that Kurt’s backside is the one facing him. And that those boots are doing wonders for his legs.

*Wonders,* Blaine repeats absently to himself, before he realizes that Kurt is leading him into a busy room ringed with mirrors, which could give anyone the chance to catch him ogling. He yanks his gaze upward, trying to make it perfectly clear that he’s looking at the back of Kurt’s head, but it feels too intense, like he’s trying to drill holes into it. Next, he tries looking away entirely, focusing instead at the black marble fountain at the center of the room, which is dry and covered with calcification. He’s wrinkling his nose at it in confusion when he almost crashes right into Kurt, who had drawn to a halt.
“Oh! Um, we’re here,” Kurt says, gesturing to an open chair.

“Sorry, sorry,” Blaine mutters. He seats himself, and then Kurt drapes a shiny black cloth around his shoulders and snaps it around his neck. “I was just looking at the fountain.”

Kurt makes a small, vaguely disapproving noise. “I don’t know why they installed that thing if they never plan on turning it on,” he comments, and then abruptly changes the subject. “So, what are we doing today?” He backs off a half-step to look critically at Blaine’s hair, and then steps forward again quickly, lightly pressing Blaine’s curls down and letting them spring back with practiced movements.

“Well…” Blaine startles and clears his throat when Kurt weaves one hand into his hair to pull it out to its full length. “My brother is getting married on Saturday — you’ve met his fiancée, Emily. I’m standing up, and she told me that she won’t let me in the door looking like this.”

Kurt hmmms a little as he continues to analyze Blaine’s hair, but he keeps his face neutral. Blaine scoots his hips forward to retrieve his wallet, fumbling it out from under the edge of the cape. He retrieves the picture he’d put there earlier and passes it to Kurt.

“Anyway,” he goes on, “I need something a little more… controlled. Maybe closer to this?”

Blaine doesn’t miss the way that Kurt’s lips twitch when he takes in the picture, which is one of his old school portraits from Dalton. He looks at it for longer than seems necessary, sucking his lower lip into his mouth. Finally, he glances up to meet Blaine’s cautious, curious gaze in the mirror. “I can’t do this to you,” he says.

“What? Why not?” Blaine asks anxiously. Is his hair so far gone that it’s actually beyond recovery?

“Because,” Kurt explains, the smile growing on his face as he flips the picture back around to face Blaine, “I did meet Emily. She gave me very specific instructions for each of you, and she won’t be happy with me if I send you into the church looking like this. It’s very Tyrone Power, of course, but I think she would say it’s more helmet than hairstyle.”

Blaine fights a scowl, because he is not going to pout in front of a stranger — especially not one this cute. He can’t quite keep the petulance out of his voice, though, when he asks, “She actually did say that, didn’t she?”

Kurt doesn’t answer directly. “Let’s just see if we can’t do better, hmm?” His eyes are still on Blaine’s reflection, one side of his mouth is turned up, and there’s something in his expression that’s both sympathetic and teasing all at the same time.

If he doesn’t give in, Blaine knows that he’s going to catch hell from both Emily and Cooper, so he has no choice but to resign himself to his fate. “All right,” he says. “Hit me with your best shot.”

“You’re going to look fantastic!” Kurt replies eagerly, grinning at Blaine in the mirror.

Blaine smiles back, and their eyes stay locked together. “Okay,” he says.

“Oh!” Kurt repeats. Then he seems to shake himself, his face settling into a more detached expression as he repeats himself more forcefully. “Okay! Right this way.”

Blaine scrambles to his feet and follows Kurt toward a bank of sinks in an adjacent room. This time,
he very determinedly does not watch Kurt walk — after only the briefest of glances — because professional, Blaine, keep it professional. You’re here to get a haircut. Not a boyfriend. Or anything else.

*Just a haircut* becomes an extremely useful and appropriate mantra when Kurt helps him cushion his neck with a folded towel and begins operating the spray nozzle with one hand and running the other back through Blaine’s hair as he wets it. “So, how’s your week going?” Kurt asks, his voice duller, losing the good-natured lilt it had taken on. It sounds like something he’s repeated a hundred times, like something he asks every customer out of rote.

“Fine,” Blaine responds, doing his best to be just another customer. “Busy, getting ready for the wedding.”

“And you’re the best man?”

Blaine whites out a little as Kurt begins massaging shampoo into his hair and makes a noise that he hopes communicates an affirmative response. He stares straight ahead, doing his best to ignore the way he can see the edge of Kurt’s shoulder flexing in the corner of his vision. There’s a huge, swirling modern light fixture mounted over the sinks, and he lets the bulbs burn spots into his vision. *Just a haircut* really doesn’t help much when Kurt scratches his blunt fingernails all over Blaine’s scalp, and Blaine valiantly tries to think of absolutely nothing at all.

“You must be close,” Kurt comments.

“What?” Blaine gasps, every muscle stiffening in surprise.

“You and your brother,” Kurt clarifies, sounding confused. “You must be close if you’re going to be his best man.”

Blaine lets out a slow breath. “Oh, yeah. Um, kind of. I go to school in New York and he lives in L.A. — he’s an actor — so we don’t see each other very often.”

“That’s right,” Kurt says, giving his hair one last vigorous rub before turning the water on again. “Emily told me about his stint on *The Walking Dead*, but I don’t watch it. Has he been in anything else I would recognize?” He rinses carefully around Blaine’s ears, which involves an amount of touching that has Blaine trying not to squirm in his seat.

“Do you remember the FreeCreditRatingToday.com commercials from a few years ago?” Blaine chokes out, disappointment warring with relief when Kurt finishes washing the shampoo out. He sucks in a deep breath as Kurt steps away to squirt something out of a pump bottle, by the sounds of it. “Free credit rating today dot com... slash savings!” he sings, quick and a little strangled, partly to spur Kurt’s memory and partly to try and cover up the sound of Kurt rubbing his hands together. They’re slick with something — conditioner, probably — and it definitely does not remind Blaine of anything else.

“Really?” Kurt says excitedly, digging his hands back into Blaine’s hair. “That’s your brother?”

His obvious interest is enough to dim Blaine’s mood a little, even though Kurt is working his fingers against Blaine’s scalp again, his touch strong and gentle at the same time. “Yeah, that’s him.”

“Huh.” There’s a *whoosh* as Kurt brings the nozzle back to life, and Blaine almost thinks he imagines the next words out of his mouth. “Your family has good genes.” There’s a little pause, and
then he starts chasing the product out of Blaine’s hair with renewed vigor.

Blaine stares at the lights again. Is he supposed to say thank you? But what if Kurt’s only referring to the genes that produced Cooper? They do look strikingly dissimilar. It’s as though Cooper inherited all of their father’s genetics and Blaine took everything from his mother’s side, refusing to share and setting the stage for a sibling rivalry that would last decades. But then why phrase it like *that*? Why not say something just about Cooper? But maybe it *had* been just about Cooper.

“I suppose,” he finally says, lamely, and then swiftly changes the subject back. “I was pretty surprised when he asked me to be best man, actually. He used to give me hell when we were younger. You know how it goes.”

“A little,” Kurt says, and his voice is wry, but when he continues, it’s in his normal tone of voice. “I was an only child until my junior year of high school.”

Blaine raises his eyebrows. “Late in life baby?” he guesses.

“No, no.” Kurt carefully runs the water around Blaine’s hairline, gently resting the edge of one hand against his forehead to avoid spraying it into his eyes, and Blaine clenches his jaw. “My father remarried, and my stepmother already had a son. He was in my class in school, believe it or not. It was less like having a baby around and more like gaining a yeti who drank straight from the milk carton and left dirty shoes all over the house.”

Blaine snorts and angles his eyes back far enough to see that Kurt’s smiling too. “We get along really well now, though. I’d definitely stand up in his wedding,” Kurt continues. He gives Blaine’s hair one final rinse and then begins to gently towel it. Blaine stifles a sigh, reveling in the feeling and almost missing Kurt’s stern advice. “Don’t ever rub, not with this much curl. You want to just squeeze the moisture out.”

“Mkay,” Blaine breathes. It’s over too soon, and then Kurt is leading him back to his chair.

When he gets down to the business of cutting hair, Kurt isn’t slow or cautious. His hands fly around Blaine’s head with combs and scissors and clippers, the movements precise and practiced and fearless. Blaine is taken aback at first — he saw *Edward Scissorhands* during Cooper’s “trying to get cast in a movie that’s destined to be a cult classic” phase (or was it his “how can I be more like Johnny Depp” phase?), and it’s not quite like that, but it’s close. It’s obvious that he’s beyond the point of no return, so Blaine does his best to relax and ignore the size of the clumps of hair that are raining down on his cape. Kurt’s arms and hands prove to be a good distraction.

For a few moments, Kurt hums while he works — Blaine thinks he catches the tune of *Chapel of Love* — but he stops to ask, “So, you said you’re going to school in New York? What are you studying?”

“Drama,” Blaine answers immediately, meeting his own eyes in the mirror in an effort to drag them away from Kurt’s forearms. “I go to Tisch. It’s —”

“You go to *Tisch*?” Kurt interrupts, his voice wistful as his hands slow.


Kurt snaps back to work. “I love theatre. I wanted to go to NYADA. Do you know it?”
“I do. It’s a great school.” Blaine forces himself to stop there. It would be rude to ask Kurt if he didn’t get in, no matter how exclusive the school is.

“I know,” Kurt says. “I was there for a year and two months.”

Blaine is staring at him now in the mirror, but Kurt isn’t meeting his eyes, instead choosing to focus intently on the back of Blaine’s head. “You… left?”

“There was a family emergency,” Kurt replies briskly, his face closing off even more.

“Ah.” Blaine fidgets a little, sorry to have touched inadvertently on what is obviously a very sore subject. “So, what’s your favorite show?”

Kurt brightens considerably at the question. “Oh god, there’s so many. How could you even start to decide? Classic, modern… you know, in the end, I think I’ll always have a soft spot for Wicked.”

“An excellent choice,” Blaine says, and then his eyes round a little when he hears Kurt humming again, but he’s not just humming — he’s singing a few bars of Defying Gravity almost under his breath.

When he notices that Blaine is listening, he stops abruptly, pinking slightly. “Sorry.”

“Don’t be!” Blaine bursts out. “Your voice is — it’s lovely.”

The color on Kurt’s face heightens a little. “There’s no way you can tell from that.”

“I can tell,” Blaine says confidently. “Sing a little more?”

Kurt glances down the row of mirrors. Just two chairs away, a teenage girl is beaming at herself in the mirror while another stylist in a sleek, immaculate outfit wraps a section of her hair in foil. “No, no. Really. I should try to stop. My dad, brilliant man that he is, told me that there’s no reason to stop singing just because I had to put NYADA on hold for a little while. I guess I took it to heart, because I don’t even realize when I’m doing it anymore.”

When he swings his eyes back to the mirror, Blaine catches and holds them. “That’s really nice.” His imagination is churning again, but he’s picturing something different now — two adjacent rooms, Kurt humming in the kitchen while he makes dinner, or maybe Kurt humming in the living room while Blaine makes dinner. The moment stretches out before Kurt breaks it.

“I know,” he says, and he still sounds a little sad.

It makes Blaine scramble for something to try and cheer him up. “Anyway, it should probably have been Popular instead, right?”

“Why’s that?” Kurt asks as he sets down his tools. He stands behind Blaine, critically pulling out a strand of hair here and there.

Blaine starts singing then, keeping his voice quiet, but not so restrained as Kurt’s had been. “And when someone needs a makeover, I simply have to take over, I know I know exactly what they need.” The song isn’t quite suited to his voice, but it’s not too bad when he slides it down into his range.
Kurt actually lets out a laugh, and Blaine beams in response. “You’re hardly the toughest case I’ve had to face,” he comments, nodding toward the mirror, where Blaine can see how good the cut is, even though his hair is still damp and starting to curl.

“But if I follow your lead, will I be popular?” Blaine teases.

“Of course!” Kurt says, and then continues in a sing-song tone. “I’ll teach you the proper ploys, when you talk to — well —” He falters.

“Boys,” Blaine supplies.

“Of course not,” Blaine says quickly. “So… what do you suggest that I do with it on normal days?”

“Oh, it’s going to be so easy,” Kurt replies, reaching around him to grab a bottle off the counter, his
arm brushing Blaine’s shoulder and his chest bumping against his back. “Remember this one?”

Blaine nods dumbly.

“Okay. A pump and a half in the palm of your hand, rub them together —” Kurt mimes doing so right in front of Blaine’s face, and he’s so close that Blaine can feel breath ghosting against his cheek “— and work it through your hair when it’s damp. Don’t scrunch; that just invites frizz. Then let it air dry, and voila.” He puts the bottle back on the counter.

“That’s it?” Blaine asks doubtfully.

“That’s it,” Kurt says. His eyes flick up to the clock mounted on the wall between his station and the next, and then he cautiously asks, “Would you like a demonstration? My next appointment won’t be here for half an hour.”

Blaine perks up at once. “Sure!”

“I’ll have to wash this out.” Kurt gestures to the masterpiece he created on Blaine’s head.

“Oh, that’s okay,” Blaine says, bouncing to his feet and following Kurt back to the sinks, completely unopposed to subjecting himself to the horror of Kurt washing his hair again.

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For the rest of the appointment, they talk easily about the wedding, their favorite stage actors, and their dream roles. They laugh and tease and, Blaine is fairly sure, they flirt. All too soon, Kurt is whisking the cape off of his shoulders and leading him back to the front of the salon, where he deposits Blaine back at the reception desk and turns to him with a reluctant smile. “It was nice to meet you. Vanessa will take care of everything from here. Good luck on Saturday. Remember to practice doing your hair before then,” he instructs.

Blaine barely manages to get out a you too and a thank you before Kurt is gone, unable to say anything else with the receptionist watching and waiting just a few feet away. He frowns as he grabs his wallet, digging out the cash that Cooper and Emily had given him to cover the cost of the haircut they insisted he get.

Although it’s rude, he’s not really listening to Vanessa, until she hands him his change and tells him, “…and if you want to leave a tip, there are envelopes at the end of the counter. Just write Kurt’s name on the front.”

Blaine’s heart beats a little faster in his chest when he looks at the neat stack of envelopes, each embossed with the salon’s logo, and the half-full fishbowl beside them.

He leaves a generous tip, of course, jots Kurt’s name on the front, and licks the envelope shut before he finds himself facing the moment of truth. He could choose to drop the envelope in the bowl just as it is. He could walk out the door and drive away, and that would be the end of it.

He needs to decide soon, before Vanessa thinks that he’s eying up the tip jar.

