**Butterfly Wings**

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**Butterfly Wings**

by [HKVoyage (voyagehk)]

**Summary**

A fashion blog started at University launched Blaine Anderson’s fortune and fame. As Vogue’s new editor-in-chief, he is struggling to find an original angle for an upcoming issue. Kurt Hummel has recently arrived in New York City after finishing high school, and is having no luck building a musical theater career, so he decides to explore another passion of his: fashion. He applies for an internship at Vogue, and Isabelle sees in him the perfect fresh face to liven up the magazine, and convinces him to try out as a model. Kurt meets Blaine, and in spite of their 10-year age difference, sparks fly. Can they overcome misunderstandings and sabotage to find their happily-ever-after? Klaine model AU.

**Notes**

Welcome to my first multi-chapter story! It’s fully drafted and I’m now doing the editing and polishing up with my beta. The fic is a slow burn and the mature rating doesn't kick in for a long time. The story is roughly 200k words over 42 chapters. Updates will be each Saturday. I live in Thailand and travel a lot, so the timings of posting might be a little different each Saturday, but I will post faithfully wherever I am.
I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my amazing beta, Lilyvandersteen. I’ve been a beta myself, so I know the work involved, and she is a beta extraordinaire, although any mistakes are mine.

Here is the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics.
When you wear a bow tie, doors open for you. Your posture is a little more erect; your shoulders are a little further back; your style is a little more dynamic. It’s about the reestablishment of the gentleman. - Dhani Jones, former American football player

February

As Blaine is sitting on the backseat of the Mercedes-Benz S-class sedan, he pinches the bridge of his nose – he hasn’t slept long enough on the overnight red-eye flight, even though he’s flown first class. Bentley, his driver, is expertly navigating through the usual morning rush hour traffic in Manhattan. Last night, Blaine was in LA and attended the grand preview of the Lifetime movie ‘The Twelve Men of Christmas’. Why it premiered in February is a mystery. Blaine can only assume that the movie missed its original deadline, went over budget and made the producers desperate to get any of their money back. Cooper was one of the chiseled stud muffins in the movie and in Blaine’s opinion, gave a great performance. I only hope he gets his big break before his ‘stud muffin’ looks resemble a cream-filled cronut.

The highlight of the evening had been meeting the movie’s star, Kristin Chenoweth, in person. In Blaine’s opinion, no one could touch her portrayal of Belinda in ‘Wicked’. After meeting Kristin, Blaine concluded that she was just as beautiful on the inside as she was on the outside.

“Blaine, traffic’s bad so we’ll be arriving at the office in about 15 minutes,” Bentley reports.

The driver discretely glances in the rear-view mirror to get a glimpse at his boss. Blaine’s hair is the usual mess of unruly curls and he is sporting his trademark stubble. Even though Bentley is straight and happily married, he understands why Blaine attracts men and women alike wherever he goes. It’s more than just good looks - Blaine has a magnetic presence. The paparazzi and fans make Bentley’s job even harder, but he would do anything to protect his boss. It’s worth it; Blaine is a decent and a down-to-earth person and Bentley admires him for that.

“Thanks, Bentley. Make sure you drop me off at the back entrance. I don’t think I can cope with arriving at the more public front door today.”

“No problem, Blaine. I’ll let Tina know when we are closer.”

Blaine stretches out in the luxurious leather backseat and sighs before taking out his tablet. When he’s finished reading his work e-mail, Blaine switches to the social media sites. There is the usual high volume of photos and tweets for the highly publicized event last night. He knows that both Cooper and his mother will be thrilled with the attention. Due to a last minute business trip, his father was unable to attend, leaving Blaine to escort his mother. He had planned to attend anyways, and it was the ideal opportunity to catch up with her; they didn’t see each other often enough. Blaine takes a last glance at Twitter and discovers that #AndersonBeauties is now trending. Wow, my mother is definitely going to be really excited when she finds out.

Blaine sees a photo of him, Cooper and his mother on the red carpet, and quickly retweets it with
@PamAnderson is the real beauty in the family.

When the sedan stops at the traffic light, Blaine gazes out of the car window and takes in the sea of workers rushing to get to their offices on time. He counts himself lucky to have Bentley, as the downtime gives him time to think about things - both work-related and personal.

After seeing his mom and Cooper again last night, Blaine’s thoughts drift to his teenage years in Ohio. He had known from an early age that he was gay. While his friends were gossiping about the cute girls at school, he was secretly daydreaming about the cute boys. At night, he’d surf the Internet and he had been pleased that he could put a label on his sexual feelings, and that they were not unusual. He then moved on to gay porn sites and they had aroused him, excited him, and many a night was spent on fratboys.com.

Blaine was 13 years old when he came out to his parents. They had not been amused, particularly his father. “Nonsense, Blaine. It’s just a phase you’re going through. You’ll soon grow out of it” were his exact words. Soon after, his father insisted that they rebuild a classic car together. The whole project was a disaster from the start. Blaine wasn’t even old enough to drive, and he guessed that his father thought getting his hands dirty might make Blaine straight. When the project didn’t produce the desired effect, his father soon lost interest, and so did Blaine. It was the first time Blaine felt that his parents really didn’t get him.

Blaine knows that his parents love him…really love him. When he was beaten up at his school’s Sadie Hawkins dance, his father immediately pulled him out and sent him to Dalton Academy. It was the Best. Decision. Ever. Blaine auditioned for the Warblers glee club and soon became their lead soloist. The Warblers were like rock stars at Dalton and Blaine made it his personal mission to sexify their performances. He quickly discovered that there were other gay boys at Dalton, and they were into him - suggestive looks in the halls, flirting in the dining room, and secret messages passed in class. It was all part of the fun, and he enjoyed messing around with a select few. Yep, definitely gay.

During his senior year at Dalton, Blaine had really wanted to pursue a music career - not necessarily being in the limelight, but making art and helping others. His father quickly squashed his dreams. “I’m not going to fund your ‘airy fairy’ dreams, Blaine. You need to have a more practical major because life is going to be rather difficult for you being gay.” At the time, Blaine was young and impressionable, and desperate to win his father’s approval. So he attended Harvard and graduated Magnum Cum Laude in Business Studies. Now that did make his father proud. How he used his degree did not.

I’ll always love my mama… I’ll always love my mama… blares in the car as Blaine’s phone vibrates. Bentley tries to suppress a chuckle but he finds it impossible – only Blaine would have selected this song as a ringtone for his mother. Blaine smiles apologetically, as he retrieves his phone from his jacket pocket. He knows the ringtone is cheesy, but he loves the Intruder’s R&B sound.

“Hi, Mom. You’re awake pretty early, considering we left the premiere at midnight.” Blaine knows that she is staying with Cooper in LA for a few extra days to do some shopping.

“Well, there’s no sleeping in when my phone is continually pinging with thousands of Twitter notifications. Thanks for the retweet, honey. I love that photo.”

“Me too.” Blaine smiles warmly at the thought of his mother scrolling through her Twitter account.
He makes a mental note to have the photo enhanced so he can print it out and frame it for next Mother’s Day.

“I want to thank you again for arranging the Stella McCartney dress. I can’t believe I wore one of the dresses in her Spring line before this month’s New York’s Fashion week. My friends are so envious.”

“Well, that’s one of the many perks of the job. Speaking of which, did you receive the tickets I had Tina send to you for the New York Fashion Week?”

“Yes, thanks. We’ve booked our flights and are arriving next Sunday. Any chance of seeing you?”

“I’m not sure, Mom. You know how hectic the week is for me. It will really depend on how tonight’s awards go. I’ll check with Tina and she’ll call you if there are any events we can go to together.”

“Oh, that sounds great. I’ll be sure to bring an outfit or two to wow the paparazzi. Take care of yourself, dear, and I’ll see you soon.”

Blaine grins when he thinks of his mother flittering between events at the Fashion Week. She’s the one who nurtured his passion for fashion at an early age. She bought him his first bowtie and sweater vest, gave him an enormous clothing allowance, and set up a VIP account at Brooks Brothers for him to indulge himself. By the time he entered Harvard, he was confident with his own sense of style.

Ah yes, Harvard. That was definitely an interesting period in my life.

In college, Blaine had kept his nose to the grindstone most of the time. Rather than joining a music society, which would only anger his father, he joined the LBGT club and soon realized that he was passionate about their rights - his rights. During his first two years at Harvard, he organized many of the club’s events, and at the start of his junior year, he was elected the club’s president. The leadership role was an invaluable experience – it gave him the opportunity to figure out a leadership style that would attract new members, motivate people and make things happen. He’d even considered a career in politics during his senior year, but ultimately, he decided against it. He didn’t want his life to be about stooping down to the dirty tactics necessary to get elected.

At Harvard, Blaine felt that it was really important to him to prove to his father that it was possible to be gay and successful in his own special way, outside the LBGT community. So he had started a blog called ‘Bowties and Suspenders’. Each day he would take a selfie of his outfit and post it online. Before he could blink, he gained followers from around the world. Blaine’s business studies at Harvard only confirmed that he should capitalize on his following, so he decided to create a YouTube channel as well. While most people considered Blaine attractive, he knew that he alone couldn’t pull in the the massive number of subscribers in order to make the YouTube channel a money earner. Sam, his local pizza delivery boy, agreed to be a model for his YouTube channel and his follower count grew, and grew, and grew. They grew to the point that during his senior year, Vogue had actively recruited him.

Through his brains, hard work and charming manners, Blaine had rapidly climbed up the ranks of Vogue. After a few years of executing other people’s ideas, he had one of his own. Vogue was planning an issue around the theme ‘sexual fantasy’ and he had a brilliant, most spectacular idea. He phoned Sam and told him to get himself to New York pronto, and arranged a photo shoot with Sam in the tightest underpants imaginable. He then called Calvin Klein to pitch Sam and his vision for an
underwear ad campaign to be launched at the same time. Fortunately, Calvin Klein agreed, and the
Vogue issue and Calvin Klein’s ad campaign were simultaneously released. Sam in underpants was
plastered on every single New York City bus, with a side mention to Vogue.

Vogue’s subscription base grew exponentially as a result, and so did the profits. After a year of
doldrums, Vogue once again became the place to find out the latest fashion trends. When Anna
Wintour announced her retirement last spring, Blaine was perfectly placed to become her successor.

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“Darken the city, night is a wire... Steam in the subway, earth is afire... Do do do do do do dododo dododo, ” blasts from Blaine’s phone.

This time, Bentley roars with laughter. “You’re just too much, Blaine. One day I’m going to find out
what song you use for my calls.”

“Uh, uh - not happening. But I promise it’s a good one!” Blaine chuckles as he grabs his phone.

“Hey, stud muffin. Why aren’t you sleeping?” Blaine asks.

“Who can sleep when Mom is squealing in the next room? She sounds like a teenage girl who just
found out her crush ‘like likes’ her.”

“Oh, let her enjoy herself. She’s always loved the limelight, even if it’s just in Westerville.”

“Thanks for coming last night, bro. Your presence definitely got the paparazzi out in full force and
gave me the exposure I need.”

“You’re welcome, Coop, but I hardly think my presence did that.”

“Of course it did,” Cooper replies. “You’re one of the ‘most eligible bachelors’ in New York City.”

Blaine groans down the phone. He could practically hear the air quotes. The New Yorker Magazine
recently named him the ‘#1 Gay and Single Hot Dude in New York City’.

“You’re never going to let that go, are you?”

“Nope, never. Sorry, but I’ve got to go. My stomach is rumbling and I’ve got to tear Mom away
from her phone long enough to convince her to make me her special blueberry pancakes. Later,
squirt.”

As Blaine returns his phone to his jacket pocket, he thinks about his recent award in the New Yorker
magazine. According to the article, he has it all - stunning looks with his curls and hazel eyes. Blaine
smiles when he thinks about the paragraph complimenting his ‘rocking body’ - he’s secretly proud of
the remark, as it means that his strict exercise and diet regimes are paying off. The article went on to
say that he is powerful as the editor-in-chief of Vogue magazine, and is in the top 95% income
bracket. The icing on the cake is that he is relatively young, at 28 years old.

Blaine’s life sounds good on paper, but the reality is slightly different. With all the media hype and
his recent promotion at Vogue, Blaine feels that he lives in a fish bowl - his life is laid out in a series
of photos and tweets. It does well for promoting the magazine, but it ruins any chance he might have
for a personal life. Fortunately, Sam is there to help fend off the legions of fans and is his go-to ‘plus-
one’ for public events.

“Tina’s reported a massive gathering at the front entrance, so she is expecting you at the back of the building,” Bentley announces, as the car rounds the corner of One World Trade Center, home to the Vogue offices. Blaine peeks out the window – there is a crowd of at least 100 people waiting for his arrival. He truly loves his fans, but there is no way he feels like he can deal with them this morning.

“Thanks, Bentley. I’m in the office all morning, but I’ll need you to drive me to a lunch meeting and then off to an afternoon photo shoot. The National Magazine Awards are this evening, so it’s going to be a long day for you. Sorry about that.”

“Absolutely no problem, Blaine. I’ve already told Marge not to expect me home until after midnight. I can’t wait to drive home the recipient of the ‘Best Magazine’ award.”

“Well, that’s a bit premature. There are some serious contenders for the award tonight, and not just in the fashion industry. But thanks for having such confidence in Vogue…and me. It means a lot to me.”

Blaine changes his sunglasses from one of his ‘signature’ styles to a basic pair of Oakley’s. This is not the morning he wants anyone to recognize him.

*****

When Blaine exits the express executive floor elevator, he is greeted by Tina, his personal assistant. “Good morning, Blaine. You don’t look like your usual sparkly and sunshine self.”

“And good morning to you,” Blaine replies, a lot chirpier than he feels. “Tina, sometimes honesty is not the best policy. Now hand over those clothes. I’m going to take a quick shower and then we can deal with the day.”

Blaine lied to Tina. There is no such thing as a quick shower in Vogue’s executive floor bathroom suite. The shower is a tiled flat bed with 6 streams of water jetting down – it’s like a shower and massage all rolled into one. While the streams of water pour over his body, the stale airplane smell slowly disappears. His body feels loosened and relaxed, and as Blaine leaves the stall, he feels invigorated and ready to take on the day. He manages to put in his contact lenses, but there is no way he plans to shave. He hates shaving at the best of times, and since he will have to do it later in the day, in preparation for the evening’s event, he decides to forgo the razor for now.

As Blaine dresses into the clean and neatly pressed clothes, he thinks about Tina. He feels like he has known her forever. She was his next door neighbor in Ohio and they were close friends from the day she moved in. Tina was the first person he came out to, desperate to have her know his deepest feelings and have her acceptance. When she muttered “I knew that, Blainey Days,” and gave him a big hug, he realized that that she was a friend for life. There was a bump in the road during their teenage years when Tina developed a crush on him, but fortunately they had managed to work past that. When he was promoted to a position at Vogue important enough to be granted a PA, he immediately called Tina and offered her the job. She hadn’t hesitated to move to New York and work for him. Tina is bright and efficient, but most importantly, she has Blaine’s best interests at heart. She is definitely a keeper.

Blaine quickly walks into his executive suite’s reception area and smiles at Tina. “Am I sparkly and full of sunshine now?” he asks cheekily, as he strikes a pose.
Tina giggles and takes her time to look him over. “Yes, I think you are. How was last night’s premiere?”

“Well, it was just as what you would expect from a Lifetime movie. Coop was great, in spite of all his finger pointing and shouting. I could practically hear the girls swooning in the theater, so I think it’s going to be a success for him. I hope it is - Coop deserves his big break.”

Tina nods in agreement. She has seen first hand how Cooper taunted and teased his younger brother when they were growing up – at the time, you could cut the tension between them with a knife. But when Blaine joined the fashion industry and was no longer Cooper’s competition, the strain between them slowly melted away. Tina thinks that they now have a comfortable friendship and they always support each other.

Tina glances at her computer screen, which displays Donald Trump on the New York Times website. “Did you read Trump’s latest thoughts about marriage equality? He said that he opposed it because he was a ‘traditional’ guy.”

Blaine thinks about this for a nanosecond. Dealing with opponents, like Donald Trump, is exactly the reason he decided against a political career during his Harvard years.

"Prejudice is just ignorance. He’s not worthy of us even discussing his views. Now go ahead and tell me what’s on the schedule for today.”

Tina smiles at Blaine’s reaction, as it was exactly what she was expecting. “I’m not going to lie. It’s chockablock. No appointments this morning, but the May issue’s mock-ups are on your desk to review.”

“Ugh! I don’t feel up to florals and pastels this morning...or any morning. What’s next?”

“There’s the lunch meeting with Marc Jacobs, but I am sure you have already prepared for that.”

Blaine is secretly dreading the meeting with Marc Jacobs, as he is a tricky client to deal with. There’s a fine balance between including his new fashion line in the magazine’s photo spreads and having him place prominent and expensive ads in Vogue. With the recent stagnant circulation numbers, Blaine knows he will have to be on top form for this meeting and somehow find a winning card to keep Marc Jacobs as a big advertising income stream.

“This afternoon, you’re expected at the photo shoot for your final approval. And of course, there’s the National Magazine Awards event this evening. I assume that you’re planning to take Sam as your ‘plus-one’?”

“Yeah, I just have to confirm it with him. I’ll do that this morning. Do you have our outfits?”

“Yes, they’re hanging on the hook at the back of your door. They’re both pressed and ready to go.”

As Tina hands over his medium drip coffee, Blaine gives her a peck on the cheek. “You’re the best! I don’t know what I would do without you.”

“I know, Blaine…. Now go on and start your day.”

*****
As Blaine enters his office, he takes a good look around. The mood, created by furniture, colors and textures, feels like him and somewhere he likes to work. He is rather proud of how he has redone it from Anna Wintour’s days. The enormous corner office still retains a look deserving of Vogue’s editor-in-chief, however, he has replaced what he considered Wintour’s misguided eclectic look.

With budget no object, Blaine has opted for a blend of the modern and traditional. Blaine is particularly proud of his AC executive desk. The desktop is a slab of the very best oak, in a rich color that reminds him of a ripened horse chestnut on an autumn day. Blaine has done his research - oak represents wisdom and strength, both of which he wants to project as the new editor-in-chief. The traditional desktop has an unexpected twist; its legs are modern steel with an interesting crisscross weave design. The desk reflects tradition, modernity and high design. There is a chair situated on the opposite side of the desk to invite visitors to sit down and work with him.

Behind the desk is a long table that always has the mock-ups for Vogue’s next issue. The table faces the floor-to-ceiling windows that afford a view of Manhattan’s skyscrapers. Blaine removed the stiff visitor chairs that Wintour was famous for, and instead created an inviting space with sofas and armchairs. The racks of potential clothing to appear in Vogue, subject to his approval, are disguised behind a small wooden partition - not only so that visitors aren’t overwhelmed, but also to keep secrets hidden. The walls are rather plain, as the only items on display are Vogue covers issued under Blaine’s leadership. Blaine, glancing around, feels like he can’t wait until the wall space is fully covered.

Blaine sits down on his executive leather chair, takes his mug of coffee, blows to cool it down, and takes his first sip. It’s like a taste of heaven.

Tina certainly knows how to create the perfect coffee, with the ideal blend of coffee, cinnamon and sugar.

When Blaine starts up his computer, he thinks about how important tonight’s National Awards event is. Vogue is up for several awards, but the most important one to Blaine is the ‘Magazine of the Year’ - the big prize. It would be a feather in his cap and a public nod that he is right person to be Vogue’s editor-in-chief. It would make meetings with potential advertisers go so much smoother with this sort of public recognition.

“Blaine, I have Sam on line one,” Tina calls out.

“Thanks, Tina. I’ll get it in just a sec.”

Sam is more than just a model for Vogue and ‘arm candy’ when Blaine needs him – Sam’s his best friend and roommate. Blaine developed an unrequited crush on Sam during his Harvard days - who could resist those lips and abs? Deep down in his heart, he had known it was impossible because Sam was straight, but it didn’t make the crush any less powerful. Sam eventually figured out Blaine’s guilty pleasure was him and was totally cool about it. “You don’t need to be uncomfortable. Frankly, I’m an attractive guy and you’re into dudes….and if you weren’t into me, I would probably be pretty offended.”

At the time, Blaine was so, so afraid that his crush would jeopardize their friendship. However, Sam knew exactly how to let him down in the kindest possible way and make their friendship grow even stronger.

Blaine leans forward to pick up the call. “What’s up, Obi-Wan?”
“Hey, R2-D2. I’m currently at the photo shoot. Man, the floral and pastels theme is so lame. You’ve got to shake it up a bit. But I’m not calling about that. Do you still need me for tonight’s event?”

“Absolutely.”

Blaine knows that all eyes will be on him tonight. Not only does Blaine need his regular ‘arm candy’ for the media coverage, but he needs Sam’s emotional support. “I’m coming to the photo shoot later this afternoon and I’ll have your penguin suit.”

“Thanks, dude. Just so you know, I won’t be available next weekend for any events as I’ll be with Mercedes in Boston. I’m so glad that her tour is finally taking place on the east coast.”

Mercedes and Sam have a ‘thing’, but that’s not something they want the public to know about. Mercedes has a newly blossoming music career with her first concert tour, so she doesn’t need the spotlight directed at her and Sam. Although Mercedes is based in LA and Sam in New York, somehow they manage to make their long-distance relationship work.

“That’s fine. I don’t have any public events planned until the New York Fashion Week. I’m so grateful that you can help me out tonight. I just can’t deal with all propositions from model wannabes and fangirls when I’m on my own. It gets creepy and super scary.”

Sam chuckles down the line. “Well, our ‘arrangement’ works out for both of us. I don’t like all the propositions either and I don’t need the temptation when Mercedes is away. It’s bros helping bros.”

“If you just ask Mercedes to marry you, then your problem will go away,” Blaine retorts, and he starts singing “Put a Ring on It” into the phone.

Sam laughs as he replies, “I might just do that.”

*****

When Blaine puts down the phone, the conversation leaves him thinking about his own disastrous private life. Blaine is out and proud, which makes him a target for gay men wanting to get into the fashion industry and women thinking they can convert him. Well, that’s not going to happen. I’m a perfect gold star gay.

On any given day, Blaine has his pick of gorgeous men to take home and could have any sexual fantasy satisfied. However, Blaine knows that this is because of his powerful position at Vogue and his ‘most eligible bachelor’ status publicized in print and on-line. The reality is that he never meets interesting guys that like him for who he truly is…the real him. So he never goes on dates…. And he is so lonely.

He longs for a long-term loving relationship. Someone he could adore and dote on. Someone to walk hand in hand through Central Park with while walking their dog. Someone to retire to Provincetown with and live out their remaining years in a lighthouse. Someone real and authentic. “Is that too much to ask for?” Blaine thinks, as he sits to get down to the task of reviewing the May issue’s mock-ups.

Chapter End Notes
Pam Anderson’s ringtone: ‘I’ll Always Love My Mama’ by the Intruders
Cooper Anderson’s ringtone: ‘Rio’ by Duran, Duran
Song in Sam and Blaine’s conversation: ‘Single Ladies’ by Beyoncé

I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr. Reviews are like a mug of hot chocolate topped with marshmallows on a cold winter day.

Next up: Kurt interviews for an internship at Vogue.
The Vogue Interview

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

‘To me, clothing is a form of self-expression - there are hints about who you are in what you wear.’ - Marc Jacobs

January

“Good night, Gunther,” Kurt calls out as he clocks off his shift at the Starlight Diner. Rachel was right – he does get the opportunity to perform every shift. But how many times will he have to sing a cover version of Frank Sinatra’s ‘New York, New York’ for the tourists? The tips are great and pay his basic expenses, but for the first time ever, his wardrobe is so last season. What gets to Kurt the most about the job is that he is serving others and not driving his own musical theater career forward.

Kurt shoots off a text to Rachel to let her know that he’s on his way home. He’s so grateful for her friendship, particularly when he had first arrived in New York City. She had found them a loft in Bushwick, at an affordable price, and got him a job at the Starlight Diner, where she also works. He had thought that once he had sorted out a job and housing, he would figure out a plan. However, the plan just isn’t shaping up.

When Kurt leaves the diner, the cold crisp breeze of the winter’s night whips across his face. He pulls up the lapels of his pea coat and digs his fingers into his pockets. He’s happy the subway station is only a few blocks away, and starts walking briskly. He passes the Gershwin Theatre and smiles at the memory of breaking into it with Rachel last year at the Nationals competition.

Kurt has put his education on hold for a year so that he can save some money and experience New York City. But that doesn’t mean that he isn’t pursuing a musical theater career. Each morning he pours over the new listings on backstage.com, where there are over 2,000 casting calls advertised. Surely one of those roles is meant for him. However, each audition finishes with “Thank you Mr. Hummel. Don’t call us, we’ll call you.” Who knew that casting directors really say such things?

Last week, Kurt auditioned for the part of Erik in “Erik Dies, You’re Stupid and We Hate You”, an off-off-Broadway show. He had been so hopeful of landing the leading role of Erik. The basic plot was that Erik was lonely and his friends took him on a surreal, nightmarish odyssey to ‘get his dick wet’. He thought he would be perfect for the role. After all, it sums up his life nicely.

But he hasn’t received a callback and Kurt knows that with each passing day, it becomes more unlikely he will. Kurt really tries to not let it get him down, but it’s hard. Life is hard at the moment. However, he’s a thousand times happier than he was in Lima. He just has to remind himself of that every day when he wakes up.

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Kurt gazes at the subway compartment’s window and sees the reflections of fellow passengers in the glass. There are people on their way home from work and some homeless people looking for a warm reprieve from the cold winter’s night. But mostly, the compartment is filled with couples – those on first dates, their cheeks flushed with hope, and those who are lovers, giving each other intimate looks and soft touches.
Kurt knows that there’s a huge part of him that longs to explore his sexuality. He wants to say that his musical performance career is more important, but the reality is that they’re both on equal footing. Being the only out gay boy in high school was tough. But living in New York City does give him the opportunity to find someone… Someone like him. But what does that mean?

Kurt has figured out that the touch of fingertips isn’t nearly enough - he has his teenage hormones to thank for that. His foray into gay porn on-line was frightening – typical guys couldn’t be that big. He’s tired of being a baby penguin. He wants to be desirable and sexy to other gay men. He wants a man who can play him like a finely-tuned instrument and find every erogenous zone on his body. He wants a man to show him sexual pleasures and someone he can satisfy in return.

Arriving in New York, he already knew that he didn’t want random hook-ups – Bear Night at Scandals had taught him that. It had also taught him that he doesn’t want to be anybody’s princess. Just because he has a high voice and some people think he looks effeminate doesn’t mean that he’s the ‘girl’ in the relationship. But he doesn’t necessarily want to be in the controlling role either. He wants to be on equal terms with his partner.

Even though he longs for his first kiss - well at least one that counts - Kurt wants the romance of it all. Someone who takes him on dates and woos him. Someone who makes him feel connected and safe. Someone who will love him. That’s not asking for the moon, is it?

When a throng of passengers leave the compartment at a popular transfer station, Kurt quickly snags a vacant seat, still warm from the previous occupant. He thinks back to his last date and is surprised that it was over a month ago.

*****

The glittery globes reflected the light in a multitude of directions and the music pulsed through every nerve of Kurt’s body. He was at the HK Lounge and it was filled wall-to-wall with people dancing to the music. Madonna’s ‘Get into the Groove’ was playing and he was lost inside the music. Kurt’s hips were swaying and he was doing his signature shoulder shimmy. He probably looked like an idiot, but he didn’t care. And Kurt could see many eyes on him when he was on the dance floor. Eyes that wished that they were dancing with him. He was flattered, but he didn’t care.

The club was located in Hell’s Kitchen, and that seemed appropriate. His day had been another disappointment. He’d auditioned for the ‘Gazillion Bubble Show’ and had been rejected on the spot.

But tonight, Kurt Hummel was doing just fine. He was on his third date with Max, a guy he’d met whilst waiting for Rachel at the ‘Wine Escape’ near NYADA. He was instantly attracted by his good looks – curly brown hair, hazel eyes and a compact but rocking body. If he had a ‘type’, that was definitely it. He smiled at Max as he shimmed his shoulders one more time. Max grinned back at him and copied his move. Half way through the song, Max discretely positioned himself behind Kurt and grasped his hips. After a music beats, he started to grind gently against Kurt’s ass.

Kurt knew exactly what Max was asking - he wanted to take things further. But Kurt wasn’t comfortable with that. He definitely didn’t want to take things further. Sure, he was attracted to him but he didn’t feel any chemistry. So at the end of the song, Kurt begged off with a ‘migraine’. As he made his way to the subway, he pulled out his phone and deleted Max’s contact details.

*****
Kurt now knows that he’s attractive to other gay men. And they are everywhere – Starlight Diner patrons, coffee shops, Callbacks, and in the auditions’ waiting lines. His sharp and clever wit immediately signals that he is nobody’s princess. That he’s a force to be reckoned with. There are plenty of men who like his sparkle.

Kurt has gone out with Paul, James, Tristan, Andrew, and Matthew, but he’s politely declined advances after the third date. The dates all seem to fall into the same pattern, like there was a gay guy’s manual that he doesn’t know about. The first date is always in a coffee shop - getting to know each other. It’s safe, short and easy to plan an escape route. A smile and a handshake at the end.