Before he can worry about it for another second, Blaine picks the pen back up, scrawls his name and phone number across the back of the envelope, and throws it into the bowl. Then he all but runs to the car.
Blaine is on pins and needles for the rest of the afternoon. The buzz of his cell phone is like an electric charge, speeding his heart every time it sounds, but, in what he thinks is an admirable show of restraint, he waits at least 45 seconds to check it each time. So far, he hasn’t heard from Kurt, and the texts from Cooper that would usually be ridiculous or bordering on irritating (short notice i know but can you think of anywhere nearby that would fold a couple hundred origami swans by saturday?) are, instead, downright annoying.

When a text message comes in at precisely 8:43 that evening, Blaine’s past being nervous, and he’s moved on to being exasperated with himself for thinking it was a good idea to leave Kurt his number in the first place. He’s so sure that it’s just another absurd question from his brother that he doesn’t even turn from where he’s scribbling what will hopefully become his best man’s speech into a notebook until his thread of inspiration has run out. When he finally does read it, his heart jumps right back into double time. It’s from an unknown number.

You know, it wouldn’t be very ethical of me to use a phone number given to me by a customer.

Blaine fumbles so much over typing his response that he needs to reread the fourteen words three times before he sends them.

I apologize. I wasn’t aware that it would be a breach of salon etiquette.

In the silence that follows, Blaine sets the phone back down on his desk, afraid that he’s going to ruin it with palm sweat if he keeps holding on so tightly. He picks up his pen, hovers it over the notebook paper, writes nothing.

His mind skates anxiously along. He can’t really tell if the first message is flirty or stern, teasing or an honest admonition. He hopes his reply is suitable for either circumstance. Please be flirtatious, he silently orders, or maybe he begs, shooting a glare at the phone where it sits innocently beside his notebook.

It buzzes two minutes later. Blaine feels like he vibrates along with it until he snatches it back up, 45 seconds be damned.

It’s not just etiquette, it’s ethics! But I suppose I can let it slide just this once. It’s really not fair to punish you just because you were uneducated.

Blaine breathes a little easier, because that seems more promising. He quickly fires back: Maybe you can educate me. The message is gone before he can think of the repercussions. He’s on the verge of banging his head down on the desk when the reply comes in.

Are you asking me to show you what’s ethical and what’s not ethical?

It could be playful. It could be wary. Blaine taps out another message, squinting down at the screen, feeling daring. He’s going with flirtatious. It sounds so lascivious when you put it like that. He hits send before he can decide against it, and he clatters his phone down on the desk immediately afterward. He goes back to his speech – in theory – scratching down a few unconnected thoughts.

The illusion is destroyed when he grabs for the phone again as soon as it starts to buzz. I could
always give you a handbook, if you’d prefer.

Before he can even decide how he’s supposed to respond to that, another message comes through. Hi, Blaine.

Blaine breathes a sigh of relief. Okay, this he can do. Hi, Kurt. The next message comes in so fast that it’s there before he’s done entering Kurt’s name in his contact list.

From: Kurt
Hi. How’s the haircut holding up?

To: Kurt
It’s great! Is it normal for it to have gone south a mere 6 hours later?

From: Kurt
Not if it’s one of mine. Did you practice for Saturday?

To: Kurt
Yes. It was actually kind of an unmitigated disaster. I’ll probably just have to go with the usual.

Blaine grimaces. He may be overstating it a bit, but his attempt at copying the hairstyle had ended up looking a little more There’s Something About Mary than GQ.

The phone buzzes again.

From: Kurt
Maybe you just need another demonstration.

Blaine sits up straight in his chair, and even his heartbeat sounds hopeful where it’s beating low in his ears. He tries not to jump, to play it at least a little cool.

To: Kurt
I wouldn’t be opposed to that.

The seconds are long, but Blaine doesn’t make any effort this time to pretend that he’s not staring at his phone, waiting almost breathlessly for a response. When it comes, it’s actually three messages, arriving in rapid-fire succession.

From: Kurt
Or maybe, if you’re not confident, you should just put things in the hands of your stylist. Who might be available on Saturday. And I’m of the opinion that dinner and a night out is fair compensation for a good hairstyle. I’m just thinking out loud here.

The jolt of adrenaline is so strong that it almost sends Blaine out of his chair.

To: Kurt
Are you suggesting that I ask my stylist to my brother’s wedding?

From: Kurt
Absolutely not! A wedding is a horrible first date.
We’ll have to go out for coffee first. Are you free on Thursday?

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Or it could have happened like that. But it didn’t.
Perhaps at the church

Blaine looks around the room, taking in the groomsmen scattered across the shabby couches and chairs, and laments again that Emily had given them strict marching orders to get to the church so far in advance of the ceremony. She and the bridesmaids are dressing and primping together in a room at the other side of the building, but Cooper, Blaine, their cousin Pete, and two of Cooper’s friends from Los Angeles had arrived in their tuxedos, as per the instructions they’d received at the rehearsal dinner, and they’ve been left with way too much time to kill.

Cooper’s friends, Tanner and Russell, are poring over something on a tablet computer, something that Blaine is fairly sure is a script. He’s not sure if they’re writing it or trying to memorize it, and he’s sort of afraid to ask. Ever since their arrival, when Russell had greeted him with a severe don’t call me Russ, Blaine has felt the need to walk on eggshells when they’re around. Cooper had explained it away dismissively (“He’s just trying to get used to his new screen name. Not all of us were lucky enough to be given something usable at birth.”), but Blaine can’t help but be wary now.

On the other side of the room, Cooper is reading his vows over and over again, while Pete watches and offers his advice. Blaine had been doing the same, but when he had the audacity to suggest that Cooper speak his vows with whatever real emotion he feels at the time, he’d been banished to a chair on the opposite wall. (“Giving my best performance shows her that I care, Blaine. Look at how much work I’m putting into this!”)

Since then, Blaine has checked both his email addresses, looked for updates at every social media site he’s ever registered for, and read all the news and sports headlines, but there are still forty minutes until the photographer needs them. When Cooper asks if he’ll go up to the lobby to wait for the florist, Blaine is only too happy to be of service. “Don’t forget your jacket!” Cooper calls as he starts to leave. “You know Emily will murder you if any of the guests see you without it before the ceremony!”

Blaine sighs, shoulders his tuxedo jacket, and makes his escape.

As he draws closer to the entrance of the church, Blaine’s surprised to hear singing. The words are familiar, although the voice is not.

“I had to let it happen… I had to change… couldn’t stay all my life down at heels…”

Bonnie the florist isn’t in the lobby — neither is anyone else for that matter — and Blaine can’t help but investigate. The voice is clear and pure, and when it releases into the chorus, soaring. Blaine peeks through the doors into the nave, and there’s a boy there — a man really, poised near the piano, slender without being slight, singing from the tips of his toes. His eyes are closed and his arms are slightly extended, like he’s commanding an audience of hundreds instead of lifting his voice in an empty church.

When the singer gathers himself to start the second verse, he opens his eyes, which catch on Blaine almost immediately. His voice cuts itself off, right in the middle of the word fortune, and he curls his arms around his chest, some of the height going out of his posture. “Sorry,” he says thinly. “I didn’t realize there was anyone else here.”

“It’s okay!” Blaine jerks forward, starting down the aisle quickly, as though moving faster will help assuage the other man’s discomfort. “I didn’t realize there was anyone here either. Other than the
wedding party, I mean. You don’t have to stop on my account, especially if you’re warming up.”

“No, no. It’s too early to warm up. I was just… singing,” the man says, and wow, he gets better looking with every step Blaine takes.

“So, Evita?” Blaine asks, because he’s still getting closer and he has to say something, even if that is a question with a blatantly obvious answer.

“Oh, you’ve… seen the movie?” the singer guesses, arching an eyebrow.

Blaine draws to a halt at the side of the piano. “No, um… actually I saw the Broadway revival.”

“Oh.” He sounds surprised, and both eyebrows are up now.

The moment slips into silence, so it seems like it’s up to Blaine to say something else. “Your voice is amazing,” he blurts out, instantly afraid that it may have been a bit over-earnest.

Whether it is or not, the other man seems mollified. “Thank you. I’m certainly no Patti LuPone. No Madonna, either, for that matter.”

“Thank god for that,” Blaine jokes.

A wrinkle appears between the singer’s eyebrows. “Why…?”

Because Patti and Madonna are both women, Blaine thinks, not attractive men with amazing hair and legs for miles and lips and eyes like yours.

He says, “Oh, well, the paparazzi would probably ruin the wedding, and I’m pretty sure they don’t allow lingerie in the church.”

His own words make him want to cringe a little, because who talks to strangers about lingerie, but there’s only a wash of relief when he sees amusement in the other man’s eyes and the twitch of his lips. “That is a shame,” he says. “Imagine how much more interesting the procession would be.”

“Not to mention the people watching,” Blaine chimes in gamely.

“There would have been much less chance that we’d show up wearing the same thing,” the singer says, motioning to Blaine’s black suit and then his own.

Blaine grins. “Oh no, I would have been wearing this no matter what. Emily picked these suits out of a magazine over five years ago.” And there’s still the distinct possibility that he’ll have to run screaming from the building if he hears that story even one more time.

“Then it’s a good thing that a good black suit never goes out of style.”

“They may have suggested some changes to the lapels at the shop,” Blaine confides.

“I’m not surprised. So, you’re in the wedding party?”

“Not only am I in the wedding party,” Blaine says grandly, “I’m the best man. Cooper is my brother. I’m Blaine.”
He extends a hand, which the other man takes in a firm grip, his skin soft and his thumb folding over the top and pressing into Blaine’s skin. “Kurt.”

“Nice to meet you, Kurt. You must be singing at the ceremony.”

“Actually, no,” Kurt says, affecting a supercilious air that crackles around the edges with mischief. “I just like dressing to the nines and sneaking into churches to try out the acoustics.”

Blaine feels buoyant, and he tries to steady himself with a hand running lightly along the curve of the piano. It’s smooth and cool. “You should stick around then. Cooper and Emily will probably put you to work.”

Kurt lets out a chuckle. “Oh, they’ve already done that. Usually I just show up and sing a couple of hymns or a ballad or two, but your brother made me a very generous offer to sing at the garden reception and even part of dinner.”

The news makes Blaine’s heels want to bounce; he keeps them in check, but his hand skates off the piano. “Does that mean that you go here? I mean, is this your church?”

“No!” Kurt says quickly, and his face tilts toward sardonic, begins to shutter off. “No. They’re not… accepting of the type of person I am here.”

Oh. Can Blaine take that as confirmation that he’s —? Well, no, Blaine reasons. It could mean a lot of things. Like that he’s a Satanist. But really, which makes more sense? Blaine is opening his mouth, at least to say that he doesn’t feel very welcome there either, when Cooper’s voice booms out and cuts straight across his intentions. “Blaine! There you are. Didn’t I ask you to watch out for — oh! I see you’ve met Kurt!”

Blaine grits his teeth. The fragile moment vaporizes, and he’s crashing back down to earth, all the further to go when he’d been flying so high. He glances over to where Cooper is shouting at him across the nave, which seems like poor manners, the florist trailing after him holding a flat box filled with colorful clusters of flowers. “You did,” he replies, trying to force his voice out normally. “I’m sorry I missed you, Bonnie, but I’m happy to help you now if you —”

“No, no, no,” Cooper says, hurrying to step in beside him, beaming. “I don’t want to interrupt. After all, you’re both singers. I’m sure you have a lot to talk about.”

“You sing?” Kurt pipes up, looking at Blaine curiously.

But it’s Cooper who answers. “He even goes to Tisch. Hey! Maybe he can give you some pointers!” Blaine’s eyes flare wide as Cooper claps him enthusiastically on the shoulder, and he can’t, he can’t look at Kurt. “Just make sure you’re back in ten minutes, Blainey.” With one last slap of his hand on Blaine’s back, he’s gone.

There’s a pointed moment of silence, during which Blaine very deliberately does not cover his face in mortification. “You don’t need tips,” he finally says, tightly. “And being done with my first year at Tisch certainly doesn’t make me any more qualified to give you any.”

“I can’t believe I used to have the FreeCreditRatingToday.com jingle as my ring tone,” Kurt murmurs.

Blaine’s head snaps up to find that while there are flickers of annoyance in Kurt’s expression, his
face mostly just registers a vague sort of disdain.

“**You did?**” Blaine asks, and he can’t help the sinking sensation that accompanies *that* bit of information.

“**Oh! Um, not for long.**” Kurt admits, looking sheepish. He appears to give himself a little shake, then, before he says, “**You should probably get back. I don’t want to keep you from your responsibilities.**”

Blaine smiles ruefully. “**I don’t actually have many of those. Right now it’s mostly just hold onto the rings and make sure they don’t get lost.**” He pats his jacket, feeling the telltale lump of the pouch secured inside the inner pocket. “**I think we’re starting with pictures outside soon, that’s all.**”

“I’d say that counts as a responsibility, and far be it from me to keep you from that,” Kurt says. “Besides, Brad’s here —” he nodded toward a man with sandy hair and wire-frame glasses who had just entered the church “— so I should probably run over a few things with him. Brad’s the pianist,” he adds.

Blaine nods. “I guess I’ll see you during the ceremony, then.”

“You’ll hear me, at least,” Kurt says with a wink.

Blaine’s breath hitches, and he feels like his heart is beating irregularly as he moves away. “Okay. I look forward to it.” He turns when he’s afraid he’s about to bump into the pews and instead almost collides with Brad, who merely gives him an exasperated look. Blaine escapes hastily.

Luckily, by the time he makes it back to the groomsmen’s holding pen, the photographer is already there. She hustles them straight out the door, and although Cooper waggles his eyebrows at Blaine, they’re soon too busy for Blaine to do anything other than roll his eyes in response.

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Kurt is wrong; Blaine most definitely sees him during the wedding. It’s a Catholic ceremony, long and plodding and the one concession that Emily has made to her family’s wishes, so he has plenty of opportunity to look. Kurt spends most of his time sitting still in his seat beside the piano, his face as stoic as a statue, but Blaine’s favorite is watching Kurt stand tall and straight as he fills the room with his voice. The passion that Blaine had heard in it earlier is notably absent when he leads the opening hymn and the responsive portions of the service, but even without that, his voice is bright and luminous. Blaine sings along because he loves to, because he can imagine them singing together, and in his head, he hears only their voices, blending and weaving. He harmonizes without thinking, blushes a little when he wonders if Kurt can hear him over the quiet off-key murmuring of the guests.

Then it’s time for the marriage, and Blaine finds himself caught up in watching Cooper, who tearfully and honestly fumbles his vows, making Blaine’s own eyes feel heavy and damp, even though he’s smiling. He steps forward to hand off the rings, and that’s all he has to do until he gives his speech later tonight.

And just when Blaine’s heart feels full to bursting with how genuinely happy he is and how beautiful the ceremony is turning out to be, Cooper and Emily move to light the unity candle.

Kurt steps forward again to set the moment to music — a lovely but bizarre rendition of Aerosmith’s “I Don’t Wanna Miss a Thing,” and Blaine has no choice but to chuckle to himself. It’s still Cooper’s
wedding, after all.