The second date is dinner and Kurt always insists on organizing it. He usually opts for a meal at his favorite cheap and cheerful Thai restaurant. He knows the menu well and always orders dishes that are scrumptious but not too loaded with garlic or chili – spring rolls, Moo Daeng, and Pad Thai. While they continue to get to know each other, flirting is an added dimension to the date. Sampling each others’ food, lots of smiling, laughing, and the occasional touch. It always ends with a kiss on the cheek and a half hug that leaves both parties wanting more.

The third date is epic and crucial - and is always arranged by the other. They always start in a classy bar. With fake IDs in hand, the date orders a dirty martini and Kurt’s go-to drink is a cosmopolitan. After his high school experiences, Kurt isn’t a big drinker, but he wants to come across as sophisticated and cool. Then it’s the inevitable club…the gay guy club. A club that accepts them and where they can let it all loose.

A second cosmopolitan is ordered. There are lots of smiles and the inevitable dancing. Kurt loves to dance. However, he always feels uncomfortable when the date tries to take it to the next level. When they pull him in to dance to a slow song, he feels their arousal, their cock pressing into him, longing to get into his pants. But he never feels it back. He misses the romance that he desperately craves. The sly looks, the tender touch, the feeling of hope. None of them feel special enough to be his first kiss, let alone be his boyfriend. He doesn’t feel connected and safe and loved. It’s just another thing in his life that isn’t happening. He's sure that there has to be somebody in the city who he could fall in love with. But then again, in 50 years’ time, he could be alone with 13 stray cats.

*****

“Hi Rach – I’m home,” Kurt calls out as he slides the door to their apartment open.

“Hey, Kurt. Since you were working late, I ordered pizza. It should be here any minute. New York Domino's is sooooo much better than Lima Domino's.”

“It's the water,” Kurt replies. He is so grateful that Rachel has ordered pizza. She’s quite possibly the worst cook ever. During their first week at the Bushwick apartment, Rachel decided to cook a vegetable polenta casserole. As she was sautéing the onion and garlic, flames burst out of the frying pan. It was quickly agreed that going forward, Kurt would be in charge of the cooking and Rachel in charge of the cleaning. But tonight he just feels too tired to whip up dinner. Kurt gives Rachel a quick hug and adds, “Thanks for that.”

Once the pizza arrives, they sit on the couch happily munching away as Melissa Etheridge plays in the background. Kurt can feel Rachel’s eyes staring at him as his mind is going a hundred miles per second. His best friend knows that life in New York is not what he’d expected. It’s just so much harder.
“So what’s with the faraway look, Kurt? What’s up?”

“I don’t know. It’s just that life at the moment feels both exciting and overwhelming.” Kurt picks up another slice of vegan pizza to buy him some time. He desperately wants someone to confide in, to share his innermost private thoughts with. He doesn’t want to discuss this with his dad at the moment…. To admit that all his dreams are being crushed slowly, one by one, is too hard. Rachel wants an honest answer and he really, really wants to give her that.

“The auditions are getting me down. I have been to 47 open auditions since October. I can’t even manage to land an agent. I might as well have a big neon sign above my head that says ‘gay-diddy-gay-gay-gay’. One look at me and I’m typecast as the younger brother, the best friend, the comic relief – never the leading man. I feel as stuck now as I was in Lima.”

Rachel squeezes his thigh as a sign of reassurance. “That’s not true, Kurt. Auditions are tough on everyone and they’re soul-destroying. Even with NYADA and my amazing Winter Showcase win, I don’t have a Broadway role yet. Do you know how many times I have been called back for ‘Funny Girl’ and they still haven’t made up their mind yet?”

Kurt rolls his eyes. Of course he knows. He feels like he could play the part of Fanny Brice himself with the number of times he’s helped Rachel rehearse her lines or has listened to her belt out the songs. “But at least you’re getting callbacks.”

Kurt collects his thoughts, really afraid to relate his innermost worries. But he needs to get it out, and so he takes a deep breath. “I know that when I got the rejection letter from NYADA, I was devastated… shattered. And it’s going to take me a while to save some money and figure out where I should continue my studies. However, on reflection, I’m actually grateful for it because I think I can use the time for some real life experiences. I just don’t know what they should be. I’ve lost my focus.”

“Have you considered that maybe you should take a break from auditioning and cultivate some of your other interests? You are such an incredible cook and such a fashionista.”

This makes Kurt pause for thought because he honestly hasn’t considered alternatives. No way does he want to work as a chef. His part-time career as a waiter at the Spotlight Diner has already convinced him of that. It has long hours, underpaid illegal immigrants, and it destroys any love of food.

But doing something in fashion could be up his alley. From an early age, Kurt has been interested in fashion. He’s followed it religiously and has a subscription to Vogue magazine. In middle school, he commandeered his mother’s old sewing machine and taught himself how to repurpose clothing. When the bullying got to him in high school, he created the ‘FashionKnowsNoGenders’ blog and posted a selfie every morning before school and showed off the many outlandish outfits he’d worn for Glee Club. He even posted his Alexander McQueen inspired outfit that he wore for the “Bad Romance” song during Gaga week. The blog had very few followers and hits, but it had given him strength and purpose. Maybe being single-minded about a Broadway career is not the way to approach life. Just maybe, he should consider other avenues.

“Thanks, Rach. Maybe I should start considering all my options.” He gives her a goodnight kiss on the cheek and goes to his partitioned bedroom.

After an hour of Internet surfing, Kurt signs up at dointernships.com for positions in the fashion, retail and media industries.
This feels good. It feels right for me. No worries about being type-cast – the fashion industry is dominated by gay men. Oh, lots of gay men. Maybe this could lead to me kick-starting my love life as well.

When Kurt returns from the bathroom after his extensive night-time skin regime, his computer pings with a new e-mail notification. He quickly opens it to discover a message from dointernships.com announcing a new listing for an internship at Vogue working in the department that maintains its website content. When Kurt reads through the job description, he realizes that the internship is perfect for him. Kurt flops back in bed and starts to squeal and kick his feet excitedly.

Yes, things are about to change for Kurt Hummel.

*****

Two weeks later, February

Kurt wakes up and peeks at the alarm clock. It’s 5:30 AM and Rachel has already started to warm up her vocal cords. Sometimes it’s hard to appreciate what a good singer she is because all he can think about is shoving a sock into her mouth. Kurt jumps out of bed, bright and alert, because this morning he has his interview at Vogue.

Kurt had spent most of the weekend planning his outfit for the interview. He knows that the outfit really matters. It has to wow them… make him unique in the ocean of potential candidates for the internship. He looks at the outfit hanging on the outside of the portable clothing rack that is considered his wardrobe. Yeah, he has made a good choice.

Kurt dashes to the bathroom and is happy that he has beaten Rachel to a morning shower. He spends extra time moisturizing his face, using his ‘special occasion’ cream imported from France, and making sure that his hair is in tip-top form. He returns to his bedroom and carefully puts on his outfit. It’s a crisp white shirt that adds balance to the Paul Smith shark-tooth-print trousers, a bargain he has bought recently at 6pm.com. The Hugo Boss blazer is relatively plain, but trendy, and will hopefully project a professional image. The final touch is a vintage style hippo brooch, to add a bit of whimsical fun and flare. He does one final check in the full length mirror before going to the kitchen for a light breakfast.

After good mornings are exchanged, Rachel carefully examines that outfit. “I love the outfit, but what’s up with the blue socks?”

Kurt blushes when he realizes that Rachel has picked up on his sock choice. “Well, light blue is the color of clear skies and I’m really hoping for a positive result.”

Rachel tugs Kurt to sit down next to her at the table. “You don’t need a silly superstition to kill this interview. You are an amazing man, and Vogue will recognize your many talents, even more so without blue socks.”

Kurt places his head on her shoulders, wraps his arm around her, and gives a gentle squeeze. “You’re right.”
Kurt’s checks the time on his phone as he exits the subway station near One World Trade Center, where the Vogue head office is located. He has plenty of time before his interview with Isabelle Wright, the new senior editor who heads up Vogue’s website. He spots the Silverstein Family Park nearby, so he crosses the street and takes a seat on an available bench. He checks his messenger bag for the hundredth time to make sure his designs are packed inside. Once satisfied that is all in order, he takes out his phone and he presses 1 on his speed dial. The call is picked up after the first ring.

“Kurt, are you all right? Safe?”

“Yes, Dad, I’m fine. How are things?”

“Everything is usual in Lima – busy at work, helped at the car wash fundraiser for the arts program at McKinley. But that’s not what you’re calling about. Don’t you have the big interview today?”

Kurt grins sheepishly. Leave it to his father to get to the heart of the matter. “Yeah, I do. I’m a bit early for the interview so I’m at a nearby park. I’ve got my portfolio of designs ready and my outfit is pretty fabulous. Do you remember those shark-tooth-trousers I …”

Burt interrupts, “You didn’t call me about fashion advice because I know you don’t like flannel. So how are you really feeling about the interview?”

“I’m scared. It felt so right when I saw the internship advertised, but now I feel so wrong for the position. Why would they hire a teenage nobody? What will I do if I don’t get the internship. What if…”

Burt interrupts again. “Slow down, buddy. That’s a lot of ‘what ifs’ to deal with. You need to take a chance for most things in life worth having and that’s scary. Heck, I felt that exact same way when I opened the tire shop.”

“You did?”

“Of course I did. Your mother was working, so that took some of the pressure off. But I took out a big bank loan, signed a lease for the garage, and hired people who would depend on me for their weekly paycheck… to put food on the table. But after a few teething problems, it all worked out. What I’m saying is that sometimes you need to grab an opportunity with both hands.”

Kurt thinks about this for a moment and realizes that he had never thought about his father being in a similar situation. “But what happens if I’m rejected?” Kurt whispers.

“You’ll do what you need to. You’ll pick yourself up, brush yourself down, and go back to that internship web thingy. There’s a lot of amazing opportunities out there for you. Just remember I’m here to catch you if you fall.”

“Dad, you’re right. I’m going to show Vogue what Kurt Hummel is all about.”

“Bye, Kurt. Give me a call tonight to tell me how the interview went. And remember, I love ya.”

*****

Kurt’s waiting in Vogue’s reception area, and he can feel his body relax, as he closes his eyes and
concentrates on taking deep breaths. He feels calm and mentally rehearses what points he wants to get across during the interview. His eyes quickly open as the receptionist announces, “Ms. Wright will see you now.”

When Kurt enters the office, he sees photos and papers and racks of clothing samples… but no sign of Ms. Wright. Kurt calls out for her and she pops out from behind a clothing rack. “Call me Isabelle.”

They both take a seat and Isabelle immediately puts Kurt at ease by discussing his on-line blog and asking about his fashion icons. Kurt thinks that the interview is going smoothly when Isabelle talks about dreaming big and working hard to make it happen. He feels that she gets him, with his love of both Broadway and fashion, and she inspires him to dream bigger. There is a pause in the conversation and Kurt wonders what will happen next.

Isabelle slowly gets up from her seat and smiles at Kurt. “I’m absolutely parched. Let me get us a cup of tea.” Not waiting for a reply, she walks to the nearby break room.

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Isabelle takes a deep breath as she fills the electric kettle with water. She isn’t particularly thirsty, but she needs some time to think… to think about the young man in her office and how she is going to handle the situation. Kurt is amazing – a one-of-a-kind - and she would hire him as an intern in a heartbeat.

However, her thoughts wander back to a recent meeting with Vogue’s editor-in-chief. They are friends and often have lunch together and talk shop.

“Isabelle, I’m really not happy with the May issue’s floral and pastel theme for the main photo spread. It’s not edgy - it’s not what Vogue has built its reputation on. I’m looking for somebody who can knock this out of the park for us.”

“I assume you have contacted Elite, Ford, IMG, and DNA?”

“Of course I have. The agencies are just sending over the usual suspects. I need a fresh face. Someone with the wow factor.”

“Blaine, have you considered a change in the theme?”

“If only I could. The photo shoot is next week and at this stage, it’s too costly to change or postpone it.”

“I’ll give this some thought and let you know if I can come up with anything.”

“Thanks, Isabelle. And thanks for listening. I just needed to let off a little steam. I’m hoping that somebody will walk off the street and be the answer to my prayers.”

Isabelle doesn’t usually meddle with the magazine and its decisions. However, Blaine hired her as the new on-line senior editor and she feels a loyalty towards him. He’s an excellent leader and mentor. She wants to prove to him that she can think laterally and for the greater good of the magazine empire. And there, sitting in her office, is a man who is just the perfect fit for the May issue’s photo spread.
Prior to the interview, she had trolled through Kurt’s blog and he looked absolutely stunning in each of his outfits posted. He can wear anything from his aunt’s old sweater to a tartan kilt. As she removes the teabags from the cups, she knows what she’s going to do.

*****

Isabelle returns to her office and hands Kurt his cup of tea. “I know that you’re here for the internship, but I really think that you have looks and body to be a model.”

Kurt almost drops his cup because that is not what he expected Isabelle to say. All he can manage to blurt out is, “Really?”

Isabelle giggles and gently squeezes his arm. “Yes, really. I know for a fact that the magazine is looking for a fresh face for the May issue. I think you would be a perfect fit.”

Kurt still can’t believe what he is hearing. All through high school he was constantly called hurtful nicknames – lady lips, lady face, gay face. They weren’t particularly original, but they had hurt him. They had made him feel undesirable and not worthy of love. However, here was the Isabelle Wright telling him that he would be a perfect fit for a Vogue photo spread. He has not once considered being a model, but then again his break from school was all about opening himself up to new life experiences.

“I honestly don’t know what to say. I’m flattered that you think so highly of me. I moved to New York to experience new things. This might not be what I expected to come out of today, but I’m open to the idea. I’m hard-working and a quick learner. So how do I apply for this modeling job?”

Isabelle smiles at him, thrilled that he has agreed to explore the modeling opportunity further. She stands up and grabs Kurt’s hand to pull him up.

“Come with me, there is someone who needs to meet you. I’m so excited – I’m about to get you discovered!”

Chapter End Notes

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. Special thank you to Fearlessly for taking a look at the first draft.

Here is the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics.

I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr.

Reviews are like getting a job offer from Vogue.

Next up: Blaine and Kurt meet.
I think the sexiest thing on anybody is intelligence. I respect somebody who has a brain and wants to use it more than a pretty face and status. – Sophia Bush

February

Blaine gets up, rolls his shoulders and stretches, trying to loosen up his stiff muscles. He feels like no matter how long he stares at the preliminary layout for the May issue, it doesn’t look any better. Even factoring in that the main photo spread is missing, he isn’t even remotely inspired by what his staff have given him. What was his team thinking when they came up with the ‘floral and pastels’ theme for the May issue? It’s too cliché for words. He just has to find a different angle on the age-old theme to boost Vogue’s circulation and to get more website hits.

Blaine is interrupted in his thoughts when Tina buzzes him. “Isabelle is here and she urgently wants to meet with you. She has someone in tow.”

“Okay, but be sure to remind her of my five-minute rule.” Blaine is a firm believer that no meeting should last longer than five minutes. It is amazing how effective this is, making people focus on the real objectives of the meeting.

“Already done. I’m sending them in.”

*****

When Kurt enters the office, he is shocked to see the Blaine Anderson walking from behind his desk to greet them. Kurt knows all about Vogue’s editor-in-chief – Blaine is like a rock star in his eyes. His ‘Bowtie and Suspenders’ blog and YouTube channel are legendary, and Kurt had religiously followed them both during his lonely nights in Lima. Blaine’s smiling face and encouraging words had helped him get through the tougher times at school. So what if he printed out the photograph of Blaine wearing red trousers, a black polo shirt and a bowtie, and hung it up inside his McKinley High locker? Blaine Anderson certainly doesn’t need to know that.

Kurt takes a moment to check out Blaine as Isabelle greets him and they chat about the upcoming New York Fashion Week. Gone are the days of bowties, suspenders and slicked back hair. The man before him is even more gorgeous than he could ever have imagined – Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, and Snapchat don’t do him justice. Blaine’s hair is a mass of curls, and Kurt knows, based on his own personal experience, that Blaine uses a little product to create the tussled look. His eyes are a honey amber color with flecks of sea moss green. Kurt's eyes move downwards to his plump lips, which are curled up in a smile as he talks to Isabelle. And then Kurt sees the famous stubble, and it looks soft and enticing. Kurt is envious that Blaine is able to maintain this look seemingly without any effort.

Blaine is wearing an Armani suit that has obviously been tailored to hug his body in all the right places. It shows off his tiny waist and his powerful thighs. Kurt can tell that Blaine takes good care of himself and his body. In a nutshell, Blaine is short but perfectly formed.
“And let me introduce you to Kurt Hummel,” Isabelle says.

Kurt quickly snaps out of his trance. He knows that first impressions are important, so he smiles and puts on his ‘game face’, while he walks forward to greet Blaine Anderson. However, in his rush, he trips over his own feet, and somehow, his hippo brooch ends up jabbing the editor in the chest.

“S-s-sorry, I’m so sorry about that, Mr. Anderson. Are you okay?” Kurt stutters, mentally face-palming. So much for a good first impression.

“It’s okay, but that brooch should come with a warning,” Blaine replies as he chuckles. Kurt sees that Blaine’s smiling and his eyes are full of warmth and sincerity, which slightly calms him down.

“Anyone who can pull off a hippo brooch deserves to be in this office,” Blaine adds with a wink. “Now let’s try it again. Good morning, Kurt,” Blaine says, while extending his right hand.

Kurt carefully shakes his hand, while blushing. “And good morning to you, Mr. Anderson.” The editor has a firm but gentle handshake, and Kurt wonders how Blaine has perfected the combination. Blaine’s hand feels soft and fits so perfectly into his.

“Please call me Blaine.”

Kurt reluctantly releases his grip as Blaine gestures for them to move towards the office’s seating area.

Isabelle heads towards the sofa and signals for Kurt to join her there. As Kurt sits down, he he runs his hand over the leather, luxuriating in the butter-soft feel of it. He can tell it’s of the highest quality, but has never experienced a seat as sumptuous as this.

Blaine sits down in a comfortable chair opposite the sofa. Blaine immediately crosses his legs, and Kurt notices that he isn’t wearing any socks. Kurt wonders what the editor’s reaction would have been if he had worn his light blue socks today.

“Now, what can I do for the two of you?” Blaine politely asks.

Kurt looks down shyly, wondering what he’s going to say. He can’t blurt out that he wants to be a model…not after the clumsiness he had shown stabbing Blaine in the chest with his hippo brooch.

Thankfully, Isabelle decides to take the lead. “Blaine, I’ve been doing a lot of thinking about the May issue since we met last week. You’re right. Vogue needs to have a fresh approach to the floral and pastels theme. I think that Kurt is our solution.”

Blaine raises an eyebrow at that comment. “Do tell, Kurt. I’m open to all suggestions. I’m looking for a new angle for the photo spread.”

Kurt freezes in place. Did Vogue’s editor-in-chief just ask for my ‘suggestions’? How is this even happening to me? He feels out of his depth and starts to twist his fingers in his lap.

Blaine leans forward in his chair, with an encouraging smile on his face. “It’s okay, Kurt. Take your time. I understand how daunting it must feel to be in my office without any notice. Just speak when you’re ready…because I’m really interested in listening to your ideas.”
Kurt takes a few calming breaths. Blaine’s reassuring words help him to relax. He takes a moment to collect his thoughts, and he looks up into Blaine’s eyes before he speaks.

“It does sound like a clichéd theme for the May issue. Spring is more than floral and pastels - it’s a time for rebirth and renewal. Spring also symbolizes love, hope, youth, and growth. Perhaps the photo spread should focus on hope, sir…uhm…Blaine.”

“Exactly,” Isabelle pipes in. “And that is why Kurt is so ideally suited to be a model in the May issue’s photo spread. Everyone wants love, hope and growth, but often they can’t find it with all the background noise going on in their busy lives. Kurt would really stand out as someone special – he’s the antithesis. We could really play up his creamy complexion against a backdrop of the usual bronzed and beefy models. He’s a fresh face and everything that spring symbolizes.”

Blaine arches his eyebrows and gives Isabelle a questioning look. He turns his gaze to Kurt and asks, “Do you have a portfolio, Kurt?”

Isabelle quickly saves the situation. “Kurt wasn’t expecting to see you today, so he didn’t bring his portfolio… but you can take a look at his blog photos,” she replies, as she hands over her tablet to Blaine for his perusal.

*****

Blaine reclines back in his chair to reflect upon the conversation so far. The ideas of hope, love and growth are an interesting twist to the spring theme. So maybe there is something in this new concept, but he’s not convinced that Kurt is the answer. He carefully looks at the images on Isabelle’s tablet. They are a refreshing change to the usual stock photos that model agencies send him. Blaine smiles as he flicks through the daily shots of Kurt’s outfits on his high school blog. They remind Blaine of his own selfies posted during his ‘Suspender and Bowtie’ days while at Harvard. Kurt Hummel certainly makes unique fashion choices. Judging from the photos, it looks as if Kurt could wear any number of styles. But the photos are too grainy to get a really good look - they are obviously selfies taken with Kurt’s phone.

Blaine looks up and takes a good long look at Kurt. On the surface, Kurt’s just another wannabe in the long line of potential models that he has seen over the past few weeks. Blaine can’t instantly see Isabelle’s vision, but he likes the idea of contrasts. He doesn’t feel that he can see Kurt at all - he’s wearing far too many layers to be able to make out his body shape. Blaine returns the tablet to Isabelle, and looks Kurt up and down again, frowning.

*I need to see what he looks like under those clothes.*

Blaine smiles politely at Kurt and says, “Strip”.

*****

“No!” Kurt cries out, spots of pink high on his cheeks. Frankly, Kurt is shocked by the order. He has heard of the director’s casting couch, but this is ridiculous. And in front of Isabelle too! This is not how he imagined his first time naked in front of another man. He has principles.

Kurt’s vehemence seems to surprise Blaine, who gives Isabelle a mystified look, and then Blaine explains himself. “Kurt, your outfit is amazing, but it’s distracting me from seeing your build.”

“Because of the layers?” Kurt asks timidly.
“Because of the layers,” Blaine confirms with a snort. “You can keep your underpants on, of course. Don’t worry, I’ve seen it all. I should remind you that my first successful campaign for Vogue had Sam Evans in nothing but underpants… And let me also remind you that your five minutes are almost up.”

Isabella gently strokes Kurt’s arm and whispers, “It’s okay, sweetie. All models have an underwear shot in their portfolio. It really is necessary for a professional assessment of how you will look in designer clothes. I’ll be here the entire time. There’s nothing creepy about Blaine’s request.”

Blaine looks very offended when he hears Isabelle say that, and suddenly Kurt feels a bit foolish for thinking Blaine had something else on his mind than professional motives.

Kurt slowly nods and turns around to peel off his layers. It seems silly to act so modestly, given the circumstances, but he has to maintain some level of decorum. He mentally chastises himself for not thinking through his red boxer brief choice this morning. If he had known that Blaine Anderson would see him in his underpants, he would have splurged on a pair by Dsquared2. He has worn a lot of crazy things in his glee club days, but never has he been stripped down to his basic core. But this is his new life and his chance to shine.

“*Make it work,*” Kurt thinks as he turns around. His eyes meet with Blaine’s, which are filled with warmth and reassurance. It makes Kurt feel safe. With trembling knees, Kurt asks, “How do you want me?”

Blaine’s eyebrows shoot up and Kurt wonders if he said the wrong thing. Blaine motions for Kurt to twirl around, looks at him from all sides and then responds, “You can get dressed now.”

Kurt sighs with relief and quickly turns to put on his outfit again. *Thank god that was over quickly, without any ogling.*

Kurt sits down next to Isabelle and waits to hear Blaine’s verdict. Isabelle gives him a reassuring smile before she starts the conversation again.

“Kurt’s perfect – I knew he would be. His body build will allow him to wear a variety of outfits from a wide range of designers. Thoughts, Blaine?”

“Well, Kurt has beautiful eyes, long legs and healthy skin…”

“I do have a strict daily moisturizing routine,” Kurt chirps in.

Blaine smiles at the remark, but continues, “… however the porcelain color could come across as pasty under the studio’s lights. We will need to make sure that Unique, in Make-up, uses her special brand of magic on him. Kurt’s slim. I know we aren’t looking for another ‘beefy’ look, but he needs to buff up a bit, nonetheless.” He looks directly at Kurt and adds, “Your agent should be able to get you connected to a gym and a fitness trainer.”

“But I don’t have an agent. I’ve never considered a modeling career until…well, now. I actually came here today to apply for the Vogue.com internship position.”

Blaine raises his eyebrows at this new piece of information. “That’s fine. There are a lot of twists and turns in life’s journey and you just hit a big one. I’m sure that Isabelle can help you find an agent.”
“Does that mean that I have the job? That I’ll be featured in Vogue?” Kurt asks hopefully.

Blaine turns to Isabelle. “Get him an agent and deliver him to today’s photo shoot. We’ll do some test photos and I’ll be there after lunch to check them out.”

A huge smile appears on Kurt’s face. Okay, it wasn’t a definite ‘yes’, but it was a definite ‘maybe’. And he will actually be included in a Vogue photo shoot. If it doesn’t work out, I can always use the experience to help me with other aspects of fashion…to know what it feels like to be under all those light. But if the whole modeling gig did work out…well, he could just imagine the look on the Lima losers’ faces when they see that other people think he’s beautiful.

“Thank you for the opportunity, Blaine. I’m hard-working and a quick learner. I’m going to put my everything into today’s photo shoot.”

Kurt goes to shake Blaine’s hand, but his enthusiasm gets the better of him and makes him reach out and give Blaine an impromptu hug. As his exhilaration starts to fade, Kurt is embarrassed…until he realizes that Blaine has wrapped his arms around Kurt’s back as well. Kurt pulls in Blaine for a gentle squeeze. He can feel Blaine’s back muscles flex and stretch underneath his arms. Kurt reluctantly releases Blaine before any awkwardness sets in.

“Thank you once again. It has been a real pleasure to meet you. I’ll try not to let you down.” Kurt face breaks out into a huge smile before leaving the office with Isabelle.

As Kurt is about to leave the office suite, he hears Blaine shout, “Hey, Kurt. Don’t forget your jacket.”

*****

While Kurt is in a quick discussion with Isabelle in the office’s reception area, Blaine is still reeling from the meeting. Kurt’s parting smile to Blaine made Kurt’s whole face light up. It was genuinely sweet, with a combination of excitement and shyness… and dare he add ‘hope’. It was ‘the look’ that Isabelle was talking about. Blaine thinks the ‘floral and pastels’ disaster might actually be saved by this young man.

Blaine’s mouth twitches as he desperately tries to suppress his laughter at Kurt returning to the office with his head down low and a pink tinge to his cheeks. He wants Kurt to stay a bit longer… to see if Kurt will give him ‘the look’ again. Blaine quickly decides on the best tactic to make it happen, and says, “Come have a seat for a moment.”

After Kurt has made himself comfortable on the sofa, Blaine continues. “So I understand that you showed up this morning for a fashion internship interview. We’re always looking for new ideas for the magazine’s fashion spreads, so tell me what you would like to see in Vogue.”

Blaine notices that Kurt is shifting uncomfortably on the sofa, and it’s obvious that the young man in front of him is nervous. Heck, most people who come to his office are nervous. Blaine has realized early on in his career that he can’t get the best out of people if they are jittery, and has learnt ways to calm people down.

“Now, just like before, take your time. I’m not expecting a detailed, thought-out idea. You are obviously a fashionista, and I really want to know what types of articles you would like to read in upcoming Vogue issues.”
Tina enters the office, checking her watch. “Blaine, you are due downstairs in…”

“I know, Tina… in 45 minutes. I won’t be that long with Kurt. In the meantime, could you bring us a glass of water?”

As Tina bustles around the office for the waters, Blaine hopes that the diversion gives Kurt enough time to compose himself and his ideas. When Tina distributes the bottles and leaves the office, she gives Blaine a smirk. Blaine rolls his eyes at her in response, and dreads the discussion they are sure to have later.

Blaine returns his attention to Kurt, who looks much more calm and composed. “Are you ready, Kurt?”

Kurt slowly nods. “Broadway has recently concluded its highest-grossing season on record. The typical audience member is a middle-aged woman, with a high annual household income. It’s predicted that the average age will drop with the increased use of technology on the stage, and highly publicized and affordable events, such as the Elsie Fest. Broadway’s demographics is the exact same that Vogue targets for its readership.”

“You seem to have a lot of facts at your fingertips, Kurt,” Blaine comments, who is very impressed.

“Well, I came to New York City from the Mid-West a few months ago to make it big on Broadway. I feel it’s my duty to understand the business aspects of my endeavors as well.”

Kurt shyly smiles before he continues, “I knew that I was in for lots of audition rejections, but no one pointed out to me how disheartening they would be. After a few months, I decided to take a break from the audition cattle calls and pursue one of my other passions - fashion.”

Blaine is intrigued with Kurt’s background and can picture him starring on a Broadway stage. He is touched that Kurt revealed something so personal about himself, and wants assure him that he understands.

“I hear you. My brother is also an actor, and it’s a tough life. Fortunately, he’s thick-skinned and has a very high opinion of himself, because that’s what it takes to keep auditioning. Now, I am intrigued where your Broadway knowledge is leading to… Please carry on.”