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The rest of the day passes in a blur. Blaine has been operating under the impression that the pressure would be off after the ceremony is over, but after that, there’s the receiving line and pictures and more pictures and the garden reception, where he barely gets a chance to listen to Kurt because he’s besieged by every aunt and uncle and second cousin he never knew he had. He tells them over and over again about New York, sings little snippets of songs, asks politely about their health and their children.

Then the guests are being herded inside for dinner while the wedding party congregates in the lobby. Blaine waits patiently for his turn, finally strutting into the room with Emily’s best friend. He catches a quick glimpse of Kurt as they pass the corner of the room where there’s another piano, and Kurt looks like he’s using his whole face to try and contain a grin. Unable to resist, Blaine shimmies at him just a little before climbing the steps to the platform elevating the long head table.

Blaine’s best man speech seems to go over well, at least if the tears in his mother’s eyes are anything to go by, and no one notices or cares that he leads the toast with a glass of real champagne. The food is delicious, and now, finally, they can all start to relax. He ribs Cooper about his vows, calls Emily Mrs. Anderson, and listens with half an ear when Kurt gets up to sing things that are quiet and jazzy and romantic. He can’t help but look over every so often, and more often than not, Kurt meets his eyes and smiles behind the microphone.

The dinner slips away quickly, and then the waiters are moving the tables away from the dance floor. The band is setting up, Kurt having sung his last song and retreated to a table in the back corner of the room to a flurry of applause. As soon as Blaine can extricate himself from everyone else, he approaches Kurt’s table with his hands stuffed in his pockets.

“Hi,” he says when he’s there, feeling suddenly bashful.

“Hi,” Kurt responds. They look at each other for a moment, and then Kurt clears his throat and looks back down at his plate, spearing a piece of asparagus. “Your speech was great.”

“Thanks. Not anywhere as good as your songs, though. Where’s Brad? Didn’t he want dinner?”

“Oh,” Kurt says, “he’s not very social.”

When Blaine drops down into the chair beside him, Kurt’s eyes dart over to him in surprise. “What are you doing?” he asks, his forehead creasing.

Blaine shrugs. “Keeping you company.”

Kurt still looks confused. “Don’t you have other things to do?”

“Nope! Now that my speech is out of the way, I’m fancy free.”

“But aren’t you here with someone? I’m not keeping you from…” Kurt waved his hand in the general direction of the dance floor. “…them?”

“Nope,” Blaine repeats. “I’m here by myself. Except for my family, of course.”
Kurt makes a little humming noise. “Oh,” he says. “I thought maybe the shorter blonde bridesmaid…”

Emily’s sister Serena, Blaine realizes. Because she’s one of the few members of the wedding party who isn’t vapid and strange, he’s found himself gravitating towards her for a respite from everyone else’s insanity. She’s quiet and sweet and likes to read, and they had ended up holed up together in a corner at the garden reception, debating whether or not poorly written fad books have any redeeming characteristics. But still… “Not my type,” Blaine says succinctly.

“No?” Kurt’s looking down at this plate again as he carefully cuts a bite of chicken.

“No. I, uh, I don’t feel all that welcome in Catholic churches either.” His heart is beating strangely in his throat all of a sudden. It feels very much like a declaration of intent — sitting down here, announcing that he’s unattached and, oh yeah, gay. It isn’t exactly how he planned to go about this.

Kurt doesn’t seem flustered, though. If anything, he relaxes a little, chewing thoughtfully on his chicken as he watches Emily’s tiny cousins run, squealing, from one end of the empty dance floor to the other. When he turns back to Blaine, he looks a little impish. “Do you know that in my illustrious career as a church soloist, I have never once been asked to perform ‘I Don’t Wanna Miss a Thing’ during the lighting of the unity candle?”

Surprised at the sudden change of subject, Blaine lets out an undignified snort. “It comes as no surprise to me that Cooper and Emily Anderson would want nothing less than the most over-the-top blockbuster ballad at their wedding ceremony.”

“Did your brother tell you that he reenacted several of his most famous roles when I auditioned for him?”

Blaine gapes. “He made you audition?”

“Yup.”

“That’s not standard, is it?”

“Nope.” Kurt pops another piece of asparagus into his mouth, and Blaine tries not to stare as the fork slips free of his lips.

He clears his throat. “Why did you agree to that?”

Kurt shrugs. “For practice. For fun.” He glances over with a teasing gleam in his eye. “Finally getting to meet the famous Cooper Anderson?”

Blaine props his elbows on the table and buries his face in his hands. “Oh god.”

There’s a delicate chuckle from beside him, and then Kurt’s fingers are on his wrist, tugging his hand away so that Kurt can peer in at Blaine’s eyes. “Hey, it wasn’t all bad. I particularly enjoyed seeing his role from The Walking Dead.” He does a quiet imitation of Cooper’s zombie noises and they both dissolve into hushed laughter, which ends abruptly when Kurt gives a little start and drops Blaine’s wrist.

Blaine tries to fold his hands casually on the table, but now it looks like he’s posing them no matter what he does. “So,” he says, struggling to refocus. “Just how long is this illustrious career of yours?”
“Eight months, give or take. And the winter months were slow, of course.”

“Well, you’re a natural,” Blaine says gallantly.

Kurt’s smile seems a little sad. “Thanks. I’ve been singing for years.”

“How did you get involved with weddings?” Blaine asks, distracted by watching Kurt’s hands as he carefully crosses his knife and fork over his plate and pulls his napkin from his lap.

“It’s kind of a long story.” Kurt replies. “I was living in New York until early this fall. I certainly never thought of singing in churches as a way to keep performing, but my friend Mercedes put in a few calls — she was always very involved at her church and with local Christian youth groups — and I started getting jobs right away. My reputation spread pretty quickly, and surprisingly, they care that I have a good voice more than it bothers them that I’m gay. Maybe they think that getting me into a church will help me see the error of my ways… sorry, I don’t mean to get up on a soapbox at your brother’s wedding.”


“Oh, no. Well, not outside of performances for school. I went to NYADA for a little over a year.”

“Kurt,” Blaine breathes. His hand shoots out almost of its own accord, lightly squeezing Kurt’s forearm before he snatches it back. “That’s amazing!”

Kurt toys with the edge of the linen napkin, rolling and unrolling it. “I suppose so. You’re at Tisch.”

Blaine scoffs. “NYADA is way more exclusive than Tisch. But… you left?”

“Family emergency,” Kurt says quietly.

“I’m so sorry.”

Kurt’s lips twitch up at the corners, more an acknowledgment of his words than anything like a real smile. “Thank you.”

They fall into an uncomfortable silence then, and Blaine isn’t really sure how to proceed. A waiter stops by to whisk Kurt’s empty plate away, and, robbed of his napkin, he curls his hands together in his lap instead. It isn’t long before Blaine can’t take it anymore. “Well!” he says heartily — probably too heartily. “I think Cooper was wrong. You should be giving me singing tips.”

“I don’t know if that’s necessary,” Kurt replies. “You sounded pretty great to me.”

“When did you hear me…?”

“At the ceremony. You harmonize very well.”

Blaine can feel the heat in his face, but before he has the chance to say anything, the room suddenly dims, and a rattling drum plays over the speakers. Belatedly, Blaine realizes that it’s the 20th Century Fox theme song, and he groans. A quick glance at Kurt reveals that he’s watching the proceedings with utmost amusement.
“Ladies and gentlemen,” the lead singer of the band announces when the horns die away, “Mr. Cooper and Mrs. Emily Anderson will now dance together for the first time as husband and wife.”

Blaine expects the band to swing into something then, something romantic and appropriate, and he’s surprised when recorded music starts playing over the speakers instead. There’s a plaintive whistling and then the lyrics start. *Every night in my dreams, I see you, I feel you…*

“Noooo,” Blaine moans quietly. He looks over again to see that Kurt has actually pressed his knuckles against his lips and his eyes are all crinkled up. As though he senses Blaine’s attention, he tries to sober his expression, but when he returns Blaine’s gaze, his eyes are twinkling.

With a sigh, Blaine leans over so that he can speak quietly but still be heard over the music. Kurt inclines his head toward Blaine, which stretches out his neck, and Blaine’s mouth goes a little dry as he starts to speak. “I — uh — I take it back. 'I Don’t Wanna Miss a Thing’ is the second most over-the-top blockbuster ballad.”

Kurt tilts into him then, and oh, they’re so close that their shoulders are pressed together. “I hate to break it to you, but if your brother is going for Hollywood glamour, he’s doing it completely wrong.”

“At least he didn’t ask you to sing this one,” Blaine shoots back, grinning.

“I might have had to refuse on the grounds of utter ridiculousness,” Kurt says, and their faces are really just a few inches apart. Blaine is fully aware that he cannot kiss the wedding singer in front of god and everyone during Cooper and Emily’s first dance, but his eyes dip down just the same. *Maybe no one’s even paying any attention to us*, he reasons. *At least Cooper won’t see.*

Before he’s decided if he really wants to go through with it, he’s interrupted when what he thought was the leg of the table that he’s been bracing his foot against suddenly presses back into him, making him jump. *How long have we been sitting like that?* he wonders dazedly, as Kurt cringes back. “Sorry! Sorry, I thought —”

“No!” Blaine jumps in. “I just thought you were the table leg. Here.” He chases Kurt’s foot with his own, pushes them back together firmly. “It’s fine… isn’t it?”

Kurt smiles warmly at him and returns the pressure. “It’s fine.” Blaine feels flushed all over, and it must be from something in Kurt’s expression, because it would be ridiculous to get hot from the non-contact of their feet with all the layers of leather and sock between them.

“So,” Kurt continues, resting his elbow on the table and his chin in his hand and leaning forward into Blaine’s space, “about these singing tips. Perhaps we could discuss them over dinner sometime?”

“You mean like a date?” he asks playfully, unable to keep from grinning.

“Second date.”

Blaine’s still smiling, but his forehead wrinkles. “Second date?”

“You don’t think this counts?” Kurt’s voice is innocent. “Dinner and a show?”

“We didn’t even eat together!” Blaine protests. “And no matter how mortifying it was, I’m not sure that my brother’s first dance counts as a show.”
Kurt’s expression is almost completely wicked as he says, “I wasn’t talking about that one. I was talking about what’s going to happen when those three hit the dance floor.” He nods his head toward the bar, and Blaine turns to see his sweet Aunt Rosa buying shots for Tanner and Russell.

“Oh my god,” Blaine mumbles.

Kurt laughs and touches his arm sympathetically. “At least we got the meeting-your-family part out of the way early?”

***

*But that’s not what happened either.*
Or through the lens of a camera

Blaine is pretty sure that he and the cute assistant photographer have been making eyes at each other all morning.

It’s hard to be certain, though. After all, it’s literally the other man’s job to observe what’s going on today. Maybe he’s spent the entire day waiting for Blaine to do something worthy of being preserved for posterity, and Blaine’s disappointing him. Maybe Blaine’s blowing it out of proportion. It’s not like he’s not the only one the photographer is looking at — Cooper has definitely been on the receiving end of many of his glances, but Blaine is willing to chalk that up to Cooper being the groom. He’d really prefer for that to be the reason, anyway.

But just before he steps forward to escort the maid of honor down the aisle, Blaine cuts one more glance over toward the photographer and finds the other man’s eyes flicking away quickly once again.

Blaine had caught his first glimpse of the man after he was done directing the florist about the exact manner for tying sprigs of flowers and ribbons onto the ends of the pews, per Emily and Cooper’s strict instructions. While passing back through the lobby, Blaine saw him hunched in patch of sunshine on the front lawn, trying to hold the bridal bouquet at an appropriate angle with one hand and maneuver an impressive camera with the other.

He had paused for a moment and watched as the photographer scrolled through the pictures he’d just taken, frowning down at the camera with a critical eye. When he began struggling to adjust the camera settings while still holding the flowers, Blaine had pushed open the door and approached him. He told himself that he was being polite and that Emily would eviscerate anyone who dropped her bouquet. The guy’s distinctive profile (accentuated by a truly magnificent sweeping hairstyle) had very little to do with it.

The photographer was so involved in his work that he didn’t even glance up until Blaine’s shadow fell over the flowers. “Excuse me — you’re blocking my…” he said, turning to squint up with clear blue-gray eyes that dropped open slightly when Blaine drew nearer. “Oh. Um, you’re blocking the light.” He turned back down to fiddle with the camera again.

“I’m sorry,” Blaine said, shuffling to the side. “I just wanted to see if you could use any help.”

“No, no. Thank you, but I’m actually pretty accustomed to doing this part on my own.”

Blaine crouched down beside him. “Really.” He reached out and gently prised the flowers from the man’s hand. They were heavier than he had expected, and he clutched them carefully. “I won’t even tell anyone that you absconded with the bouquet.”

One side of the photographer’s mouth curled up as he shot Blaine a look through narrowed eyes. “Absconded? Really?”

Blaine shrugged, then stilled himself again when the other man glared. He ignored the man’s fingers curling around the camera’s lens, poised over the shutter button and then pressing it down. “Have you met the bride? She wouldn’t be too happy to have someone else handling the bouquet before she does. Maybe I’m just trying to take some of the heat in case you get caught.”
How chivalrous,” the man mumbled, sounding vaguely pleased but also seeming distracted as he flipped through a few pictures. He glanced up and reached over to adjust the angle of the flowers with a hint of skin sweeping along Blaine’s. “Mel did say that this wedding would be an interesting one. Full of character, I believe were her exact words.” He continued to shoot as he spoke, adjusting his position briefly between each click of the camera.

“That’s one way to describe it,” Blaine said diplomatically, looking at what he could see of the other man. The strong line of his shoulders. The soft wrinkle of concentration in his forehead. His hand twisting the zoom lens. It felt strangely voyeuristic — they were so close together, but the man wasn’t paying him any attention at all.

At least, he wasn’t until he suddenly dropped the camera a few inches, looking over at Blaine. “You must not be Cooper, then.”

“Nope. I’m Blaine. Cooper’s my brother.”

“Ah.” Quick as a flash, he raised the camera and took few quick shots of what Blaine could only assume was his surprised face as he stooped there in the sunlight holding the flowers. “Just in case anyone wants any evidence about who really stole the bouquet,” he said, grinning impishly.

Blaine chuckled as they both straightened to their feet and started back toward the church. The other man held out his hand for the flowers, rolling his eyes when Blaine hesitated in giving them back. “I think she really might kill someone if anything happens to them,” Blaine hedged.

“Trust me, this is far from my first time handling a bouquet,” the man said, wiggling his fingers. “Besides, if something happens, wouldn’t you rather have the blame fall on an innocent bystander? You’re going to see her at Thanksgiving and Christmas every year for the rest of your lives.”

“Fair enough,” Blaine said, handing over the flowers before holding the door open for him.

When the flowers were safely nestled back into the flat with the bridesmaids’ bouquets, the photographer straightened back up and nodded over his shoulder. “I should go track down Mel. See where she needs me to be.”

“Okay. Well, I guess I’ll… see you around.”

“Probably more than you want to. Thanks for your help, Blaine.”

He was walking away before Blaine realized that he hadn’t learned his name — a fact that Blaine lamented for the next two hours. He couldn’t even find a good way to discover it. He couldn’t ask Mel when she shot the groomsmen’s portraits on the sunny lawn beside the church. He was too afraid that Cooper would find out and tease Blaine mercilessly, so he didn’t ask the man directly when he was shooting candids of the wedding party goofing around while they waited to walk down the aisle, sneaking extra looks at Blaine the whole time. At least Blaine thought he was. Maybe he was peeking at everyone.

During the ceremony, Blaine watches him move around the back of the church and wonders.

Finally, when the wedding party is milling around at the front of the church, waiting for the group pictures to begin, Mel gathers them together for a brief series of announcements. She’s a no-nonsense, energetic woman with brassy hair, and she speaks loudly. “Just in case any of you missed it, I’m Mel, and this is my assistant photographer, Kurt.” The man gives a little wave, and Blaine
repeats the name in his head. Kurt. “You’re going to be seeing a lot of us today…”

Blaine can’t help but be glad to hear that. He tunes the rest of the announcements out, and when Mel is posing Cooper and Emily for a few pictures alone, he sidles up beside Kurt and says, “It’s nice to officially meet you, Kurt.”

Kurt is holding the camera in front of his face, but Blaine sees the corner of his mouth tilt up. “Likewise.”

And that’s how it really starts. For the rest of the day, he and Kurt somehow gravitate together again and again, exchanging quips and tentative smiles and chatting for a few seconds at a time.

At the park, Kurt straightens up after taking a few pictures of the flower girl and mutters to Mel, “It’s too bad the miniature’s dress is cuter than the bride’s.”

Blaine, who’s standing close by, can’t help but ask, “You don’t like Emily’s dress?”

Kurt reddens when he sees Blaine standing so close. “I —”

“Because I think it looks like she got into a cage match with a few yards of lace and lost,” Blaine says with a wink, and Kurt gives him an appraising look and bites back a grin.

When they’re leaving the park and Blaine thinks that Mel might strangle Cooper because he won’t stop turning into his poses, he sneaks up beside Kurt and hisses, “He’s not going to stop doing that, so she’s going to have to calm down.”

Kurt snorts. “Well, at least it’s making for some very… dynamic images.”

At the garden reception, Blaine comments on the singer and finds out that Kurt’s on sabbatical from NYADA. Every time they bump into each other in the courtyard, they mention a favorite production or actor or movie adaptation.

It’s a conversation that weaves itself throughout the day, pausing and putting itself on hold for long stretches, reigniting furiously every time they’re in each other’s proximity for more than a second or two. By the time Blaine’s sitting down for dinner, ever aware of where Kurt is, he’s pretty sure he’s infatuated.

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After the meal, Blaine has no choice but to spend some time catching up with his family. The room begins to heat up when the dancing starts, and Blaine ditches his jacket and rolls up his sleeves, but before long, he’s headed to the bar in search of some water or a soda. The bartender is an old friend of Cooper’s named Andy, and he greets Blaine enthusiastically. “What can I get you? Full bar.”

Blaine arches an eyebrow. “I’m not twenty-one.”

“You don’t have to be,” Andy says. “You’re Cooper’s brother, right? Your parents are here. You’re supervised.”

“Don’t they have to — buy it for me or hand it to me or something?”

Andy shrugs. “You can go get them to hand it off if you want. Or we could just cut out the
middleman.”

“Oh. Okay, well… surprise me.”

After a few seconds and a calculating look, Andy says, “Tom Collins?”

“Sure,” Blaine agrees casually. He knows that’s a drink and he knows that’s a character from *Rent*, but not a lot more than that. After attending a few parties in high school and college, he’s really not familiar with much beyond wine coolers and cheap beer and, well, *swill*, sometimes mixed with soda and sometimes not.

Andy turns away, but before he can get far, he’s accosted by a tall woman, who screeches “I haven’t seen you in years!” and leans across the bar to give him an awkward neck hug. She begins chattering, and Andy gives Blaine an apologetic *just a minute* gesture.

While he waits, Blaine notices that Kurt has appeared to lounge against the bar about halfway down, his camera sitting beside him. His eyes are scanning the crowd restlessly, but he doesn’t look like he’s eager to move. Blaine sucks in a deep breath and lets it out slowly — *maybe this should wait until after the cocktail oh god* — then edges down the bar. “Hey,” he says when Kurt looks over. “Do you — I mean, can I get you anything to drink, or…?”

Well, *that* didn’t come out as smoothly as he’d intended, but as it turns out, doing something that could be construed as *actually hitting on* makes his heart beat so much faster and harder than the *maybe-we’re-flirting-and-maybe-we’re-not* that they’d been doing all day.

Kurt smiles and goes back to watching the crowd. His hand flexes toward his camera for a moment and then drops, and Blaine realizes that he’s looking for photo opportunities. “No, thanks. Not unless your brother wants fuzzy pictures.”

Blaine breathes out a laugh. “Not even a soda? Water? You’ve been working hard all day.”

“We do have snacks in the car, you know,” Kurt says, and then gives him an amused look out of the side of his eye. “Sure, Blaine, you can get me a water.”

When Blaine flags Andy down, he looks only too happy to extricate himself from the woman, who’s still talking his ear off. “How can I help you?”

“Change mine to a club soda, please. And a water for my friend,” Blaine says grandly, motioning to Kurt.

Andy’s face is a bit unimpressed. “Water and fizzy water. Got it.”

Blaine shrugs as he turns back to Kurt. He’s looped the strap of the camera back around his neck and has his eye on a cluster of guests on the dance floor. When Emily joins them, Kurt exclaims “I’ll be right back!” and darts away almost before the words are out.

With interest, Blaine watches as Kurt snaps several shots of the group, his flash lighting up their faces. At first, they’re hammy, posing and smiling. Kurt hovers for a moment, waiting until the moment they forget he’s there, and then he takes a few more rapid-fire pictures and retreats, studying the viewing screen.

There’s a quiet thump behind him as Andy sets two glasses on the counter. He gives Blaine a wink,
which Blaine does his best to ignore, shifting his weight from one foot to the other as Kurt settles in beside him again. Blaine thinks that he’s a little bit closer than before. It sure seems that way when he’s watching Kurt’s throat muscles work while he takes a long drink of his water, and Blaine busies himself quickly with his own glass. By the time he thinks it’s safe to look over again, Kurt’s flipping through the pictures on the camera.

“Can I see?” Blaine asks, turning to rest his elbow on the bar and craning his neck over. “Or is that a violation of code or something?”

Kurt snorts and leans toward him, so that his shoulder is almost tucked against Blaine’s chest. Blaine takes a careful breath, and Kurt scrolls through a few pictures, his thumb working a wheel to the right of the viewing screen. “Candids are hard,” he’s saying, “because there’s only a split second difference between a good shot and, well… this.” He pauses on an image of a woman laughing so hugely that she looks grotesque. With another flick of his thumb, the screen changes, and Blaine is looking at a picture of one of the bridesmaids and another guest smiling and gesturing toward each other with their drinks. “That’s better,” Kurt comments.

“You take good pictures,” Blaine says. It seems inadequate, and he wonders if he should be more specific, like *wow great composition or masterful use of lighting*, but he decides against it because he’s pretty sure it’s a great way to call attention to the fact that he has no idea what he’s talking about.

Kurt doesn’t seem to mind. “Thanks.” He continues to scroll.

“Wait,” Blaine says suddenly, his hand darting out to touch Kurt’s arm lightly. “Was that me?”

The screen flashes back, and there he is — joking around with Pete, grinning so hard that his eyes have all but disappeared. “Oh god, that’s one of those bad ones, isn’t it?”

Kurt’s smile at the screen is almost fond. “No, I think it’s nice. It’s very genuine.”

“My eyes always do that.”

“Do what?”

Blaine reaches into the space between Kurt’s body and the camera to point at his squinted eyes. “That.”

“So?” Kurt’s eyebrows draw down in confusion and Blaine pulls his hand away.

“Doesn’t it look kind of — I don’t know — insane? Oh no. Did I do that in all of the group pictures?”

Kurt still looks bemused. “Some of them. Who cares? No one can deny that you’re happy.”

“You’re no help at all,” Blaine says, and he finds himself mock-pouting. He’s not even sure if he’s as upset as he’s making himself out to be, and he wonders if he should dial it down a notch or five.

Maybe not, though, because Kurt is still gamely playing along. “And how exactly am I supposed to help?”

“I don’t know. You’re a photographer. Don’t you have some advice? Some tips about how to make
people look less maniacal in pictures?"

“Try not to squint your eyes shut if it bothers you so much?” Kurt teases.

Blaine scoffs. “Easy for you to say.”

“Easy to do.” Kurt smiles at him then, his lips stretching wide and his eyes open and bright even in the dim reception hall. Blaine stares and swallows hard, and then Kurt’s expression is faltering as he raises the camera. “You try.”

Blaine rolls his eyes but complies. The camera flash is bright, and he blinks through spots as they crowd around the screen. “Oh, that’s even worse,” Blaine moans, as they both start to laugh.

“Oh, it might not be the best picture of you that was ever taken,” Kurt says, still giggling, “but give it a rest. You’re very photogenic.”

“Am I?” Blaine asks, the words coming out more seriously than he intended, and the teasing is gone like someone flipped a switch. Kurt’s looking at him solemnly, his face close (wow, really close).

“Yes,” Kurt replies, pushing away from the bar. “Come on. Grab your jacket.”

Blaine scrambles to follow. “What? Where are we going?”

“I’m going to prove it to you. Meet me in the hallway.”

***

Kurt leads him outside, to a small tract of grassy land behind the building where there are a few small garden plots and a single bench and an orange bulb mounted on the wall.

“What should I do?” Blaine asks.

“Stand here,” Kurt instructs, tapping his foot on the ground beside the bench. “Unbutton your jacket and put your hands in your pockets. Your pants pockets, not your jacket.”

Blaine’s uncomfortable and, if he’s being honest, kind of vaguely turned on — he thinks it’s got something to do with the way Kurt is suddenly commanding the situation. “Is this okay?”

“Yes, that’s good.” Kurt stands back and regards Blaine critically. “Relax your posture a little bit. Shift your weight like this,” he commands, putting all his weight on one leg.

Blaine juts out his hip and Kurt smiles faintly. “Don’t be so melodramatic,” he admonishes as he looks down to fiddle with the knobs and buttons on the camera. He glances back up. “Ready?”

“Sure,” Blaine says. Kurt raises the camera and takes a single frame, then studies the viewing screen and makes a few more adjustments to the camera settings. He’s quiet, and Blaine asks, “Do you want me to smile?”

“No.” Kurt shoots from his current position in front of Blaine and then slides slowly off to the side. Blaine’s eyes track his movement uneasily, watching as Kurt makes minute changes in zoom and angle. With a sigh, Kurt drops the camera enough to peer over the top of it. “Blaine, what are you thinking about?”
He shuffles his feet a little. “Um… that I feel kind of awkward.” It’s mostly the truth.

“Don’t think about that. It shows on your face.”

“Oh okay.”

Kurt glances briefly over his shoulder. “Look at that tree. Hold as still as you can.”

“Oh okay,” Blaine repeats, and he takes a deep breath as the shutter begins to click again. At first, he tries to think about nothing at all. He focuses on the breeze moving the cooling night air against his skin, watches it gently rustle the leaves on the tree. He can only ruminate about the breeze for so long, unfortunately, and not a minute later, his mind rolls right around to the thoughts that he’s trying to avoid.

“This is kind of… sensual.”

Very sensual, he corrects himself; everything is heightened. It’s dark and Kurt is watching him and the air feels close. The flowers are closed because it’s nighttime, but he swears he can smell them anyway. It’s quiet back here, and all Blaine can hear is the wind and his own breath and the camera and Kurt moving around him. The wedding is so far removed that it might as well be happening in another state. They’re alone, and it feels like everything is charging up with possibilities — possibilities that crackle and fizz when Kurt says softly, “Sit down.”

Blaine jumps a little, but moves quickly to the bench. He glances up at Kurt, who walks closer, takes three quick shots, and then lowers himself down beside Blaine. “These look good,” he comments, his voice and his eyes low as he switches the camera into viewing mode. Blaine is surprised what he sees when he glances over — the pictures are vastly different from what Kurt had shown him inside. These are all about the angles, the way the light cuts across his skin and sections his face off into areas of light and shadow. “See? Plenty photogenic,” Kurt adds quietly.

“Wow,” Blaine breathes.

“I like shooting at night,” Kurt says as Blaine slides a little closer on the bench to get a better look. His shoulder shuffles against Kurt’s and Kurt leans into him as he tilts the camera further. “Using different light sources. Long exposures.”

“They’re amazing.” Blaine glances up, and really, it’s ridiculous that this keeps happening. He knows that he’s looked at pictures on digital cameras with other people before, and he’s pretty sure that he didn’t end up three inches from another person’s face every time. That would be awkward, wouldn’t it? Because the only good reason to be three inches from someone’s face is if you’re about to kiss them, or at least that’s the only one that Blaine can think of right now, which means that it’s well past time for him to lean back —

Which he doesn’t get the chance to do, because Kurt leans forward and kisses him, sudden and imprecise. Blaine only has time to gather his wits and kiss back once, almost twice against Kurt’s retreating lips, and then it’s over.

Blaine opens his eyes to see Kurt with one hand raised to his mouth, staring at him with something akin to horror in his eyes. “I’m so sorry!” he exclaims. “I don’t know what I was thinking —”

“Kurt —”
“…so unprofessional, really, I’m so sorry. God, I’m just going to —”

Blaine clamps a hand around Kurt’s wrist. “Kurt. It’s okay. Really.”

Kurt’s eyes focus back on his face. “…it is?”

“It really is,” Blaine says. He squeezes Kurt’s arm briefly and slides his hand back and away, some of his fingers brushing over the sleeve of Kurt’s jacket and some over his skin.

“Oh.” Kurt glances down at the camera, clicking one of the knobs absently. “You’re not going to complain to Mel and have me fired?”

“Definitely not.”

“Thank you,” Kurt says, looking back up, earnest and relieved.

Blaine stares back for a moment, his heart picking up pace again in his chest. He lets the words tumble out before he can think better of it and stop them. “If anyone asks, we’ll tell them it happened after our first date.”

Kurt’s eyebrows shoot up. “Our first date?”

“Oh my god, you don’t want to — wow, now I’m sorry, just forget I said —”

“No,” Kurt says, the single word cutting into Blaine’s babbling. His expression is shifting now and his eyes look brighter. “It’s just that you haven’t actually asked me on a date.”