Blaine can see Kurt preen because of his comment, and he knows that Kurt is relaxed enough to give his further opinions. Blaine hums softly as a further indication for Kurt to continue.

“‘Hamilton’ is all the rage at the moment and the hip-hop musical really pulls in a younger audience. It’s already guaranteed to dominate almost every category at the Tony’s this year. So a Hamilton inspired photo spread would be unique, on trend and would appeal to your target readership. 21% of Broadway’s audience’s are overseas tourists. A Hamilton issue ‘tie in’ might help increase the magazine’s world-wide readership.”

Blaine is floored by Kurt’s refreshing and extraordinary idea. Having the idea set out like that makes it look glaringly obvious. However, it needs someone bright enough to make all of the connections. Blaine doesn’t know what to say, but he settles with, “I’m impressed. You’re not just a pretty face.”

Kurt beams a wide toothy smile. Blaine loves this expression on Kurt. It makes Blaine feel like there is an interesting person worth getting to know behind all Kurt’s beauty. It makes him want to say things and do things for Kurt to keep that look on his face.
“Let me mull around the idea. Is it okay if I come back to you to explore this theme further? It might be in a few weeks, as the New York Fashion Week is almost here, and I am crazily busy the entire time.”

“Of course. I’ll leave my contact details with your PA.” Tina’s ears must have been burning, because at that exact moment she barges into the office.

“Isabelle just rang. She said to tell you to stop monopolizing Kurt. She needs him pronto. Something about a photo shoot?”

“Oh, my bad. Kurt definitely needs to go. We were just wrapping up our conversation. Tell Isabelle that Kurt will meet her in the parking garage elevator lobby.”

They have their second round of goodbyes, and Blaine is secretly disappointed that it doesn’t include a hug. Kurt’s hug had felt so real and genuine – not at all like the usual air-kisses and pseudo hugs he receives.

As Kurt rises from the sofa, he turns to Blaine and smiles. “I won’t forget the jacket this time.”

Blaine laughs at the comment and bids him goodbye. As Kurt walks out of the office suite, Blaine can’t help but gaze at him as he disappears. There’s definitely more to Kurt Hummel than meets the eye. He’s the first genuine person Blaine has met in a really long time.

A voice inside Blaine reminds him that he is the editor-in-chief of an international media empire. That Kurt is just an employee. He can’t get caught up in Kurt – he’s just another wannabe model. He’s young and a newbie in New York, from a small Mid-Western town. Blaine’s been in New York City for much longer and has more sophisticated tastes. He’s ten years older after all.

A smaller voice wishes that the voice of reason would just disappear.

*****

Before returning to the May issue’s mock-ups, Blaine goes to his reception area to mooch another cup of coffee off Tina and hopefully a biscotti. Blaine approaches Tina’s desk and innocently asks, “Did Mr. Hummel leave his contact details with you?”

Tina chortles as she hands over a slip of paper.

Blaine notices a huge smirk across her face and asks, “What?!”

“Oh, Blaine… Blaine, you’ve got that look.”

Blaine lowers his head, trying to disguise his blush. “W-w-w-hat look? You’re talking nonsense! Mr. Hummel is just a model, which are a dime a dozen in this industry.”

Tina softly laughs at Blaine - he should know better than to try to disguise his blushing… his real feelings. Tina’s known him forever and can read him like a book.

“Keep telling yourself that, because your eyes tell another story. That, and you gave him more than five minutes of your time.”
Back in his office, Blaine thinks about Kurt. He seems hard-working, eager to please and polite. Blaine prays that the industry doesn’t suck these traits out of him. He thinks about how Kurt must now feel, having come to an interview for a Vogue internship that morning and now heading off to a photo shoot as a potential model. Blaine appreciates how he and Isabelle have turned Kurt’s life upside down in the course of a morning. And Blaine’s cheering for Kurt… wanting him to succeed. He really wants to give Kurt the support he needs, but doesn’t know how.

Blaine carefully types in Kurt’s contact details and saves them on his phone. Blaine wants to text ‘Good luck’ or ‘I hope you succeed’, but they seem like clichés. So without over-thinking it, Blaine types in the one word that he’s really feeling and presses send.

Courage.

Chapter End Notes

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen.

Here is the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics.

I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr.

Reviews are like raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens.

Next up: Kurt models at the photo shoot.
Walk This Way

February

Blaine exits the executive elevator and sneaks out the building’s back entrance. This day is proving to be jam-packed, and he is already running behind schedule after his meeting with Isabelle and Kurt. He doesn’t have time to spend with his fans camped out at the front entrance. Blaine feels guilty that he’s not thanking each and everyone of them for their support. But there is no time to stop… at least not today.

Blaine’s grateful that Bentley is waiting with the car motor running. He enters the back seat and the car swiftly moves away from the curb. His phone sounds with a new message and he quickly reads the text from Isabelle, I’m contacting Wes Montgomery to represent Kurt. I know you guys are friends - hope you don’t mind?

Blaine has known Wes since his Dalton Warbler days and they have remained good friends over the years. He thinks that Wes will be an excellent agent for Kurt - he’s experienced, conscientious and one of the best in the business. He quickly types in a reply, Excellent choice. No conflict of interest, but thanks for asking.

Blaine returns the phone to his jacket pocket and focuses on Vogue’s June issue. His mind is going a mile a minute thinking about how to implement the ‘Hamilton’ inspired theme and how to pitch it to Marc Jacobs.

“You look like you have the weight of the world on your shoulders,” Bentley comments, when the car stops at a traffic light.

“Yeah, I might,” Blaine replies. There is a pregnant pause before Blaine continues, “What if…”

A small grin starts to form on Bentley’s face. They have played this game many times before. Bentley knows when his boss is wrestling with an idea. “So, what if?” Bentley replies.

“What if you’re wrestling with a big problem and your experienced staff can’t sort it out… and a young whippersnapper gives you an idea – a most wonderful and spectacular idea. What would you do?”

Bentley is smart enough to realize that Blaine is facing a big dilemma at work. Bentley thinks carefully about his words before he answers. “I would take the seed of the idea, and make it grow - make it blossom into a flower. I would use my smarts, experience and connections to make it even more spectacular. However, I would never forget that flower’s roots. Cultivate it, and there could be a whole field of beautiful blossoms.”

Blaine hums in agreement and he thinks about the best way to pitch the ‘Hamilton’ idea to Marc Jacobs at lunch.
“I knew Blaine was gorgeous from the photos I’ve seen of him on Twitter, but nothing prepared me for the real thing. OMG! Why hasn’t Blaine been on the cover of Vogue already? After you left, Blaine seemed so genuinely interested to find out more about me and my fashion ideas... like they mattered. I could die a happy man today because the Blaine Anderson took notice of me. He’s just…”

Before Kurt could continue with his praise of Blaine Anderson, Isabelle interrupts. “Blaine is rather unique. He has a special way of getting the best out of people. Once he’s on your side, he’s the most supportive person I’ve come across in this industry. He really mentors people and opens up new opportunities. And yes, Blaine is good-looking. But just a warning, he is a very private person and has plenty of fanboys. Gushing over him will not win you any favors.”

As Isabelle speaks, the harsh realities of the rest of the day settle in. Kurt’s not exactly sure what is going to happen at the photo shoot, and there are plenty of logistics to work out beforehand. “What am I going to do? There’s no way I’m going to find an agent and get to Brooklyn in time for the photo shoot. I also have a shift at the Starlight diner starting in an hour.”

Isabelle smiles. “Think of me as your fairy godmother. We’re going to use my private car to get us to the photo shoot on time. On the way, I am going to get you an agent. I know exactly who to call.”

As soon as they’re in the car, Isabelle whips out her phone and starts typing a flurry of texts. In the meantime, Kurt calls Rachel and tells her an abbreviated version of what’s happening. She squeals in excitement and agrees to cover his shift at the diner.

Kurt thinks about being a model and quickly realizes that he’s out of his depth… And he starts to panic. His phone beeps with a new text message from someone he doesn’t know. He’s hesitant to look at it, but he needs a diversion to calm down his nerves. Kurt swipes his finger over the display and types in his password. The text has only one word, ‘Courage’.

It can’t have been sent by his father, Rachel or another close friend, as their contact numbers are already saved in his phone. He thinks for a few moments about who might have sent it, but ultimately he decides it didn’t matter. The fact that somebody sent him ‘courage’ at the moment that he needed it the most, well, that’s the most important thing. And the text does give him courage – the inner strength he needs to meet the strange, but exciting turn of events, that are unfolding that very day. He looks at the ‘courage’ text again and knows what to reply. “I don’t know who you are but thanks. You’ve given me courage when I needed it the most <3”

The car soon pulls along the curb of a modern Manhattan office block, and a man of Asian descent enters the car. He looks very professional in a blue pinstriped suit. “Hi, Isabelle. I cleared my diary for the rest of today and tomorrow after I received your message. Your new project sounds interesting.”

“Thank you, Wes. I owe you one. I’d like to introduce you to Kurt Hummel.”

After handshakes have been exchanged, Isabelle concisely tells Wes about Kurt’s background, their meeting with Blaine and Kurt’s involvement in today’s photo shoot. Kurt is impressed with Wes’ look of concentration and the few smart questions he interjects during the discussion.
Wes turns to Kurt and asks, “Do you know anything about modeling?”

“N-n…o,” Kurt stutters. “I was in my high school glee club, so I have learnt how to perform on stage. I’m hoping that will help.”

“Ha! I was in my high school glee club too, so I know what you mean. Relax, listen carefully to instructions and consider it the performance of your life. You’ll do just fine.”

Kurt feels assured by Wes’ kind words and replies, “I’ll try my best.”

Wes reaches into his briefcase and pulls out a few papers. “Now, onto the business aspect of things. I have here a standard one-month contract, which covers today and any future call-backs to the photo shoot. At the end of the month, we’ll discuss future arrangements, to make sure we both feel comfortable with moving ahead in your new career together.”

“Thank you, Wes. That seems extremely fair. I really appreciate you helping me at a moment’s notice.”

As Kurt reaches for the contract, Wes says, “Oh, one more thing. I should tell you that I am a personal friend of Blaine Anderson - we go a long way back. We’ve learnt how to separate our friendship and our business dealings, so I don’t foresee any conflict of interest.”

Kurt takes the contract and scribbles his name at the bottom. “I like your honesty, Wes. I have a feeling things are going to work out between us just fine.”

*****

Kurt, Isabelle and Wes enter an old warehouse in Brooklyn where the photo shoot is taking place. Free-standing lights, with long electrical cords, form a horseshoe around a small set. Behind the set is a curtained-off area and Kurt assumes that it’s the place where the models change and are prepped. On the right side of the warehouse, there is a break area, with tables and benches, and a buffet of drinks and snacks. On the left side, there is a small bank of computers with staff intensively focusing on the day’s photos. There are people rushing all around with outfit accessories, props, photography lighting meters, and cameras. Kurt feels like he has entered a whole new world.

Kurt follows Isabelle and Wes as they walk to one of the many camera tripods. Isabelle introduces him to Paul, the chief photographer, and Chandler, the wardrobe stylist. Wes looks at Kurt and whispers, “They are both the very best in their fields and are Vogue’s go-to people for feature photo spreads. You’ll be in very capable hands.”

As Isabelle explains her vision and what needs to happen with the outfit and on set, Kurt fidgets uncomfortably nearby. Wes quietly ‘translates’ some of the more technical aspects of the discussion and Kurt decides that Wes is the perfect person for him right now.

“Kurt, come with me! We’re going to get you all gussied up!” Chandler says, a blond-haired man wearing owl-shaped glasses. Kurt thinks that Chandler is not much older than him – maybe in his mid 20s. Chandler’s enthusiasm is infectious and Kurt feels himself get excited.

“Can I say that hippopotamus head brooch is awesome. That whole outfit is amazing. You must get compliments all the time.”

“Thank you, and no, I don’t… I don’t get compliments.” There’s an extra bounce in Kurt’s step as
he follows Chandler.

They enter the curtain off area of the warehouse. It is crammed with portable clothing racks, tables of accessories, mirrors, and chairs in the make-up and hair area. It contains fewer people than on the other side of the curtain, but the small space seems busier. Chandler rushes to a clothing rack and starts hunting through the outfits. He selects a suit, then rushes to another rack, pulling out a simple long-sleeved red and white checked cotton shirt. Chandler gives the clothing articles to Kurt. “Put these on. I’m going to find shoes and accessories. I’ll be right back.”

Kurt finds a quiet corner to strip and dress in the outfit. He shyly moves back in place and looks at himself in the full-length mirror. The Tom Ford suit is wine-colored and contrasts sharply with his creamy porcelain skin so that it looks white, almost translucent. The suit itself is relatively simple, with a nipped jacket and cuffed pants with a single pleat. Kurt thinks it is quite simply the most luxurious article of clothing that he has ever worn. However, Kurt feels panic rising as he sees how big the suit is on his slender build. The jacket sleeves hide his fingers, he doesn’t fill out the pants and the hemline is too long. Kurt feels his ‘moment’ is over before it begins.

“Don’t worry about the fit. I’ll sort that out,” Chandler says, as he returns with a plastic bin of shoes and accessory options. Kurt is surprised that Chandler can read his mind.

Chandler picks up a pin cushion and straps it around his wrist and palm. He soon is pulling and tucking fabric to the right position, and Kurt feels like a Voodoo doll.

“Ooh la la, you look stunning, like an English rose. Tempting enough to pluck! Now, I know exactly what this outfit needs,” Chandler gushes.

Chandler crouches over the bin, and selects a pair of suede tasseled loafers. Fortunately, they are a perfect fit. Chandler finds a tie in the same color as the suit and wraps a watch to his wrist. The final touch is a fabric pocket square that matches the shirt.

Kurt peeps into the mirror and is shocked at what he sees. The jacket fits him snugly and accentuates his slender build. The pocket square is the perfect finishing touch to the outfit. Chandler’s flattery makes him feel good, although it feels a tiny bit awkward. Kurt recognizes that Chandler is good at his job, but his overenthusiasm feels a bit much.

“Is Kurt ready for me yet?” a person calls out from the other side of the models’ dressing room.

Chandler leads Kurt over to the make-up area.

“I’m Unique. Now, have a seat and I’ll see what needs doing.”

Kurt takes a good look at the make-up artist as she inspects his complexion. Unique is a perfect name, as it sums her up nicely. She seems larger than life and is wearing a bold outfit and jewelry, but he can tell by her smile that she’s a friendly person. Kurt cautiously tells her, “Mr. Anderson told me this morning that I might look pasty under the lights…”

“Nonsense,” Unique exclaims with a roar of laughter. “Blaine’s been hanging out with his golden boy Sam far too long. Your skin is perfect and offsets the suit nicely. I’m just going to brush on some translucent powder to remove any shine. I’m going to have to touch it up from time to time during the shoot, because those lights are pretty hot.”