Blaine takes a deep breath. He can feel himself starting to smile too. “Kurt, would you like to go out with me sometime?”

“I would love to.”

They grin goofily at each other until Blaine reaches out to tap the corner of the camera. “Maybe you can leave your friend at home.”

Kurt scoffs. “A photographer never just leaves his camera at home, Blaine. Besides, it makes an excellent chaperone.”

“You want us to have a chaperone?”

“Well, maybe not,” Kurt says, and Blaine grins.

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It wasn’t that either.
Blaine first sees him when he and the maid of honor are walking giddily back up the aisle after the ceremony is over. He’s sitting on the bride’s side next to a pretty young woman with short, dark hair. They have to keep moving — which is probably good, because it means that Blaine can’t stop and try to get a better look — but he does get the vague impression of an impeccable suit and hairstyle, pale skin, and a handsome face.

The same stranger always seems to be at the edges of Blaine’s vision at the garden reception, or maybe Blaine keeps making sure he’s there on purpose. He’s taller than Blaine is, and he’s long and lean and he stays near the woman he was sitting beside in the church. Sometimes it’s just the two of them and sometimes they’re in a group of other people, but either way, it looks like he’s got a girlfriend. Which is unfortunate, really, but it doesn’t mean that Blaine can’t look. And listen, the one time he gets close enough to hear the other man: they’re standing almost back-to-back near the fountain, and Blaine overhears his voice — it’s surprisingly high and clear, but Blaine likes it — and, even better or maybe even worse, his laugh.

At dinner, Blaine has a perfect view of the man’s profile. He’s sitting three tables up and two tables over with the same woman and a table full of Emily’s family. He eats the chicken and chats politely.

Finally, the reception is in full swing and everything that Blaine considered a responsibility has been disposed of. He’s enjoying himself, but the temperature in the room seems to be rising, especially now that he’s spent the past two songs dancing Emily’s nieces around the floor on his feet, so he happily escapes to the bar to find something to drink. He strips his jacket off when he gets close — surely, Emily can’t be mad if he takes it off now.

Blaine has only just reached the bar when he hears a clear voice at his side. When he turns, the man he’s been watching all day is standing there, leaning nonchalantly next to an empty glass, and unless Blaine is imagining things, he just said, “Can I buy you a drink?”

His first reaction is surprise, because that certainly doesn’t seem like something that a straight man with a girlfriend with say. His next instinct is to blurt out that he’s not twenty-one yet (no don’t say that), but he manages to hold the words in. Cooper’s friend Andy is bartending, and Blaine suspects that he’s going to be fairly lenient, whether it’s a good idea or not.

It isn’t until the other man starts babbling that Blaine realizes that he hasn’t answered yet — or reacted at all, really, other than staring at him with his jaw slackened. “Oh god,” the man is saying, “that probably sounded like such a line. I’m sorry. Just forget I said anything. I’m sorry. Really. Especially for the bad pickup line.” So… definitely not straight, then.

“It wasn’t that bad,” Blaine manages to get out, afraid that the man is going to leave if he doesn’t say something.

He pauses. “No?”

“No. In fact, I think you can do worse.” Blaine feels his own eyebrows arch up as he watches the other man’s do the same. Where did that come from? He’d led a toast with a glass of champagne before dinner, but that really wasn’t enough of an excuse.

“Oh?” The man is looking at him with evident surprise, but Blaine is almost certain that he can see
something like playfulness creeping into his expression.

It only spurs Blaine on. “I only accept drinks from people who use the worst pickup lines possible,” he says airily.

The man stares at him for a minute longer, and then he’s grinning a little as he props his chin on his hand and bats his eyelashes at Blaine. “So, what’s a guy like you doing in a place like this?”

Blaine chuckles. “Nope, that wasn’t very bad either. Plus,” he points at his boutonniere, “it’s obvious why I’m here. My brother’s getting married.”

The stranger rolls his eyes, but his annoyance seems teasing, not genuine. “Okay, fine. Show me what you’ve got.”

“What?” Blaine asks incredulously. He hadn’t been expecting a line that was quite so bold.

“Hit me with a bad pickup line. Apparently I need a practical demonstration.”

Oh. Blaine considers for a moment, and then — sending up a silent prayer of thanks for the guy who lived two doors down in his freshman dorm, the one with the strange sense of humor — leans forward and smiles. “Excuse me, sir, do you mind stepping away from the bar?”

His forehead crinkles. “Why?”

It occurs to Blaine suddenly that he hadn’t considered actually saying the next part, but there’s no backing out now. He can feel his face flushing and his heart thudding as he says, “You’re so hot you’re melting all the ice.”

The man reddens as well, but he snorts out a laugh at the same time. “That is terrible.”

“I know!”

“If the worst pickup line loses, maybe you should be buying me a drink.”

“I’m not opposed to that.” He sticks out his hand. “I’m Blaine, by the way.”

“Kurt,” the man says, giving his hand a firm shake, and his skin feels good against Blaine’s, warm and just the slightest bit damp.

“And you… must know Emily?” Blaine asks.

“I don’t, actually. Her cousin is a good friend of mine, and she didn’t have a date, so she asked me to come along.” He signals for Andy. “I do enjoy a good wedding, and this one has certainly been entertaining.”

Blaine thinks back over the more colorful elements of the day and just barely manages to refrain from rolling his eyes. “Well, that’s Cooper for you.”

When Andy makes his way over, Blaine has a brief flare of panic that he’s going to expose him for the underage fraud that he is, but Andy just says, “What can I get you? Full bar.” He gives Blaine a conspiratorial look.
“Oh. Um, just a beer is fine,” Blaine says.

Andy nods. “You like pale ales, right?”

Blaine doesn’t have a lot of experience in picking and choosing his drinks, so he shrugs. “Sure.”

“And a refill on the vodka tonic for you?”

That question is addressed to Kurt, and he nods while Blaine fumbles his wallet out of his pocket. “I’ve got both.”

“Sounds good,” Andy says with a wink, and it makes Blaine squirm a little.

When he turns back to Kurt, Blaine’s surprised to find him giving small shakes of his head as he watches Andy work. “He’s going to get either this place or your brother in trouble,” he mumbles. “And himself, for that matter.”

“How?” Blaine asks, and then wishes instantly that he’d phrased his question a bit more eloquently.

“I’m only twenty,” Kurt confesses in a low voice. “See Linda over there?” He points to a table across the room, and Blaine sees a middle-aged woman in the blue, who he’s pretty sure is one of Emily’s aunts. “Apparently, she’s my legal guardian. That’s what she told him when she ordered the first one, anyway, and the bartender didn’t even question it.”

“Oh. He probably wouldn’t. That’s Andy,” Blaine says. “He’s a friend of my brother’s.”

Kurt hums. “I suppose that explains it.” His demeanor shifts suddenly as Andy approaches with their drinks — Kurt straightens his spine and thanks him confidently.

Blaine watches dumbly as Kurt takes a sip, his Adam’s apple bobbing as he swallows. “I’m only nineteen,” he admits, as much to distract himself as anything else.

There’s definitely a measure of surprise on Kurt’s face, but he shrugs. “I won’t tell if you won’t,” he says, and holds up his drink. “Cheers?”

“Cheers,” Blaine says, clinking their glasses together.

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The next hour and a half pass so quickly that Blaine has a hard time believing it’s gone when he looks down at his watch. He’s just finished his second drink — a vodka tonic that he’d ordered after tasting Kurt’s. There had been something strangely erotic about sipping out of Kurt’s glass; his body had reacted like it was a euphemism for something, even though it wasn’t.

It turns out that they have a lot in common, which they discover over the course of a meandering conversation interrupted only by their continued attempts to out-pickup-line each other.

Kurt had earned the honor of buying their second set of drinks after they’d finished arguing the merits of the movie version of Rent. During a brief pause in their conversation, Kurt had suddenly exclaimed, “Oh! I thought of one.”
“One what?” Blaine asked, sure that he was in for another example of why the stage version would always be superior, which was a fact that he wasn’t even arguing.

Instead, Kurt had leaned over into his personal space and murmured, “You’d better lower your pitch because you’re looking awfully sharp.”

Blaine had laughed, trapped in the snare of Kurt’s sparkling eyes. “All right, that was awful. You’ve got the next round.”

“Really? Even though it was thematically appropriate?”

“To be honest, I’m not sure if that makes it better or worse.” Secretly, he’s mostly just impressed that Kurt can come up with the phrase *thematically appropriate* after two vodka tonics and a swallow or two of a third.

Things had only devolved from there, until Kurt had resorted to Googling pickup lines on his phone while they talked. They’re giggling over them while Blaine waits for Andy to make his way back to their end of the bar.

“Kiss me if I’m wrong, but isn’t your name Yolanda?” Kurt reads from the screen now, distracting Blaine from trying to get Andy’s attention by batting his eyelashes briefly before returning to his normal inflection. “I think that’s the PG version of that one, though.”

“I want to kiss you,” Blaine blurts out, and okay, it’s possible that the alcohol is starting to take its toll on the looseness of his tongue. He sucks in a breath, surprised again at his own boldness.

Kurt’s eyes shoot up to meet Blaine’s, and they’re startled, but darkening. “You can,” he says abruptly, and Blaine’s heart throws itself against his ribcage, “but not here.”

They glance surreptitiously around the room, and Blaine knows he’s right. He can pick out the handful of his family members that wouldn’t have a problem with it — Cooper and Emily among them, thank goodness — but he can also see many who wouldn’t. He doesn’t want to stereotype, but a lot of Emily’s family are from the Midwest, and he has no idea about them.

“We can find somewhere, maybe,” Blaine says lowly. He isn’t sure he’s of the right mind to be making the decision, but he does manage to get to his feet without much unsteadiness. It takes concentration, but he does it.

“Oh okay,” Kurt replies so quietly that it’s almost a whisper. Blaine only just has time to shrug into his jacket — he’s too afraid he’ll lose it otherwise — and then they’re heading quickly for the hallway.

Finding somewhere else proves to be much more difficult than Blaine had anticipated. It seems like they’re being thwarted at every turn. Blaine’s father is holding court just outside the entrance to the hotel bar, surrounded by a group of his business colleagues. Although they had reached a tentative truce on the topic of his sexuality years ago, Blaine still doesn’t think he’s quite prepared to either parade or sneak past him to find a place to make out with a guy who’d picked him up at Cooper’s wedding reception.

Next, they try the long hallway dotted with couches that leads to the hotel’s smaller ballroom. There they find Emily herself, taking a break from the noise and heat of the reception with a cluster of her friends. Kurt’s starting to grumble beside him when Blaine bursts out with, “I have a room!”
“A room?” Kurt asks, giving him a suspicious look.

“No!” Blaine’s eyes widen and he reaches out to squeeze Kurt’s bicep with one hand. He wants to reassure Kurt and it steadies his own feet. It also feels really good, wow. “I didn’t mean it like that. It’s just… it’s private. So we don’t have to worry. I really didn’t mean… that.” He’s trying to drill his sincerity home with his eyes, and he hopes suddenly that he’s not just giving Kurt a really creepy stare.

It can’t be too bad, because Kurt’s eyes soften a little and he smiles. “Okay. Lead the way.”

“Ohay,” Blaine breathes. “There are stairs over — this way!”

When they’re safely behind a closed door, climbing quickly to the third floor, Kurt reaches over and takes his hand, squeezing it before lacing their fingers together.

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Just inside the door, there’s an awkward pause marked by shuffling feet and darting eyes. They’re still standing in the entryway because Kurt hasn’t moved any further into the room. He’s right there and Blaine’s not sure — is he supposed to say something first? Does he just reach out and grab? He hasn’t so much as kissed anyone since the breakup, and even though it’s only been a few months, he feels completely out of his depth and he has no idea what to do.

But really, the second option sounds good, so that’s what he does.

Everything goes still when his hand closes around Kurt’s lapel — their bodies, just for a second, the air, maybe everything in the world, he doesn’t know. It doesn’t last long, because Blaine can’t make himself wait to pull forward, and when he does, Kurt comes easily. Blaine slumps back against the door; it makes Kurt taller and he has to bend down a little while Blaine tilts his chin up to kiss. Their lips brush briefly as they find the right alignment, and the first real press of them together is firm and a bit demanding. It makes Blaine’s heart thunder in his chest and his hands tighten on Kurt — one still clutching his jacket and the other that has slid forward to find his Kurt’s waist.

Kurt leans back infinitesimally when they part and takes a quick, ragged breath, but Blaine has no time to collect himself before Kurt’s pushing back into him, kissing him surely again and again and again, pressing Blaine’s shoulders into the plastic plaque displaying the fire escape routes while he worms one arm behind Blaine’s lower back. The other is braced against the door above Blaine’s shoulder. When Kurt blankets him back into the door and works and licks his mouth open, Blaine lets it happen, goes along happily and willingly.

It just feels so good — maybe better than anything ever, or maybe he’s just forgotten, but it’s hard to think of anything else with his head spinning the way it is. Blaine’s afraid that he’s going to combust inside his rented tuxedo when Kurt’s mouth leaves his and starts a determined journey along his jawline, his tongue darting out to flick underneath. With a groan, Blaine lets his head fall back, where the edge of the peephole catches him sharply in the back of his skull.

“Owww,” he whines, bringing his head forward again and dislodging Kurt from his neck. He moves instead to kiss Blaine’s lips, which are caught between pouting and giggling.

“Are you okay?” Kurt mumbles against Blaine’s mouth. He raises the hand that was pressed against the door to cradle the back of Blaine’s head, and then he pauses and brushes the backs of his fingers against the peephole.
“Oh my god, did you hit your head on this? I’m so sorry!” Kurt’s voice is low and concerned, and he hasn’t moved more than an inch or two away.

“Doesn’t matter,” Blaine breathes, trying to find Kurt’s mouth again.

Kurt evades him. “No, that had to have hurt.” He’s petting softly over the back of Blaine’s hair now, and it feels much more amazing than it probably should. At the same time, he’s leaning forward like he’s going to be able to see around the back of Blaine’s head. It puts his neck right next to Blaine’s mouth, so he brushes his lips there languidly.

“You could kiss it better,” he whispers near Kurt’s ear.

“You want me to kiss the back of your head?” Kurt asks, his voice amused and breathless when Blaine presses his mouth up under the corner of his jaw.

“No.” Blaine says, does it again. “I want you to kiss me anywhere.”

Kurt huffs out a breath that sounds like something between a laugh and a whimper. “Okay,” he mumbles. He gathers Blaine up, spinning him to press him into the wall beside the door, but that doesn’t last long before a lightswitch or a thermostat or who knows what is digging into his back.

“Okay, okay,” Kurt says, pulling back as they both start laughing. “Somewhere else, then.”

And then it feels like all the air gets sucked out of the room as they both glance at the bed. Blaine turns nervously back to Kurt, and Kurt’s watching him. They both speak at once.

“We don’t have to —”

“It doesn’t mean —”

The words cut off abruptly, and they pause again, staring at each other. Blaine can’t help it; Kurt looks gorgeous with his face flushed and his lips parted to breathe, and then gathered in to smile tentatively. “Honestly, there’s no pressure, Blaine. We can even go back —”

“No,” Blaine cuts him off, because going back to the reception has to be the worst suggestion he’s heard in a long time.

“No?”

Blaine shakes his head and turns to walk farther into the room, grabbing Kurt’s hand in the process to tow him along behind. He stops at the foot of the bed and turns to face Kurt, stepping into his space. “Can I just kiss you a little more?”

“Please,” Kurt responds, and the word makes Blaine flare with heat as they rush back together, clutching harder than before.

Kurt’s arms are tight around Blaine’s back, and Blaine wrenches himself suddenly away. “Wait.”

“Wait?” Kurt asks, sounding dazed. “What? Oh, did I — I’m so sorry, I didn’t —”

“No!” Blaine exclaims. “My jacket.” He’s already yanking it off his shoulders. “I can’t disappear and
then show up again with a wrinkled jacket. Cooper will know somehow and he'll make me tell him everything." *Probably in the form of a dramatic monologue,* he adds silently, and he is so not ready for that.

He doesn’t have to go far to drape the jacket over the desk chair, and when he turns around, Kurt is there, holding his out as well. “I don’t want to give you away,” he explains, and Blaine drapes the jacket over the chair with exaggerated care. Before he turns back to Kurt, he yanks off his tie and then freezes, looking down at his dress shirt, which is probably even more prone to creases than the jacket. He’s pretty sure it would send the wrong message to start stripping out of more clothes now — Blaine doesn’t intend to have sex with Kurt; he really doesn’t. But he does want to make out with him some more. Preferably on the bed, which is going to wrinkle his shirt.

Apparently, Kurt is on the same page, because his hand is firm on Blaine’s arm, angling him back around and — shoving a dress shirt into his grasp? Blaine glances up, dumfounded, to see Kurt standing beside him in nothing but his suit pants and a thin undershirt, the fabric molded around the firmness of his chest.

“These will wrinkle horribly,” Kurt said, his fingers oddly perfunctory as they start working the buttons at Blaine’s throat. Blaine chokes a little, which makes Kurt fumble in his ministrations. His hands hover for a moment, and then he slips them aside to press the palms into Blaine’s chest, warm through the cotton of his bottom layer. “Oh.”

“It’s okay,” Blaine whispers. He looks up at Kurt’s face as his hands start working again. “I didn’t ask you to come up here to — I don’t even want to — no! I don’t mean that. It’s not that I don’t want… but… oh god…”

Kurt pulls the tails of Blaine’s shirt out of his pants. “Blaine,” he says quietly, meeting his eyes again. “Relax. That’s not my intention either. But I wouldn’t mind being a little more comfortable.”

His eyes are bright and gentle, and Blaine feels some of the tension drain away. “Okay.”

“Oh,” Kurt repeats. He adds both shirts to the chair, and then he’s kissing Blaine again, and oh, his arms are bare from his shoulders to the tips of his fingers, and there’s so much skin that wasn’t touching before. Their shuffle toward the bed is clumsy, and once they’re there, Blaine is struck with horrible anxiety about how they’re supposed to actually get on the bed without it being weird. Kurt solves that problem easily by dropping right down and pulling Blaine along with him.

They kiss lying next to each other, deep and hard and long. Blaine can feel his hair getting messed up, but that he can fix. He doesn’t give it another thought, focuses on touching Kurt’s hair instead, along with his shoulders and his neck and his back. He doesn’t realize that they’ve scooted closer together until he surges forward and their hips — and everything in between — brush together. Blaine lets out a sharp moan, his body jerking forward almost of its own accord as his fingers tighten in Kurt’s hair.

Kurt gasps, and that’s enough to startle Blaine backwards. They both flop down onto their backs and stare hazily up at the ceiling, chests heaving. “I’m so sorry,” Blaine wheezes. Of course he’s hard — painfully so, and he’s pretty sure he started getting hard before they’d even made their way up to the hotel room — but this has all gone way too far. He’s suddenly, uncomfortably clear-headed, and he can’t help but feel ashamed. This isn’t the kind of person he is. He’d really enjoyed talking to Kurt, and he probably should have gone about this differently. No, he definitely should have.

“You don’t have to apologize,” Kurt replies with a gulp.
“Yes, I do.”

Kurt is silent for a moment before asking, “Would it help to know that I kept looking up those godawful pickup lines because I was working up the courage to ask you if I could put your number on my phone?”

No, Blaine thinks to himself, because that means that Kurt was going to do something sweet like ask for his number, and Blaine turned it into this. He lolls his head toward Kurt, says, “That’s — that’s really great, actually — but I don’t understand why that should make me feel better.”

“I wanted to ask you out,” Kurt says plainly. “I still want to ask you out.” He’s rolled his head in to face Blaine too, and they’re gazing at each other. Kurt even looks a little shy, despite his red cheeks, swollen lips, and disheveled hair. All of a sudden, he sits up and scrambles off the bed, heading straight for their jackets.

“Kurt…?” Blaine asks, propping himself up on an elbow. “What…?”

He’s back to the bed as quickly as he left it, climbing back up toward the headboard and tapping on his phone. “Okay, what’s your number?”

“Really?”

“Of course, really,” Kurt says, rolling his eyes. Blaine can’t help but smile, and he’s only too happy to oblige. Kurt fiddles with the screen a bit more after he’s got Blaine’s number saved, and Blaine hears his own phone vibrate a few seconds later. “There, now you have mine too,” Kurt announces, sounding satisfied.

“Thank you,” Blaine says, still grinning sheepishly.

“Now —” Kurt deposits his phone on the bedside table “— I wanted to ask you something else.”

“Oh?”

Kurt settles his chin on his hand and smirks. “If I said you have a beautiful body, would you hold it against me?”

Blaine lets out a bark of laughter and tugs happily on Kurt’s bare shoulder to bring him closer.

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When Blaine checks his phone later, the text says: Do you like raisins? How about a date?

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But even Blaine thinks that scenario might be a little far-fetched.
But here's what really happened

Blaine hadn’t expected Cooper to be nervous on his wedding day, and he’s not. He’s in high spirits, as a matter of fact, singing loudly along with the radio on the way to the church.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, Blaine is sitting quietly in his seat, sometimes staring out the window and sometimes picking at the cuff of his sleeve. It turns out that he is nervous, which is unexpected. Then again, those expectations were from a time long before he knew that Kurt would be his date.

It’s possible that he’s not really over Kurt yet. After their breakup in January, Blaine had barely taken time to think. Instead, after his initial shell shock, he’d thrown himself hard and fast into every extracurricular that he could fit into his schedule. It had kept him busy and tired and introduced him to new circles of friends, which were all things he’d desperately needed, but it hadn’t allowed him time to grieve.

Although Blaine hadn’t allowed himself to dwell, he did politely decline any potential suitors until he was back in Ohio for spring break, and he probably would have continued to do so if not for his brother’s interference. During Cooper and Emily’s cake tasting at The Sweet Life, Blaine made the mistake of letting slip that he thought the bakery assistant was cute, and Cooper goaded Blaine into meeting him for coffee.

Luckily (or not), there was absolutely no chemistry between them, and Blaine spent most of the time imagining how differently it would have gone if it had been Kurt behind the counter instead. When Blaine returned to New York to finish out the spring semester, he’d stuck to his original plan, focusing on his friends and his classes, telling himself that he’d think about dating again the next year.

Much to Blaine’s relief, Cooper wasn’t anywhere around when Blaine was getting his pre-wedding haircut the Monday before the wedding, and almost certainly getting hit on by his stylist. Blaine walked out of the salon with a great haircut and nothing else, and he left only a tip. If it had been Kurt, he found himself thinking whimsically, he certainly would have done something different, more.

Blaine started to consider the possibility that the problem lay in being back home. It had been far easier to refocus in New York. It also made him think, not for the first time, that he should probably make more of an effort to forget about Kurt. He tried to daydream for the rest of the day, imagining meeting someone in the church, at the ceremony, at the reception, trying to make it not be Kurt, but it didn’t work. Every time, the man assumed Kurt’s face, his teasing nature, his impeccable style. He took Blaine’s picture and flirted and sang solos, and sometimes Blaine was bashful and sometimes he was bold, but it was all okay, because they were just his fantasies.

The next day he had stopped at the Lima Bean to kill some time before the start of his shift at the music store, and Kurt was there.

Blaine had frozen just inside the door. He and Kurt had been in touch — not at first, not when it was too hard, but there had been cautious texts and emails since spring. First, they had only reached out for big things, like Blaine checking on Burt’s health or Kurt wishing Blaine luck before a show, but then there were more and more messages about things that were far less important (I think I just saw Thad at the mall, but I’m not sure. Do you know if he changed his hair? A lot?).
If Blaine thought that his heart thrilled every time he saw a message from Kurt, it was nothing compared to the way it had flitted around his chest at the sight of Kurt’s profile. He hadn’t been able to do anything except stare as Kurt moved forward to retrieve his drink, because he’d forgotten so many of the details — exactly how tall Kurt was, the graceful way he moved, the angle of the polite smile he gave the barista.

Kurt had spotted Blaine as soon as he turned from the counter, and there had been a long, uncomfortable moment of staring across the floor of the coffee shop and all the memories and ghosts scattered there… until Kurt had surprised Blaine by giving him a brief, cautious smile. When Blaine returned it, Kurt squared his shoulders, moved to stand with Blaine in line, and then sat with him at a table while Blaine shared all the ridiculous details that came out of planning Cooper Anderson’s wedding.

As he’d suspected, Kurt was incredulous and amused, and he rolled his eyes and said, “I almost wish I could be there to see it.”

Maybe Blaine should have given himself more time to mourn early in the semester. Maybe it would have stopped him from responding, without giving it a second’s thought, “You should! Come with me.”

The easy levity of the conversation came to a screeching halt, and Blaine tightened his fingers around his coffee cup. There was no way to call the words back, but he was still trying to figure out how when Kurt peeked up at him and asked, “You don’t have a date?”

“I… um, no. I don’t.” It had felt like more of a confession than it was, like he’d really said I still don’t think I want one if it’s not you; no one else measures up. “Forget about it, it’s probably too short notice anyway, it’s on Saturday —”

“I’d like that,” Kurt had interrupted.

“You what?”

“I’d like to go.”

Which leads Blaine to now: sweating in his seat, on his way to something that should have been a date, but isn’t. There’s a boutonniere for Kurt beside him, and it’s probably too much, even if it’s just a single white daisy that he’d clipped from his mother’s garden. It’s nestled in a boutonniere holder that Blaine had caught sight of at the last fitting for his tuxedo. The holder is sleek and black with three jewels trailing down the front, and for some reason, it had made him think of Kurt right away. He’d gone back to buy one before he could second guess himself — but he’s doing plenty of that anyway.

Because who invites their ex-boyfriend to a wedding?

***

Blaine has been fidgeting around the small waiting room for what feels like hours before his mother knocks and pokes her head in. “Blaine, sweetheart, Kurt is here. Do you want me to send him in?”

“No!” he all but shouts. He is not going to do this with Cooper in the room. “I’ll be out in a second.”
His mother looks a bit taken aback, but she just says, “All right. I’ll let him know.”

Blaine stares blankly at the back of the door for a moment after she shuts it, taking one deep breath and then another before he moves to open it himself. “Hey, Squirt!” Cooper calls as his hand falls onto the handle.

“Yeah?” Blaine says cautiously, glancing over his shoulder, too anxious to even be bothered about the nickname.

“Don’t forget your flower,” Cooper says with a wink, nodding to where the boutonniere is waiting on a nearby countertop.

Blaine hadn’t been entirely sure whether he was even going to bring it with him, but apparently, he isn’t going to have any choice. He frowns at Cooper, who just grins and waves him off.

Kurt is waiting in the lobby of the church, and Blaine’s mouth actually goes a little dry when he sees him. He and Kurt have gone to three proms together — Kurt’s junior and senior proms, as well as the one during Blaine’s senior year — but somehow, Kurt hadn’t ended up wearing a plain black suit for any of them. He’s in one now, and it’s faultlessly tailored, doing everything for him that a good suit should. The other thing Blaine notices right away is Kurt’s discomfort — he’s holding his body tight and nervous, and his smile is apprehensive.

“Blaine, hi,” he says as Blaine draws closer. “You look great.”

“So do you,” Blaine responds, keeping the hand with the boutonniere tucked a little behind himself. His heart sinks when he sees that Kurt’s outfit involves a brooch — of course it involves a brooch, what was he thinking?

“Do you have something behind your back?” Kurt’s forehead wrinkles as he tries to peek around Blaine’s side.

“Oh,” Blaine says lamely. He brings the flower out and extends it toward Kurt. “I got you this.”

Kurt’s eyes soften a little, in an echo of an expression that Blaine hasn’t seen for such a long time. The emotions thicken, clogging up his throat. This is a terrible idea.

“Blaine, that’s so lovely. Thank you.”

“But you’ve got —” Blaine’s voice trails away because Kurt is already unfastening the brooch and slipping it into his pocket. “Oh… Well. I, uh… I got the daisy because I didn’t want you to be mistaken for a member of the wedding party,” Blaine explains, gesturing to the pink rose at his own lapel.

“That’s very thoughtful,” Kurt says. He straightens the flower and glances back up at Blaine, repeating, “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” Blaine replies, and the moment continues its slide toward awkwardness as he shuffles his feet.

“So, how’s Cooper doing?” Kurt finally asks, breaking the silence. “No cold feet?”

Blaine happily accepts the change of subject. “Oh, god no. I shudder to think what kind of
performance opportunities he might find during the ceremony. Be sure to get a good seat so you
don’t miss anything.”

“I will,” Kurt says, smiling a little.

“I’m sorry that you have to sit by yourself,” Blaine adds. It’s one of the things that he overlooked in
his haste to invite Kurt to the wedding.

“I’m not, actually.”

“You’re not?” Blaine asks in surprise.

Kurt shakes his head. “No. Your mother introduced me to your aunt Rosa — I think I remember her
from your graduation party, come to think of it. Anyway, she invited me to sit with her.”

There are a million questions Blaine wants to ask — oh god, what did my mom say? — chief among
them, but instead he just smiles tightly and says, “Oh, great.”

“Yup.”

“Well, you’re more than welcome to hang around while we take pictures, and then there’s the garden
reception.”

“Sounds good.”

Blaine is about to continue his nervous recitation of the day’s itinerary when he’s interrupted by a
hand on his shoulder. He looks back to find Russell. “We need you to come back now. It’s almost
time to get lined up.”

“Okay,” Blaine says, turning to give Kurt an apologetic look. “Oh, Kurt, this is —”

“I’m Russell,” he interrupts, stressing his full name. “You must be Blaine’s boyfriend.”