After applying the powder, Unique turns her attention to Kurt’s hair. “You have healthy hair that looks like it can handle a number of styles. Since we’re pressed for time, I’m just going to put a few
stray hairs back in their place, and I’m going to use hairspray to make sure that they stay there.”

As Unique works her magic, they discuss the pros and cons of various hair products. Kurt feels like he is making a new friend.

“We’re ready back here. Do you want me to send Kurt out?” Unique shouts, when she is satisfied with the result.

“We’ll start the shoot again in 15 minutes,” someone replies.

“Can I have a moment, Unique… before I have to go out there?” Kurt asks with a jittery voice.

“Certainly, take all the time you need… as long as it’s less than 15 minutes,” Unique chuckles. “I’ll meet you on the set and don’t worry, Chandler and I will be there if something doesn’t feel right. We’ve got your back.”

Kurt closes his eyes and gives himself the second - or is it third? - pep talk of the day. I can do this.

I’ve performed at Nationals, for goodness’ sake. I want to be an actor and this is just another performance. I’m going to own it.

Kurt takes a deep breath and walks onto the set.

*****

Blaine enters Le Cirque restaurant, which is world-renowned for its nouvelle cuisine. It’s not the type of restaurant that Blaine would pick on his own - it’s far too pretentious - but he knows that his appearance there will matter, to both the restaurant and his client. The maître d’ doesn’t even ask for his name, as Blaine is whisked to a table center stage in the restaurant. Marc Jacob is already seated, with a small posse of staff. ‘MJ’, as he is known in the industry, gives Blaine a terse greeting and a close-lipped smile. It’s not encouraging, and Blaine knows that he has a difficult meeting ahead of him.

“I will have the flounder ‘Le Cirque’, with the house salad on the side,” Blaine requests. Now that their lunch orders have been taken, Blaine knows that the business portion of their lunch will begin. He wants to pre-empt a discussion with MJ about Vogue’s declining readership and the inevitable request for discounted ads.

“MJ, I’ve been brainstorming ideas for the June issue and I think you’re really going to like this new concept...”

As Blaine goes through Broadway’s demographics, Hamilton’s Broadway success, its costumes, and the tie in with the Tony’s, he sees that MJ is genuinely interested. Their meals arrive and there is a pause in the conversation as the server offers freshly ground pepper and they start to eat.

After 5 minutes, Marc Jacobs places his knife and fork down on his dish. “I think you have a wonderful idea there, Blaine. It’s fresh and unique. I think I can easily adjust the designs for my summer line around ‘Hamilton’. I’ve always enjoyed designing the unexpected, so just think what I can do with ruffles.”

Marc Jacobs silences his staff as he explores the idea further with Blaine over their coffees. Once the bill is paid, he stands up and shakes Blaine’s hand. “I applaud you for thinking outside the box for the June issue. It’s exactly what Vogue needs and I can see why the Vogue Board chose you as its
new editor-in-chief. Now, can you reserve the June issue’s last cover page advertising spot for me?”

*****

Kurt is blinded by all the lights on the set as the photography technician holds a light meter close to his face. Paul tells him to relax for 10 minutes whilst they adjust the lighting and camera settings. Kurt looks around and spots Isabelle and Wes, sitting out of harm’s way. They both are smiling and giving him a thumbs-up, which Kurt takes as a good sign.

A blond model that Kurt recognizes from Vogue issues is bounding up to him with a friendly look on his face. “Hey dude! I’m Sam. You look good… A little different than the rest of us, but that’s good. Actually, it’s fantastic. I heard someone say that you haven’t modeled before. Want me to show you some moves?”

Kurt is relieved as Sam goes through a variety of poses – looking over the shoulder, head down thinking, looking out afar, and hand in the pocket. They then proceed onto the floor for the cobra and the ‘I’ve just been tickled’ pose. Sam makes it fun and Kurt feels his body loosen with the warm-ups.

Sam gives him a broad grin. “You’re going to be okay, Kurt. Just relax and do what Paul tells you. Usually the model picks out some music to listen to during the shoot. Is there anything particular you want to hear? Don’t let the techies decide. Their music tastes are rubbish.”

“Maybe some Lady Gaga?” Kurt asks.

“You’ve got it, man.” Sam walks towards the sound system and soon the music is blasting out.

It doesn't matter if you love him, or capital H-I-M
Just put your paws up
'cause you were born this way, baby

Paul calls out the first position, and Kurt loses himself to the music. The beat permeates into his inner soul – the song holds a special meaning for him. Kurt is careful to listen to Paul’s instructions, and his body is pliant when he is adjusted for the next round of shots.

“You’re doing just fine. You’re like a seasoned pro,” Unique whispers, when she is doing the necessary make-up and hair touch-ups.

I'm beautiful in my way
'Cause God makes no mistakes
I'm on the right track, baby
I was born this way
Don't hide yourself in regret
Just love yourself and you're set
I'm on the right track, baby
I was born this way

Kurt is now in his element as he moves his head and body this way and that way. He’s surprised at how much he is enjoying himself. Everyone in the warehouse is focused on him and it makes him feel special. Like he belongs, for once in his life.

“And cut,” Paul shouts. “Kurt, you were terrific. Everybody, we’re going to stop for a late lunch break. We’ll resume again in an hour.”
There is a mass rush to the break area as the staff swarm around the buffet table. Kurt smiles when he sees Isabelle and Wes approach. Isabelle gives him a huge hug and squeals, “You were wonderful, Kurt. You were everything I thought you would be. I can’t believe that we now have our new angle on the floral and pastels theme.”

When Isabelle releases him, Wes approaches and gives Kurt a gentle pat on the back. “Nice job, Kurt. I’m now kicking myself. I should’ve had you sign a 5-year contract in the car.”

Kurt laughs at his joke, and can’t help but feel incredible. The compliments are like butterflies fluttering in his belly – only the good type. He feels like he is flying and floating, and never wants to touch the ground again. Before he can respond to Isabelle and Wes, he feels a tug on his arm.

“Come with me. You need something to eat to keep your energy level high. And I’m going to answer any little question you have,” Unique says.

Isabelle nods at Kurt as a sign for him to follow Unique. The buffet table now has slim pickings, but Kurt manages to serve himself a healthy salad. He finds Unique at a table, with only one man opposite. Kurt slides down the bench and sits next to Unique. “Kurt, this is Steve.”

Kurt instantly recognizes Steve as the technician who took light meter readings of him on set. He’s middle-aged and heavy-set, with slightly greasy hair, and he is wearing unfashionable glasses. “I remember you. However, I wasn’t sure exactly what you were doing with the little black box. Could you maybe tell me about your job?”

The older man’s eyes pop open and he starts to fidget in his seat. Kurt can see a few beads of sweat form in his hairline. It’s obvious that Steve is nervous. Kurt gives him a gentle smile and adds, “I’m serious. It looked like your job was important, judging from all the different angles you moved the lights afterwards. What does a photography light meter do?”

Kurt sees that Steve is calming down as he slowly retrieves the meter from his pocket. Steve talks about f-stops, amp calculations, white balance, and back lighting. While Kurt can’t understand half of what Steve says, he appreciates that the technician’s job is a lot more complex than he had originally thought. Steve’s currently explaining the nuances of directional lighting, when he is interrupted by a squeaky voice.

“Oh… There you are, Kurt. I’ve been looking for you all over. You were amazing up there! Your hair looked so silky and your skin was…”

“Shoo, fly, shoo,” Unique interrupts, with an annoyed look on her face. “Don’t you have anything better to do than to spew nonsense, Chandler?”

Chandler sheepishly looks down. “Well, Isabelle and Paul told me that Kurt’s going to use the same outfit for the day.” He turns to Kurt and extends his phone. “Say, Kurt, can I have your phone number? You know, in case I discover any more interesting brooches. I can text you when I find them.”

Kurt feels put on the spot. On the one hand, he doesn’t want to lead Chandler on, because there will definitely not be a first coffee date. On the other hand, Chandler is friendly and appears harmless, and it isn’t a bad idea to make some friends in the fashion industry. He quickly types in his contact details and returns the phone to Chandler.

Chandler does a few small jumps when he sees Kurt’s contact details in his phone. In his excitement,
Chandler leaves the break area without even a goodbye.

“Attention, everybody,” Paul shouts, and the staff in the warehouse quickly quieten down. “He’s almost here. The lunch break is over.”

There is an increasing noise level as the staff spring to life, dispose of their lunch trays, and get back into their positions. Kurt can feel the excitement build up, but he doesn’t understand why. He turns to Unique and asks, “What’s going on?”

She laughs as she rises from the bench. “Oh, you’ll find out soon enough. I won’t spoil it for you.”

Chapter End Notes

Song used during the photo shoot was ‘Born This Way’ by Lady Gaga (although I’m sure you all knew that).

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. Here is the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics.

I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr. Reviews are like the first ray of sunshine on a rainy spring day.

I’m traveling all day tomorrow and so I posted this chapter one day early. For the next six weeks, I will be constantly on the move, so if I can’t post on a Saturday, I will post earlier. I promise to give you one chapter a week.

I am so blown away by your comments and kudos. Every time my e-mail pings with a notification, I get so excited. I thank every reader from the bottom of my heart for sticking with it <3.

Next up: Blaine arrives at the photo shoot.
Wannabe

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

_Oooh, you've got to_

Let your body move to the music
_Oooh, you've got to just_

Let your body go with the flow
_Oooh, you've got to…Vogue_

_Vogue by Madonna_

When Blaine climbs into the car after his lunch at ‘Le Cirque’, Bentley can tell that his boss’s meeting was a success. Blaine’s worry lines and frowns have been replaced with sparkling eyes and a huge smile. “I trust the meeting went well?”

“It went better than well. It went crazily, fantastically well - off-the-charts well,” Blaine replies, as he gives a fist pump in the air.

“Well, I’m glad to hear that. I take it I’m now driving you to the warehouse in Brooklyn, where the photo shoot is taking place?”

“Yes, Bentley. And I have a good feeling about that, too.”

Blaine rests his head back against the plush leather seat, and laughs to himself when he thinks about the lunch with Marc Jacobs. It had gone better than Blaine could ever have expected. MJ likes the Hamilton idea – he likes it so much that he’s changing his summer line’s designs around it. _How cool is that_! With MJ backing the idea, Blaine knows that the concept is a winner and will get Vogue back on track to its trend-making reputation and increase its circulation.

The icing on the cake, though, is that MJ reserved the last cover page advertising spot for the June issue, without negotiating a discount. Blaine mentally calculates the revenues from the most expensive ad page in the magazine, and knows that Vogue’s finance director will be very, very happy with him.

Blaine’s mind is buzzing with ideas. He texts Tina to make an appointment with Mark Townsend, a leading New York City hair stylist. He mentally notes to himself that he needs to convince Sam to grow his hair again. Long hair will definitely be coming back in fashion this summer. He sends Tina another text asking her to book a block of seats for the Tony Awards in June. _Maybe Vogue should host an after-party the night of the Tony’s? Perhaps Marc Jacobs will stump up the funds, especially if models attend wearing his new line?_ He types this idea into his tablet.

_So raise your glass if you are wrong, in all the right ways, all my underdogs…_ blares in the car as Blaine’s phone vibrates. Blaine notices that Bentley is looking at him in the rearview mirror, quietly smiling.

“Hey, Wes. Long time, no hear. What’s happening? Did Isabelle contact you about Kurt Hummel?”

“Yes, she did. I’m glad that she cleared it with you first. I don’t want any awkwardness between us.”

“Of course there won’t be. We’ve worked together in the past, and have managed to keep it
professional,” Blaine reassures his friend. “Are you at the photo shoot?”

“Yes, I am. I’ll have to buy my PA a huge bouquet of flowers because she’s cancelling all my commitments over the next few days. I’ve agreed to represent Kurt for a month. I can tell you now, I plan to offer him a longer-term contract.”

Blaine finds this a very interesting bit of news. Wesley is usually so cautious about representing new modeling talent. “Oh really, Wes? Do tell.”

“Well, I’ll let you see for yourself when you get here. I’ll just say that I think you are going to like his look.”

Blaine throws another fist pump in the air and he hears Bentley gently chuckling in the background. “It’s been a while since we last met to shoot the breeze. Once the New York Fashion Week is over, let’s get together for a karaoke night.”

Wes chuckles. “Some things never change, do they, Blaine? You’ve always enjoyed the spotlight. Okay, yes, I’ll contact Tina to sort out a date and I’ll also let Paul know that you are on your way.”

Blaine presses the ‘end call’ button on his phone and his thoughts drift to Kurt Hummel. In the space of an hour’s meeting this morning, Kurt has turned things around for him and Vogue. Kurt gave him the kernel of an idea that Marc Jacobs was on board with. And according to Wes, Kurt might be the one to fix the ‘floral and pastels’ problem in the May issue. He thinks of Kurt as his good luck charm, and rushes out of the car as soon as it stops in front of the Brooklyn warehouse.

Blaine enters the warehouse and senses the buzz. He knows that it’s in large part because of his presence. During Anna Wintour’s long reign at Vogue, she never once stepped foot on the set of a photo shoot – she thought it was beneath her. However, Blaine thinks a bit differently from her. He feels that he can get the best out of people if they know that everyone’s contribution matters to a common goal. Blaine waves at the staff and walks toward James, whose wife is suffering from cancer. “How’s Linda?” Blaine asks, genuinely concerned.

After a few moments of discussion with James, Blaine eyes Sam, who is rushing over to him. Blaine knows Sam very well and can sense that he’s excited. Blaine can’t help but zoom in on Sam’s lips – they are so plump and look so inviting and so ki…. Blaine shakes his head to get rid of the thought. Looking at Sam’s lips is an old habit from his Harvard days, when he had an unrequited crush on Sam. Blaine hasn’t thought of Sam in that way for a long time, but old habits die hard.

Sam places his arm around Blaine’s shoulder and pulls him in for a hug. Sam then twirls, bats his eyelashes and asks, “Do I look pretty in pink?”

Blaine knows that Sam is referring to the ‘floral and pastels’ theme of the photo shoot, and replies in his campiest voice, “Just marvelous, darling.”

The staff nearby laugh and Sam gives Blaine a fist bump. Blaine soon spots Kurt and he smiles and waves, as he heads to the techies’ computer area in the warehouse.

*****

Kurt smiles and waves back at Blaine, but he soon realizes that Blaine hasn’t noticed. However, Kurt has noticed. Every. Single. Thing. As soon as Blaine Anderson walked into the warehouse, all eyes shot to him. It wasn’t about his status as Vogue’s editor-in-chief. It was all about his personal
charisma. Blaine’s smile was warm and welcoming. As he greeted staff, his body language sent the message that he was powerful, but kind. Blaine looked like he was comfortable with his position, comfortable with the photo shoot, and comfortable with the staff. Blaine made people feel like they were the only ones in the room. Kurt saw that Blaine had stopped to talk to one of the kitchen staff, clearing off the tables. The moment might have been brief, but the look in Blaine’s eyes had been so sincere.

Kurt had certainly noticed Blaine’s interaction with Sam – and Blaine’s glance at his lips. Any person who was connected to social media sites knew about ‘Blam’, and it had trended every time they were spotted out together. In the past, Kurt wasn’t convinced about ‘Blam’ being an item from what he had seen on the Internet. While the couple looked like they enjoyed each other’s company, they were missing ‘the look’ of romantic love - the little tell-tale signs that were lacking. There was no special squeeze that lovers make when they think that no-one is looking. They didn’t sit closely with their legs intimately pressed together. They didn’t share secret glances that only lovers do when they are in a crowd. In Kurt’s opinion, they looked more like best friends.

However, after the ‘lip glance’ that Blaine just made, Kurt isn’t sure. His musings are interrupted as Unique calls him to her make-up area. He shakes his head to get rid of these thoughts and moves toward the models’ dressing curtain.

*****

Blaine carefully studies the photos that were taken of Kurt earlier in the day. He gasps when he sees Kurt in the wine-red colored suit. On a professional level, Blaine can instantly tell that Kurt was made to be in front of a camera – the photo makes Kurt appear as if he is drawing in and enticing the viewers. Kurt’s lithe build looks perfect in the Tom Ford suit and Blaine can’t tear away his gaze away, even if he tries. He recognizes Kurt’s beauty, but… Blaine doesn’t see ‘the look’ in the photos – the radiant smile that Kurt had given him in his office earlier in the day. The smile that had seemed so genuine… and tugged at his heartstrings. Blaine knows that the camera hasn’t yet captured all that is Kurt Hummel.

Blaine intuitively knows what he needs to do – get the very best of Kurt in the photo shoot, and make him smile. Blaine walks to the set. “Kurt, can you please position yourself so that your back is against the set?”

Kurt quickly moves against the back wall, looking as if he’s afraid that he might crash against the background curtain.

“Now, I’m going to position your right knee up,” Blaine instructs, as he gently moves Kurt’s leg. As the techies do their final round of light placement, Blaine leans in close and whispers, “Courage.”

*****

Kurt feels a fire in his body rushing from the tips of his toes to the top of his head. He now realizes who has sent the earlier text message. Kurt feels a mix of emotions rush through him because of that one word – ‘courage’. He can’t believe that the Blaine Anderson realized what he needed to hear and made the effort to tell him – twice. And it makes Kurt want to give his all to this photo shoot and make Blaine proud of him.

Kurt feels more comfortable now about what is expected of him during the afternoon photo shoot. However, he is nervous and excited at the same time with Blaine in attendance. He wants to make a good impression with Blaine and give him exactly what he asks for.
The Lady Gaga music starts up and Blaine shouts, “Stop! I think we need to spice things up a bit. Sam - what do you think?”

“Oh, yeah!” Sam replies as he rushes to the sound system.

Kurt hears a deafening roar from the staff, which echoes from the warehouse’s walls. Kurt turns to Unique and asks, “What’s happening?”

Unique chortles and replies, “It doesn’t happen very often, but when Blaine decides to sing, it’s magic. He’s famous for his impromptu performances - just listen and see.”

Soon the warehouse is filled with music. Blaine starts snapping his fingers and swaying his hips. Blaine starts to sing.

So, I'll tell you what I want, what I really really want,
So tell me what you want, what you really really want,

Kurt can’t think of any words to describe Blaine - it’s as if he’s all five Spice Girls at once. He can barely hear Blaine’s voice due to the staff clapping to the music, but Kurt can see his lips move. He laughs at all the silly faces Blaine’s making. Kurt can even see Wes doing a gentle side shuffle to the music.

If you want my future, forget my past
If you wanna get with me, better make it fast
Now don't go wasting my precious time
Get your act together we could be just fine

Kurt realizes that Blaine knows all the dance movements for the song, like he has studied the video a thousand times before. He quickly inhales as Blaine wiggles his sweet ass to the music and quickly throws his head back to look at Kurt and to wink. Kurt feels his whole body tingle and he can’t help but smile. Oh dear god, did Blaine just jump on a table?

If you wanna be my lover, you gotta get with my friends
Make it last forever friendship never ends,
If you wanna be my lover, you have got to give,
Taking is too easy, but that's the way it is.

As the song fades out, Kurt’s ears deafen with the loud hoots and hollers of everyone present. Unique comes on set to inspect his hair and make-up. “Well, I’ve seen a few impromptu performances in my time, but I’ve never seen Blaine sing his little heart out quite like that.”

*****

The staff surround Blaine and give him high fives and slaps on his back. As he brushes the sweat from his brow, Blaine thinks that maybe his performance was just what the photo shoot needed for staff morale, and most importantly, for Kurt. Paul calls him over to the computer bank to take a look at the new shots. Blaine is amazed at what he sees. The new photos have captured everything he saw in Kurt earlier that day. Kurt is positively beaming in the photos, and a small voice in Blaine’s head wonders if that is because of ‘Vogue’s editor-in-chief’ or because Kurt is happy to see him. Blaine
Blaine looks around for Kurt and sees him engaged in conversation with Steve, the photography technician, over by the camera lights. Blaine knows that Steve is normally a very shy guy, but now his whole face is lit up as he tilts the lights’ umbrellas. Kurt looks genuinely interested in the conversation and seems to be asking questions to draw Steve out of his shell. Blaine feels jealous – he wants to be the one to hang out with Kurt.

Paul claps his hands to get everyone’s attention. “It’s a wrap, everyone.” There are cheers all around - the weekend is about to start and nobody wants to work overtime.

Kurt rushes over and gives Blaine one of his signature hugs. Blaine is a tactile person, but hugs have never felt quite like this before. He feels Kurt’s soft skin against his and Kurt’s arms gently squeeze his back. Blaine closes his eyes and melts into it. The hug feels so genuine and real. It makes him feel connected and cared for. It feels so right. Kurt’s warmth cocoons him from the outside world and he desperately wants to stay there. He can smell the scent of Kurt’s freshly laundered shirt and something that is distinctly Kurt. It could have been 2 seconds or 2 hours later when Kurt pulls away; Blaine has lost all sense of time. He quickly shakes himself back into reality, because this is not professional behavior.

“Blaine, I could never have done the photo shoot without you – your words of courage, the song… everything! You are the most amazing person I have ever met. And even if this day doesn’t lead to anything, it has been the best day of my life. Thank you for giving it to me.” Kurt gives Blaine’s shoulder a gentle squeeze before heading to the dressing room.

Blaine is stunned. Most wannabe models hint at contracts and suggest ‘afters’ to discuss how the photo session went. Blaine knows exactly what is on offer and never accepts the invitation. However, Kurt is a different story all together. His gushing seems so genuine and so totally about Blaine as a person and not about what he could do for Kurt as Vogue’s editor-in-chief. Maybe I should take the risk and get to know him better.

Blaine’s thoughts are interrupted by Isabelle and Wes, who are approaching from the computer area. Isabelle’s face is lit up with a huge smile. “The afternoon photos of Kurt are just perfect. I just knew that Kurt was the solution to liven up the ‘floral and pastels’ theme. Tell me you’re going to use him in the May issue.”

“I’m also impressed,” Wes adds. “I’ve never seen such a natural in front of the camera. Just think what he’ll be capable of with a bit of coaching.”

Blaine nods his head in agreement. “I’ve come to the same conclusion as the two of you. Kurt is made for the camera. I would like to use a photo of him for the May issue. However, we haven’t discussed the business side of things. I’m prepared to offer Kurt a six-month exclusive modeling contract with the standard terms and rate of pay. The contract would be effective immediately and run until the end of September.”

Wes takes a moment to consider the deal on the table. “That seems very reasonable and fair to me. Kurt’s lucky to have such a long contract on offer after one photo session. I’ll have to discuss this with Kurt, but I see no reason why he wouldn’t agree to these terms.”

“Great. Isabelle, can you free up your day on Monday? I already know that Wes is available. I’m
thinking that you two should give Kurt one of your infamous makeovers. Nothing too drastic, but a tweak here and there. And while I approve of Kurt’s bold wardrobe choice, take him to the Vogue vaults. He needs a signature style for potential public engagements on Vogue’s behalf.”

“Absolutely,” Isabelle squeals. “I can already see Kurt in vintage Alexander McQueen.”

“I’ll let you two work out the details. I’ve got to go and get dressed for the National Awards dinner tonight. Wes, make sure you get back to me soon about Kurt’s decision on the contract.”

“Sure thing, Blaine. And good luck tonight. You certainly deserve to win that coveted award.”

*****

Kurt hums to himself as he enters the dressing room. He doesn’t think he has ever been happier in his whole life. The photo shoot was so much fun, particularly in the afternoon, when Blaine arrived. Blaine had made him feel like he was the only person who mattered in the warehouse. Kurt chuckles as he thinks about Blaine’s performance. Blaine is the total package – brains, looks, body, and talent. Kurt wonders how much of the song and the flirty moves had been directed at him. Kurt sits down to take off the make-up and Unique appears and asks, “So, how did you like your first day as a model?”

“I absolutely loved everything about it. I loved the outfit and how it was ‘tailored’ to fit my body. I loved how you did my make-up so that I still looked like myself – natural. We seem to think alike about my hair… And I have to tell you, I don’t let just anyone touch my hair.”

Unique chuckles at the compliments. “Anything else you loved?”

“Well, is it egotistical to say that I loved being the center of attention on set? That it was thrilling people saw me as a person of beauty and not as a ‘gay-face’ freak? When I was on the set, I felt like I was my own acting a part.”

“Honey, you’ve been hanging out with the wrong people. There is nothing wrong with enjoying people’s attention. I personally live for it,” Unique comments. “Anything else?”

“I enjoyed learning new things, not only about modeling but also the behind-the-scenes stuff.” Kurt pauses for a moment and adds softly, “And of course, there was meeting Blaine.”

Unique smiles knowingly and nods at Kurt to continue.

“Blaine is a one-of-a-kind person. He knew how to get the best out of me, whether it was through kind words or his impromptu performance. He made me feel safe in an unknown environment.”

Unique is about add her comments about Blaine when Chandler runs over and gushes, “I’ve just seen the photos from this afternoon. You look even more gorgeous than you did this morning, and I didn’t even think that was possible! I’m not sure what you are doing this weekend, but maybe we can go clothes shopping together. I know some stores that have outfits that would look amazing on you.”

Kurt gives Chandler a polite grin. Whilst he enjoys the compliments, Chandler is fawning over him just a bit too much. Kurt can’t help but wish that he was having this conversation with Blaine instead. “I have to work double shifts this weekend. Besides, I don’t have any money to go clothes shopping. My paychecks all go toward essentials like food, rent and the subway.”
Chandler has a disappointed look on his face, but he quickly perks up with a new idea. “Well, we could go window shopping some time, so that when you do have money, you will know what to buy.”

Kurt diplomatically replies, “As fun as that sounds, I’ll have to take a rain-check. I’ll call you when I have a spare afternoon. I’m off now. It was wonderful meeting you.”

Kurt notices that Chandler is walking toward him with open arms, as if expecting a hug. Kurt gives him a small wave and then turns quickly around to give Unique a hug. Kurt whispers in her ear, “The other thing I loved today was meeting you. No matter what happens with my modeling career, I hope that we can become friends.”

Unique gives Kurt a reassuring nod and a wink, “Honey, I’d like to see you try and get rid of me.”

When Kurt exits the dressing area, he notices Blaine and Sam in coordinating tuxes, ready to attend the National Awards that evening. He takes a good long look at Blaine and concludes that he has never looked more gorgeous. The Brooks Brothers tux fits him perfectly and his curls have the right amount of gel to stop frizzling. He can see Blaine’s body actually hum in excitement for the evening’s event. Sam and Blaine look so handsome together and Kurt is pea green with envy. They are laughing with Isabelle and Wes, and Sam casually puts his arm around Blaine’s shoulders.

Seeing Sam and Blaine together in real life, Kurt comes to the conclusion that the social media are right - they really are a couple. Kurt feels disappointed, but he quickly discards that thought. Of course Blaine has a boyfriend. He’s 28 years old, successful, good-looking, charming, and smart. Blaine’s the type of man that Kurt admires – and is attracted to. It’s like someone knew the recipe to produce a perfect man, and it turned out to be Blaine.

Before leaving, Blaine looks around the warehouse and smiles and waves at Kurt when he notices him. Kurt responds in kind and can’t help but think ‘why are the good ones always taken?’

Isabelle and Wes are soon by his side and both have smiles from ear to ear. Kurt can only think this is good news, but isn’t sure what to expect. “So what happens now?” he asks.

Wes replies, “Well, Kurt you did a fantastic job today, and the photos prove it. Do you want to take a look?”

Kurt cautiously agrees and walks toward the computers in the techies’ area. As they click through the photos, Kurt cannot believe what he is seeing. They start with the photos taken during the morning and Kurt is stunned at how professional looking they are. He is also amazed at how he looks – as if he truly belongs in a Vogue photo spread. However, when they start looking at the photos taken in the afternoon, Kurt is shocked by the expression on his face. The look conveys that he is excited, happy and genuinely interested in something… or somebody. It’s a look of infatuation, and Kurt hopes that no one else sees ‘heart eyes’ as well.

“Impressive, aren’t they?” Isabelle asks.

“I just can’t believe that it’s me,” Kurt replies. “I mean, I know it is me, but I didn’t know that I could look so sophisticated and happy at the same time. So what happens next?”

Wes joins in the conversation. “I had a brief word with Blaine after the photo shoot and Vogue is offering you a six-month exclusive contract. We can go over the terms and conditions in the car.”
when we take you home. It looks like you have a promising career in modeling ahead of you.”

Kurt can’t believe his ears. “Really, you’re not messing with me?”

“All right,” Isabelle pipes up. “When we drop you off, you need to rest up over the weekend, because you are going to be very busy Monday morning. Wes and I will pick you up at 9 am for a ‘make-over’. Nothing too drastic, but we are going to put in place everything you need to become a successful model. Does that sound good to you?”

Kurt replies, “I’m in. Make-overs are like crack to me.”

Chapter End Notes

Song used for Wes’ ringtone was ‘Raise Your Glass’ by Pink.
Song Blaine performed at the photo shoot was ‘Wannabe’ by the Spice Girls.

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. Here is the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics.