Blaine’s eyes flare wide as a flash of pure horror runs through him. He almost can’t bear to check
Kurt’s reaction, but Kurt just smiles mildly and shakes Russell’s hand. “I’m Kurt,” he says, not
offering any further clarification, but there’s definitely more forced politeness than genuine
friendliness in his voice.

“Nice to meet you. Blaine? You coming?”

“I’ll be right there,” Blaine replies tightly. As soon as Russell is out of earshot, he starts babbling.
“Kurt, I’m sorry. I didn’t tell him — or anyone — I mean, I didn’t say that —”

“Blaine, calm down,” Kurt says. He reaches out like he’s going to touch Blaine’s arm, but drops his
hand before he makes contact. “It’s okay. Just go. I’ll see you later.”

“Okay.” Blaine watches Kurt critically for a moment, but Kurt’s neutral expression doesn’t change,
so he turns to leave.

***

Things go a bit more smoothly after that. Blaine gets caught up in the ceremony, and, cheesy musical
selections notwithstanding, he’s genuinely thrilled about his brother’s happiness. It’s easy enough to keep his gaze from wandering out into the congregation to find Kurt — it doesn’t happen too often, anyway.

Conversely, when he’s posing for pictures, Blaine swears he feels the crawling sensation of Kurt’s eyes on him. Whenever he gets the chance to turn and check, though, Kurt is chatting with someone or fiddling with his phone.

At the garden reception, there’s finally enough time to start thawing some of the strangeness between them. Blaine gamely starts a conversation about how the other former members of the New Directions had spent the spring. Kurt has more information about Finn (and, by extension, Puck), Mercedes, and Rachel, of course, but Blaine has been in better touch with Artie, Sam, Mike, and Tina. Their conversation is comfortable, and before they move inside to the reception hall, Kurt even leans over to murmur his opinion on Emily’s cousins’ fashion choices in the direction of Blaine’s ear, which makes him flush in a way that he hopes can be blamed on the sun.

Then, at the dinner, everything goes awry.

The wedding party has been introduced, and they’ve taken their seats on a raised platform at the head of the room. Blaine rolls his eyes when he sees that Cooper and Emily have opted to set up a small table for two at the center of the stage, while the groomsmen, bridesmaids, and their guests ring two large tables on either side of it. It seems awfully self-indulgent, but on the bright side, it means that Kurt doesn’t have to eat by himself. That’s not the bad part; Blaine doesn’t mind that part at all.

No, the discomfort doesn’t set in until some enthusiastic guest begins banging a fork against a glass. Soon the whole room is clinking, and Cooper stands, removing the microphone from the stand beside his chair and shushing them. “We have a little surprise for you all!” he announces, beaming. “Whenever you decide to do that, I’m going to pick a piece of paper out of this bowl.” He points to a fish bowl at the center of his table. “If you were invited today, your name is in here. And if I pick you, you have to kiss your date, and Emily and I will follow your lead. All right? Okay! Let’s get started.”

Blaine goes perfectly still as Cooper’s hand dips into the bowl. He doesn’t need to look at Kurt to feel the tension suddenly pouring off his muscles. All the casual comfort they’d built up over the afternoon is crashing down under Blaine’s immaculately-covered chair.

It hadn’t been real.

Cooper pulls a folded piece of cardstock out of the bowl and opens it. Blaine holds his breath, but Cooper’s brow creases, and he holds the paper out to Emily. “Uncle Tom!” she exclaims into the microphone, raising a hand to point into the crowd.

Blaine releases the air in his lungs slowly as a heavyset man with salt-and-pepper hair dips his wife into a kiss. Cooper and Emily follow suit. When the hoots and hollers of the crowd die down, he hazards a glance at Kurt. Kurt’s eyes flicker up toward him, and they exchange tight, anxious not-really-smiles.

It isn’t real because he’s been lulled into a false sense of security, thinking that the clumsy companionship they’d built up over the course of a day was anything like the deep bond they’d shared before. All the artifice is gone: Blaine is sitting stiffly beside his ex-boyfriend at a wedding, and it’s strange and uncomfortable. This is, without a doubt, the worst idea Blaine’s had in a while, and he can’t imagine why Kurt accepted his invitation. It’s a relief when the salads are served a few
moments later. Blaine gives up on pretending like he’s following Tanner and Russell’s conversation and focuses on the greens instead. Kurt equally quiet beside him.

Between the salad and main courses, the time comes for Blaine to give his toast. Glasses have been clinked twice more already, and each time, he and Kurt have sat frozen in their seats, staring at their plates.

By the time Blaine is standing to speak, he needs to pause for a moment, the microphone clutched tightly in one hand. He’s had fewer butterflies before national show choir competitions, but somehow, giving his speech in front of Kurt is suddenly wracking his nerves more thoroughly than any lead role he’s ever had. There’s no way he can talk about love without obliquely talking about Kurt, and he’s sure that Kurt will know.

Blaine takes a deep breath. Lets it out. Looks up and smiles. “Good evening. I wanted to start out by thanking everyone for being here today. I know that some of you have traveled quite a long way. For those of you who don’t know me — and those of you who do but have spent a little too much time at the bar — I’m Blaine.”

The line gets a few chuckles, and Blaine feels himself relaxing into his performance persona. This is fine. This is good; he can do this.

“Cooper is my older brother,” he continues. “Obviously, I’ve known him my whole life, but — as I’m sure many of you can attest — you don’t need to have known him that long to be well acquainted with his first love.” Blaine pauses dramatically, then snaps his free arm out to point at his brother. “Acting!”

The laughter is louder this time, and even Emily looks amused. Cooper is watching him with an expression on his face that’s half very funny and half I might have to kill you later depending on where you go from here.

Blaine gives him a wink and turns back to the room at large, which has the happy consequence of him not having to look anywhere near Kurt. “I have to admit that for quite some time, it was hard for me to imagine Cooper getting married. We all know that he’s extremely dedicated to his craft, and I wasn’t sure what kind of a person would put up with it — the odd hours, the auditions, the line readings. Oh god, the line readings.”

There’s another appreciative wave of laughter. Blaine smiles again, but he can feel himself on the verge of shakiness as he’s about to move on to more serious matters. He looks down at the front edge of the stage. “There’s a saying I’ve heard that always summed up the way I feel about marriage. When I looked it up, I found that I don’t agree with a lot of what the original author has to say, but it doesn’t take away the simple truth and beauty of these words: don’t marry the person you think you can live with; marry only the individual you think you can’t live without.”

His eyes flicker toward Kurt then, like they’re drawn there, and he looks away again quickly. Kurt’s face is painful, pale, his gaze fixed. He wonders if Kurt hears the words too, like echoes. I can’t stand to be apart from the person I love. I’m never saying good-bye to you. What are you promising? To always love you.

He plows forward, the thick emotions pitching his voice a little differently. “Even I can see that that’s the way it is for Emily and Cooper. I had my suspicions early on. Not long after they met, he skipped an audition to keep her company when she sprained her ankle. He told me later that he was way too young to play that part anyway, Blaine, but I was on to him.
“I don’t want to give you the wrong impression, though. Emily and Cooper don’t hold each other back from anything. They fit perfectly into the spaces in each other’s lives. Emily doesn’t just put up with Cooper; she brings out bests in him that I didn’t even know he had. She knows how to calm him down when he doesn’t get a part he really wanted, or how to pick him up as the case may be. Apparently she’s a better line reader than me, a fact for which I am eternally grateful.”

As he pauses for another round of chuckles, Blaine fills in other words in his head. I know that when Kurt starts getting annoyed at the wait staff, I can distract him by making silly jokes or starting a debate about movie musicals until he forgets. When I’m upset, Kurt is more patient with me than he is with anyone else, always helping me sort out my anger, direct it toward the right person, and deal with it in a positive way.

Blaine shakes himself and angles toward the head table, raising his glass. “Cooper and Emily, you love each other, and what’s more, you compliment each other. You’ve — you’ve reminded me about the kind of love I want to have. Thank you. And Emily, I’m so happy to welcome you to our family. Cheers!”

When he returns to the table to the praise of his dinnermates, Kurt stays silent beside him.

***

While they’re waiting for the staff to clear the dance floor, Cooper catches Blaine’s elbow. “Can I talk to you for a second, Squirt?”

On instinct, Blaine gives Kurt an aggrieved look, and Kurt responds with one that’s equal parts sympathy, annoyance, and a quiet plea not to murder his brother at his own wedding. With a sigh, Blaine acquiesces and follows Cooper a few steps away.

“You have to talk to him,” Cooper says abruptly as soon as they’re far enough away.

Blaine freezes. “I don’t know what you’re talking about. I’ve been talking to him all day.”

“Don’t play dumb, Blaine. You’re no good at it. You stay way too tense. Look.” Cooper goes a little slack-jawed and Blaine rolls his eyes.

“Is that all?”

“No. Talk to him. And then stop making that face and let me enjoy my own wedding reception.”

“I’m not making a —”

He’s cut off when Cooper slaps him on the shoulder so hard that he’s knocked a little bit sideways.

“Catch you later, Squirt!”

“…face,” he grumbles as Cooper walks away. As much as he tries to tone it down, he’s still wearing a bit of a frown when he finds Kurt again, seated at an empty table alongside the dance floor. His eyes restlessly follow the children in attendance as they zip back and forth, sliding along the shiny floor in their socks and tights.

“What was that all about?” Kurt asks as Blaine drops into the seat next to him.
“Just Cooper being Cooper,” Blaine mutters.

Kurt sniffs. “I guess some things never change.”

“No, I guess they don’t,” Blaine says, but he’s still pouting and the words come out too serious, too laden with meaning.

“Blaine…” Kurt says, but then the lights are dimming and the 20th Century Fox theme song is blaring throughout the room. At the interruption, Kurt snaps his mouth shut and slides his eyes back down to where his hands are fidgeting on the tabletop. Blaine fights the urge to drop his forehead sharply down right beside them. He can’t even find the energy to be mortified that Cooper and Emily are dancing to "My Heart Will Go On.” Instead, he’s just frustrated. He has no idea what Kurt was about to say, but clearly, it had been something.

They watch in silence as Cooper and Emily turn around the floor with camera flashes sparkling around them. Blaine thinks distractedly that they must be enjoying how much like paparazzi it seems.

“I liked your speech,” Kurt says suddenly, still staring straight ahead. “It was very touching.”

Blaine grimaces. “Thank you.”

“I wish they would have picked your name,” Kurt adds. “At dinner.”

The words bring Blaine up short. “What?” he asks, his voice so quiet and surprised that he’s not sure how Kurt hears it over the music.

But Kurt is looking him full in the face now, his eyes desperately sincere and his lips quivering. “Your name. I wish they would have picked it at dinner. I would have kissed you.”

“Kurt…”

“I wanted to,” Kurt continues, his voice going a bit defiant, “and I don’t care how many of Emily’s country cousins would have been watching us.”

Blaine stares at Kurt’s face for a moment, seeing the hurt and the hope and the fear all over his expression. “Why?” he breathes.

“What?”

“Why did you want to?” Blaine asks. “Just because you think we should… kiss? Or…?” He can’t even bring himself to ask, can’t bear the thought of being wrong.

Kurt is shaking his head. “I think we should talk,” he says.

“We are talking. Please talk to me, Kurt,” Blaine says, and he knows his voice is pleading.

“Can we go… somewhere else?”

Blaine looks around at the roomful of people drinking and moving to the dance floor as the music shifts to something with a beat, and says, “Okay. Come on.”

***
The hotel room seems almost too quiet after the loud throb of the reception. Blaine flicks on the light and lays his key card on the desk. When he turns, Kurt is still hovering just inside the entryway, looking everywhere but Blaine.

“Kurt,” he says, practically begs, “please tell me what you’re thinking.”

The words bring Kurt’s eyes up, and Blaine is taken aback by the depth of emotion he sees there. Kurt truly hasn’t been letting him back in until now.

“Do you remember what I said?” Kurt asks quietly. “Last winter?”

“I do.”

And he does — he remembers all the arguments and discussions in the bleak months after Burt’s second heart attack with painful clarity. They’d taken place while Blaine had hastily helped Kurt pack up his belongings for his return to Ohio, over the phone, over the Internet, behind closed doors when Blaine came home for holidays.

*Have you realized that we’ve only been in the same place for two and a half months out of the past fifteen?*

*This is harder than I thought it would be.*

*I know you’re trying to help, but I can tell that you’re censoring what you’re saying, Blaine. I don’t want you to feel like you have to do that.*

*It seems like one of us ends up hurt or angry every time we talk now.*

*Maybe we should just…*

Blaine squeezes his eyes shut.

“I think… maybe I was too hasty,” Kurt says.

“About what?” Blaine whispers, because he has to be sure that he understands what Kurt’s saying before he believes anything.

Kurt takes a deep breath and a half step closer. “I told you that it was too hard. To hear about our life in New York going on without me, and to try to balance a job and helping with my dad’s rehab and a long-distance relationship. To feel so guilty about taking up so much of your time with all of my problems when you were still getting settled in during your first year of college.”

Blaine nods.

“It was so much harder without you,” Kurt says, and his voice cracks.

“Oh, Kurt.”

It’s almost impossible for Blaine to look at Kurt’s face crumpling up and not go to him, but he has no idea if Kurt would want his comfort, so he stays put, clenching his fists while Kurt continues to speak. “There were so many nights… it would have helped just to hear the sound of your voice.”
“You should have called,” Blaine says. “I would have answered.”

Kurt gives him a tiny, watery smile. “I know you would have. That’s why I didn’t. I thought I made the right decision, and I had to be stubborn about it, otherwise I probably would have crumbled as soon as you said hello.”

“I know the feeling,” Blaine mutters, casting his eyes down to the floor.

“I still think I might have made the right decision.”

The words catch Blaine unawares, and the feeling of disappointment is so acute that it feels like his heart has turned into stone and it’s ripping a path straight through him as it plummets to the ground. “Oh.”

“Blaine, no.” Kurt’s voice is earnest and Blaine peeks cautiously up. “It might have been right because as soon as I saw you at the Lima Bean this week, I knew.”

“Knew what?” Blaine asks cautiously.

“That I was wrong.”

“That doesn’t make any sense.”

“I know!” Kurt says with a frown. “Let me try again. I knew that it was you. That it should be us.”

Blaine shakes his head slowly. “What are you saying?”

“That I miss you. That I think we belong together.” Kurt’s on the verge of crying now, and Blaine’s getting close, too. They stare at each other for several long seconds, and Blaine feels like the air is trembling, until Kurt raises his hands a little and says, “Come here?” His voice is small and uncertain.

But Blaine doesn’t need to be asked twice. He strides purposefully over to where Kurt is standing, and they all but throw their bodies together, colliding hard in the middle. Blaine locks his arms tightly around Kurt’s chest, scrabbles at his back for purchase that isn’t there. The boutonniere he’d bought is getting crushed between them — so is his rose — but none of it matters. All that matters is that he and Kurt are wrapped up tight in the circles of each other’s arms, and he can feel Kurt’s damp cheek and smell his cologne and it makes him dizzy.

Blaine presses his face hard into the side of Kurt’s neck, right where it’s always fit. He feels warm, anchored, like the only place on earth is right here. Kurt takes a deep breath, and it shudders, so Blaine angles his head a little to press his mouth comfortingly into the place where Kurt’s neck meets his shoulder. Blaine does it on instinct, but it makes him screw his eyes shut a little tighter — this is the first time any part of Kurt’s skin has been under his lips in half a year.

Kurt gasps and suddenly he’s pushing back. Blaine’s eyes jar open from movement and panic — did he push too far, want too much? “Wait, wait,” he hears Kurt say. It sends spikes of anxiety through him, even though Kurt still has his hands clasped tightly around Blaine’s biceps, not letting him go very far. “Our first kiss after getting back together is not going to be on my neck,” Kurt babbles out. His cheeks are red and his eyes are bright.

Blaine freezes. “Is that what we’re doing?” he breathes, because he needs to make absolutely sure.
“Isn’t that — or do you not want to? Oh god, I just assumed —”

“No!”

“No?”

Kurt’s face is stricken, and Blaine can’t get the words out fast enough. “I mean, no I don’t not want to. I do want to. I miss you so much, Kurt.” He gulps. “I still love you. I never stopped, not even a little.”

He’s seen that tremulous look on Kurt’s face before, like he’s lighting up from the inside, but he’s not sure that it’s ever been more beautiful. “I love you, too,” Kurt says. His hands squeeze Blaine’s arms and then release, moving up to cradle his jaw as they tumble in toward each other again. When they’re just an inch apart, they pause — just for a second — before melting into one perfect kiss. It’s delicate and firm, sweet and passionate, and it makes Blaine’s heart flutter in his chest before setting up a pounding rhythm.

When they break apart, Kurt rolls his forehead against Blaine’s and sighs. “I’m sorry I didn’t come to my senses sooner.”

“Hey,” Blaine says softly, “no apologies. What’s done is done, and the important thing is that it led us to this moment, right here.”

Kurt pulls back enough to give him a wavering smile. “But we wasted so much time.”

Blaine shrugs. “What’s six months in the grand scheme of things? We’ve got all the time in the world.”

“A lifetime,” Kurt amends.

“A lifetime,” Blaine repeats, and then Kurt’s kissing him again, over and over, a little frantic at first, but then settling in, the kisses long and luxurious.

“Kurt,” Blaine says, trying to speak against his mouth. “Shouldn’t we… talk… or…?”

“Not right now.”

Blaine chuckles and happily obliges him. In fact, he gets so carried away that it’s not long before he’s humming against Kurt’s lips. “Mmmm, I missed you,” he mumbles. All the tension is draining out of him, knots that had been tied up tight for months loosening and snapping, and his brain is buzzing with a cascade of emotions and the delicious feeling of kissing Kurt again.

“Mmhmm,” Kurt agrees, bringing his mouth back to Blaine’s before he’s even done making the sound, and it vibrates against his skin.

Blaine loses himself for another few moments. Kurt’s lips trace down to his jawline, and Blaine sighs, “Missed this.”

Kurt pulls back just long enough to snort and ask, “Blaine Anderson, are you trying to get into my pants?”

“What? No!” Blaine protests, even though Kurt doesn’t seem bothered, having gone straight back to
sucking kisses along his jaw.

He stops, though, at Blaine’s anxiety, and raises his head to look Blaine in the eye, Blaine’s stomach swoops at how mischievous and happy and starting-to-be-turned-on he looks. “Relax. I’m teasing. I missed this too.” He falls forward as he speaks, the words dissolving into a damp, lazy kiss. “I missed your lips,” he whispers.

Blaine smiles as they press together again, warm and easy. He snakes one hand up to the back of Kurt’s hair, tightening his hold there to keep Kurt in place while he brings his mouth to Kurt’s throat. “I missed your neck,” he says, and kisses there, uses his tongue, pushes up under Kurt’s chin so that he has to tilt his head.

“Mmmm, I remember,” Kurt mumbles, and then tugs Blaine back up so that they’re face-to-face, smiling and flushed. “I —” Kurt moves his hands to Blaine’s back and runs them up and down “— think the thing I missed most was —” they drop suddenly and squeeze playful but hard “— your ass.”

Blaine chokes and they both dissolve into giggles that border on hysterical. They calm slowly, as Blaine tips his head forward into Kurt’s shoulder and Kurt slides his hands up to rest loosely at Blaine’s waist. “Well, then, it’s a good thing we’re in a hotel room,” Blaine says.

He means it as a joke; he doesn’t really think — but Kurt’s voice is low when he says, “We are.”

Blaine raises his head. “Kurt?”

He finds that Kurt’s lips are parted around deepening breaths. His eyes are gleaming, but there’s a question there too. Blaine answers it eagerly as they fuse back together, throwing himself against Kurt, but Kurt’s enthusiasm still knocks him back a step. He’s digging his hands into Blaine’s hair from the roots, ruining the careful style, and his tongue is surging into Blaine’s mouth. Blaine plants his feet and takes it all, giving back as good as he gets. His hands clutch tight at Kurt wherever he can find purchase, readjust, and clutch again.

Blaine’s reservations are falling by the wayside within seconds, as he’s caught up in an undertow of emotions and a rapidly-growing arousal that crashes over them like a wave. Somehow, when Kurt releases his mouth to start nipping his way back to Blaine’s ear, he manages to collect his wits and gasp out, “Kurt… Kurt, is it too soon?”

“Too soon?” Kurt asks, rough in Blaine’s ear before his teeth sink sharply into the flesh of the lobe. “I’d argue that it’s been too long.”

Blaine groans as Kurt closes his mouth around the place he’d bitten, sucking softly. “But… I didn’t think, I mean, this isn’t…”

Kurt pulls back and takes Blaine’s shoulders firmly in hand, staring him down. “Blaine, I love you. That’s what this is about. And now I want to be close to you.”

“Me too,” he replies quietly, eyes wide, pinned down by the heat of Kurt’s gaze.

Kurt smiles, beautiful and reassuring as his chest heaves and his eyes sparkle. “Well, come on then.”

Blaine finds himself being dragged and nudged toward the bed, pushed down onto it with Kurt toppling beside him. There’s a moment of stillness when they’re settled, facing each other. Blaine has
one hand on Kurt’s chest, where he can feel the firm thump of Kurt’s heartbeat, and Kurt trails his fingertips across Blaine’s temple while his thumb swipes gently over Blaine’s cheekbone. From up close, Blaine drinks in Kurt’s eyes; they’re exquisite — the color, the shape, the emotions inside of them. And then, the way they suddenly turn dark again when Kurt’s thumb drops down a little further to slide over Blaine’s bottom lip, where it drags. Kurt breaks eye contact, looking down as he takes his hand away from Blaine’s face to pull his bow tie loose.

It’s something that’s happened a million times before, but it makes Blaine’s breath hitch and his hand curl into a fist around the edge of Kurt’s lapel. Kurt snaps his gaze back up and they’re on each other again in seconds, crushing their mouths and chests and hips together. Blaine hooks his knee up against Kurt’s thigh, desperate to better feel Kurt coming to full hardness against him. In a distant corner of his mind, the words too much too soon? struggle to make themselves heard again, but they’re extinguished when Kurt reaches down to squeeze his leg and then pushes him over onto his back.

Blaine can’t help the satisfied noise that escapes him as Kurt lets his full weight blanket Blaine down into the mattress. He’s still cradling Kurt’s hip with one leg, and Kurt shifts a little against him, aligning them perfectly and then grinding down. Blaine meets him enthusiastically, even as he’s forced to rip his mouth away from Kurt’s to let out a sharp moan.

“Speaking of parts of each other that we missed…” Kurt says cheekily as he passes Blaine’s ear to kiss the spot just behind and a little underneath.

Blaine squirms and tries to find words to string together. “Oh, I see… I see what this is really about,” he pants.

“You,” Kurt says. “Me. Us.” He punctuates each word with a kiss down the front of Blaine’s throat. When he reaches the restrictive collar of Blaine’s dress shirt, he sits up a little, pulls the tie off completely, and begins working on the buttons.

“Kurt…” Blaine’s not sure why the simple words hit him so hard, but all at once, he feels like crying again.

“Blaine,” Kurt counters, but his expression softens when he looks at Blaine staring up at him. “I love you,” he says again. “I think you’re going to have to get used to me saying that a lot.”

Blaine’s smile is a little shaky. “Please. As often as you want. And for as long as you want.”

“Good.” Kurt shifts back even further and tugs on Blaine’s jacket. “Now sit up. You’re still wearing a whole tuxedo.”

Then everything turns hot and hazy. They trade fevered kisses while they push each other’s jackets and shirts down their arms, pausing only when they have to — when they tangle in sleeves and need to pull their undershirts over their heads. As soon as all the skin of Kurt’s chest is exposed to him, Blaine wraps his arms around Kurt’s waist and brings his mouth there. He wants to kiss and drag his tongue over every inch of it, but he’s too frantic to remember where he’s been, especially when Kurt cradles his head in both arms and presses his parted lips to Blaine’s temple, pushing out harsh, damp breaths.

Blaine abandons his plan and sucks on Kurt’s collarbone instead, reveling in the way he feels enveloped by Kurt’s heat and scent. When he lowers his head to bring Kurt’s nipples to stiff peaks, licking and biting a little because he knows it’s okay, Kurt tightens his grip, lets his head drop back
with a breathy whine, and twitches his hips down.

The increased friction draws a growl from Blaine’s throat, and he grabs Kurt to hastily reverse their positions, lowering his mouth to Kurt’s chest again as soon as his back hits the mattress. “Blaine,” Kurt whines as Blaine draws his teeth lightly over a nipple again, “you’re not playing fair.”

“Like you were when you kept going for my ears?” Blaine retorts, bringing his hips down roughly and capturing Kurt’s lips in a sloppy kiss.

Kurt works his hands down under Blaine’s waistband, beneath his pants but over his briefs, and grabs his ass hard, forcing him to repeat the motion as Kurt rolls his hips up. “Fair point,” he gasps.

It feels amazing, but there are too many layers still between them. Kurt seems to agree, if the way he’s fumbling at Blaine’s waist is any indication. When Blaine’s pants are open, Kurt runs his hands back to their previous position, sliding them down. Blaine rolls away for a second so that he can work them off with a minimum of fuss, and when he looks back, he finds Kurt kicking his own pants off his ankles. He’s left his underwear on, and it makes Blaine smile, because that means that Kurt’s teasing him again. As much as Blaine loves — loves — to see Kurt naked, Kurt knows well that there’s something about admiring him in his underwear that drives Blaine crazy. Seeing him now, long and lithe in slate blue boxer briefs, is no exception.

The expression of faux innocence on Kurt’s face as he reclines back on his elbows just proves to Blaine that he’s right, so he aims to knock the look straight off Kurt’s face. He scrambles over and dips his head to press a kiss to the head of Kurt’s cock, right below the place where a damp spot is appearing on the fabric. “Blaine!” Kurt chokes out, collapsing back onto the bed.

“What?” Blaine draws the flat of his tongue up Kurt’s length, the fabric dry and bunching a little.

Kurt groans and drags Blaine up his body, flipping them over so that he’s on top again, pinning Blaine down. “Stop cheating,” he commands playfully.

“All’s fair in love and war,” he teases, grinning up at Kurt. The position is intimate — they’re pressed and tangled together, touching everywhere from their shoulders to their toes, their faces just inches apart.

Kurt smiles back and leans down to kiss Blaine, more gently than he had expected. Blaine responds in kind, tender and passionate, and Kurt slides his hips in a long, slow arc against Blaine’s. It’s decadent and rich and it doesn’t jolt their lips apart, so Blaine moans into the kiss, opening for Kurt so their tongues can slide in against each other.

They continue rocking languorously together for several minutes, drawing it out as much as they can, but it isn’t long before they’re picking up pace. The kiss gets too messy, and they have to stop, breathing heavily against each other’s cheeks and necks instead. Their bodies roll rougher, faster, and Blaine thinks fleetingly that maybe they should stop, make it better — they could at least be naked — but it’s been so long and he just doesn’t want to, so he digs his fingers hard into the damp skin of Kurt’s back. Kurt chooses that moment to scrape his teeth over Blaine’s earlobe again, and Blaine whites out, arching up against Kurt with a strangled cry. He’s only vaguely aware of Kurt making a sharp noise in his ear and stiffening against him a moment later.

When he comes back to himself, Blaine finds that his eyelashes are wet and he feels heavy, not just because Kurt is dead weight on top of him, panting into his neck. It’s the emotion of it all, the tears and the laughter and the sex, the fact that Kurt is here and he’s going to stay here filling him up and
making him feel like he could fly up to the ceiling at the same time. Just when he thinks he might really start to cry, Kurt snuffles into his skin and says, “I had plans. Plans that did not involve us coming in our underwear.”

So Blaine laughs instead, tightening his arms around Kurt, who shifts partially off of him and snuggles into his side. “So did I. But it’s okay — that was amazing. You’re amazing.”

“It was pretty good, wasn’t it?”

“It reminded me of being seventeen.”

Kurt snorts and burrows in a little closer. “That was two years ago, Blaine.”

“You know what I mean.”

“I do.”

“Besides,” Blaine says, his heart soaring. “we have plenty of time to do everything else.”

He feels Kurt smile against his skin. “We really do.”

They stay wrapped up in companionable, perfect silence for another few moments, Blaine doing everything in his power to ignore how much of a sticky mess he is. Eventually, Kurt speaks again. “Do you think Cooper noticed that we disappeared?”

“Absolutely,” Blaine groaned. “Why would you even ask that?”

“Just trying to figure out how much embarrassment I need to prepare myself for.”

“Boatloads,” Blaine says. “He’ll probably make us reenact our tearful reunion. And then critique it.”

“Just as long as we don’t have to recreate everything that happened after that,” Kurt quips.

“Ugh, stop!” Blaine admonishes, running his hand around to Kurt’s side to tickle at the skin there.

Kurt gives a little squeal and squirms away from him. “You stop!”

Blaine moves his hand to Kurt’s back as Kurt props himself up on Blaine’s chest. “What if I want to reenact everything that happened after that?” he asks.

“Oh, we will,” Kurt replies. “Just not in front of your brother.”

“I love you.”

“I love you too.”

***

When they make it back down to the ballroom, smiling and walking close together and warm with the knowledge that Kurt is wearing a pair of Blaine’s underwear, Cooper wrestles the microphone away from the deejay and leads the room in a cheer while they blush.
And that’s what really happened.

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