I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr. Reviews are like a secret admirers on Valentine’s Day.

Next up: The national awards dinner and Kurt’s make-over.
Blaine is lost in thought as Bentley drives him and Sam to the National Awards ceremony. He knows that he should be focusing on the red carpet, the fans, meeting and networking with people, and of course the awards. However, his thoughts are still on Kurt and the afternoon photo shoot.

“Blaine, you have ‘the look’ on your face – the look that tells me that you’re smitten with Vogue’s newest male model,” Sam teases.

“Huh? What did you say?” Blaine answers as he slowly comes out of his daydreams.

Sam chuckles as he repeats his observation.

“Sam, I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Blaine replies, blushing. “There’s just a lot going on at work at the moment. Yes, Kurt is a find, but a professional one. You know what my views are about combining work with pleasure. It’s not going to happen.”

“Well, rules are meant to be broken. And I can tell you that Kurt has ‘the look’ as well.”

“Really?” Blaine asks tentatively.

“Dude, you saw how Kurt looked in the photos taken when you were singing. He didn’t look like that during the morning photo session. Trust me, Blaine. Kurt is really into you.” Sam isn’t going to push Blaine on the subject, so he looks out the window and quietly hums, ‘She’s got the look, She’s got the look, What in the world can make a brown-eyed girl turn blue.’

Blaine isn’t sure how to interpret what Sam has just said. Yes, there was a remarkable difference in Kurt’s expression in the photos taken during the afternoon session. It could be because of him, but more likely, it was because Kurt had the morning’s modeling experience under his belt. He had noticed that Kurt had stared at Sam more than once this afternoon. Maybe Sam is more Kurt’s type and ‘the look’ Sam had referred to was for him. Sam’s has always been a bit oblivious when it came to gay men crushing on him. Blaine could write a book on the subject matter.

Blaine doesn’t understand what ‘look’ Sam and Tina had referred to on his face – he can’t visualize it. Blaine thinks that his face had a warm and welcoming expression this afternoon, just like he had for all the Vogue staff. However, he can’t be quite sure. He has never been taken by a man so quickly and felt such an immediate connection as he feels with Kurt. Blaine thinks back on his past relationships and is aware that he has never really been in love before. He’s never had the type of loving and long-term relationship that he craves.
“We’re in the queue for the red carpet drop-off. It should take about five minutes before it’s your turn to walk the carpet,” Bentley announces.

Sam and Blaine quickly look into a handheld mirror to check that their hair is still perfectly styled. They each give the other a once-over to ensure that ties are straight, buttons are all done up, and there is no lint on the jackets.

“Get ready to leave the car in one minute,” Bentley reports. “And Blaine, good luck tonight. The whole family is livestreaming the awards at home and they’ve promised to record it for you.”

“Thanks, Bentley,” Blaine replies. “I’ll give you the 15-minute heads-up when we plan to leave.”

When they exit the car, there are bodyguards to help them along the red carpet. Tina is also there to ensure that all goes smoothly before entering the event venue. The crowd of adoring fans are chanting, “Blam! Blam! Blam!” Blaine and Sam are blinded by the cameras flashing. Blaine approaches the barricade to sign autographs and have photos taken with his fans. He knows that he could take home anyone of them tonight, but he doesn’t – never has and never wants to. Blaine notices a short and slender boy, who looks about 13 years old, being pushed away from the barricade by some of the more aggressive fangirls, and he looks distraught. Blaine waves at him through the crowd and announces, “Let that boy through. I want to talk to him.”

The fangirls reluctantly let the boy pass until he’s right in front of the barrier, and Blaine can see that he’s shaking with nerves. Blaine notices that he has a photo in one hand and an envelop in the other. “Thank you for coming out tonight to meet me. Trust me, the fangirls are far more intimidating than me. What’s your name? Would you like me to sign the photo?”

Blaine can see the boy visibly relax as he hands over the photo. “I’m Finley, and thanks for noticing me. It seems like I’m invisible to most people.” Finley pauses briefly before he continues. “You’re my idol and I’ve been following you on-line for a few years now. I wrote this letter to you describing how you’ve helped me. I think I’m gay and I have nobody to talk to.”

“Well, now you do, Finley. If you go to the PFLAG website, you will find a lot of groups and resources available to you right here in New York City. It really does help to know that you are not alone. There are people that will support you, no matter what, no questions asked. I’ll read your letter tomorrow when my life slows down after tonight’s event. I want to give your thoughts the attention they deserve. Now, give me your phone and I’ll take a selfie of the two of us.”

As Blaine takes a selfie with Finley, he is reminded of why it is important to have a good connection with his fans. He has learnt that he can make a positive difference in people’s lives. And if that means that he is subjected to a social media frenzy, then so what. It’s all worth it if he gets to meet people like Finley.

Blaine and Sam are kept busy signing autographs and taking selfies, while Tina is collecting gifts from the fans. The bodyguards are soon nudging them to start walking along the red carpet. The paparazzi are out in full force and are shouting out their names to catch their attention. Blaine stays close to Sam as they walk arm in arm along the red carpet. They stop at the E! Online area that has a cameraman, boom operator and Maria Menounos, their star reporter. E! Online has paid a lot of money for exclusive video rights and attendees are expected to stop and talk to Maria.

“And here we have Blaine Anderson, Vogue’s editor-in-chief, with Sam Evans, their hottest model. Tell me, Blaine, how are you feeling tonight?”
“Maria, I’m feeling great. The National Awards ceremony is always a highlight of the year in our industry. It’s a time to give recognition to the many great magazines in this country. I’m looking forward to the event.”

“Vogue has been nominated for numerous awards, including ‘Magazine of the Year’. What do you think your chances are of winning the coveted award?”

Blaine considers his response carefully. He wants to come across as confident, but humble at the same time. “It’s quite an honor for Vogue to be nominated for so many awards. We at Vogue have worked very hard to ensure that the magazine consistently produces high quality and trendsetting articles. Vogue is up against some very stiff competition for the awards and I’d like to think that we are all winners.”

“How has Vogue handled Anna Wintour’s retirement and what have been your main contributions?” the reporter asks.

“Anna Wintour’s retirement was well planned and the hand-over has gone very smoothly. The magazine business has evolved over the past decade or two with an increasing emphasis on its on-line content. We are very committed to Vogue’s website and have recently hired Isabelle Wright to head it up. She has fresh ideas and the content, both in terms of photos and content, are first class.”

“Lastly, you and Sam look so handsome in matching suits. Who are you wearing?”

“Brooks Brothers, of course.”

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After some small talk and schmoozing in the foyer, Blaine and Sam approach the Vogue table at the ceremony, where Anna Wintour is already seated. Air kisses and fake hugs are exchanged before Blaine and Sam take their seats. The conversation between Blaine and Anna is cordial, but strained. Blaine thinks that Anna Wintour has a rather smug look on her face, as if she wants Blaine to fail and Vogue not to receive any awards. However, Blaine has learnt the art of idle chit-chat and keeps the conversation flowing as the meal is served.

“….and the winner of Magazine of the Year is Vogue,” the presenter announces. Blaine gives Sam a kiss on the cheek and they are blinded by the multitude of camera lights flashing to capture the tender moment. There is no doubt that ‘Blam’ and the photos will be trending on Twitter tonight.

Blaine goes up to the podium to accept the award and he makes a heartfelt speech about how Anna Wintour is his mentor, even though it’s not true. He has worked hard to get his position and she has blocked him every step of the way. However, although Anna is now retired, she still wields influence in the fashion industry and could make Blaine’s job that much more difficult, so Blaine wants to keep on her good side.

Blaine is still on a high from the day, so he continues his speech focusing on Vogue’s future. “I’ve just come from the main photo shoot for the May issue and Vogue has a fresh face to reveal. The June issue is also one to watch out for because it will combine fashion and the arts. I hope to be back here on the podium this time next year because Vogue has some unique and trendsetting ideas for the future.” After a roar of applause, Blaine smiles and returns to his seat.

Sebastian Smythe, editor-in-chief of Elle magazine, Vogue’s main competitor, is in the audience and wonders what Blaine is up to. He makes it his mission to find out.
On Saturday morning, Kurt and Rachel are eating a late breakfast of bagels and coffee in the Bushwick loft. Kurt’s body feels a bit stiff after holding so many poses during yesterday’s photo shoot. However, he has a Starlight Diner shift starting at 2pm and needs to keep his energy level high. The conversation revolves around yesterday’s turn of events at Vogue.

“I then took a look at the photos and they are really something. I asked Wes what happens next and he said that Vogue has offered me an exclusive contract through September. I can hardly believe it! Wes and Isabelle will be here on Monday morning to go over the contract details for me to sign. And then they’re taking me for a make-over.”

Rachel doesn’t say much, but Kurt can tell that she is envious that things are working out for him. After she finishes her peppermint tea, Rachel finally responds. “Kurt, that’s great news. I’m so glad that things are working out for you, even if it wasn’t what you really wanted to do.”

Kurt interrupts, “But Rachel, you were the one who told me that I should open myself up to new experiences and different options. That is exactly what I have done! Maybe you should take a leaf from your own book and consider doing something other than Broadway.”

Rachel shakes her head. “I understand what you’re saying, but it’s different for me. I’ve worked hard my entire life to be a star on Broadway and I am quite determined to succeed.”

Rachel pours another cup of coffee from the pot before continuing. “I’m so proud of you exploring different options. It’s made me think about my own priorities. I feel stuck in a rut as well with NYADA, the Starlight Diner and the endless auditions for Funny Girl. So I’ve decided to take control over my destiny – I’m going to visit the Funny Girl producers on Monday and convince them that I’m the only person to consider for the role of Fanny Brice.”

Kurt isn’t sure what to say – he has never felt like a role model before, and certainly not for Rachel Berry. He gives her a warm hug and says, “Well, we better sort out your outfit… But after I call Gunther and quit the Starlight Diner job.”

Wes and Isabelle arrive at the loft promptly on Monday morning. An hour is spent going through the fine print of both the Vogue contract and Wes’s agency agreement. Wes hands over a Cross fountain pen for Kurt to sign on the dotted lines.

“As Kurt signs the contracts, he asks, “Wes, can I ask you a favor? Can I please keep this pen as a memento of my first big job?”

Wes smiles. “Sure, Kurt.”

The car stops at a nondescript warehouse in Queens and Isabelle signs them into the guestbook at the security checkpoint. As Isabelle leads the way along series of corridors, she explains to Kurt and

Monday, 9 am – Vogue’s Vaults
Wes the purpose of the building. “At the beginning of the 1900s, Vogue decided to keep and maintain all the outfits adorning its issues. The exact location is a closely guarded secret because the collection is worth millions – actually, it’s priceless. Only a select few work in the vaults and even a smaller number get to visit them. Blaine has authorized your entry, Kurt.”

Isabelle shows a security guard their passes and a thick fireproof door is opened. Inside is a huge room filled with rack upon rack of designer men’s wear. Kurt feels like a kid in a candy store and doesn’t even know where to begin to look.

“Vogue will be loaning you a dozen outfits to wear for when you attend public events, representing Vogue. We need to come up with a signature style for you. I’m thinking of a classic look – vintage outfits from the last half of the 20th century – paired with those whimsical accessories that you wear so well.”

Kurt agrees with that plan, and the three of them pull out a variety of potential outfits. After an hour of trying on, agreeing and discarding options, the outfits are decided upon. There are ones designed by Ralph Lauren, Alexander McQueen, Gucci, and Christian Dior. An elderly lady comes to pin the suits for further tailoring, so that they emphasize Kurt’s body in all the right ways. She confirms that they will be delivered to Isabelle at Vogue within a week.

Monday, 1pm - E at Equinox gym

After a quick lunch, Wes directs the driver to a celebrity gym, where he registers Kurt for a six-month membership. Soon, the three of them are whisked away to meet with Chrystal, Kurt’s new fitness trainer.

Wes initiates the conversation. “Chrystal, I’d like to introduce you to Kurt Hummel, the newest model I have on my books. He has a six-month contract with Vogue. Kurt’s in good shape, but he needs to tone his stomach and arm muscles. He has a slender build and we want to keep it that way. No bulking out, just a little more definition of what is already there.”

Chrystal has Kurt step on a machine to calculate his Body Mass Index (BMI). She reviews the results and hands them over to Wes and Isabelle. Chrystal then gives Kurt a thorough look-over and pronounces her verdict. “I can see why you have signed him onto your books, Wes. I have the perfect program in mind for him. We’ll start with one-on-one sessions with me three times a week, focusing on equipment that will help his overall muscle tone and definition. I’ll also provide Kurt with a daily exercise routine that he can easily do at home. I think Kurt would also benefit from some aerobic exercise. You are just in luck because we recently received the franchise rights for the SS boot-camp 101 aerobics regime – it’s all the rage at the moment for its quick results. If Kurt does the class twice a week, combined with our private sessions and daily exercises at home, Kurt will be in even better shape in no time. Can you start tomorrow?”

Kurt smiles and desperately tries not to roll his eyes. Sue Sylvester is obviously making a name for herself beyond Lima, Ohio with her exercise classes. They agree on a time for the first training session, which is at some ridiculous hour of the morning the next day.

Monday, 2pm - Cristiano Cora Studio

After a short drive, Wes, Isabelle and Kurt enter the Cristiano Cora Studio, a popular and trendy New York City hair salon. After a short wait, Kurt is ushered to a salon chair in a private curtained-off area. Soon after, Cristiano sashays into the space and starts gently pulling and inspecting Kurt’s
“Kurt, you have marvelous hair that can withstand a variety of styles. Your hair is very healthy and it’s obvious that you take good care of it. I’m going to give you some hair products to use to clean, condition and sculpt your hair. You’re using a little too much hair spray for my liking, which gives it a stiff look. Use a pea-size drop of this hair wax and you will find that your coif will be even higher, but with a more natural look.” Cristiano artfully demonstrates how to use the new hair product to add more height in the front.

Kurt inspects Cristiano’s work on his coif and he loves it. He quickly takes a selfie and sends it to Unique with the simple message, ‘You like?’

Unique immediately texts back. ‘I like, but don’t you dare do anything to your hair without my permission. Remember that Unique knows best.’

Cristiano and Kurt agree to add a few highlights in the front and they set up an appointment for the following week. Kurt sends Unique a text with the appointment details because he definitely doesn’t want to get on her wrong side.

Monday, 3pm – Oz Garcia Nutrition Center

Wes and Isabelle take Kurt to meet with Oz Garcia, nutritionist to the stars. He looks at Kurt’s BMI report from the gym and asks Kurt what he has eaten over the past week. As Kurt recounts his meals, Oz Garcia firmly shakes his head in disapproval.

“No, no and no. I know that you’re an 18-year-old and that you eat your meals at the diner where you work, combined with an array of take-outs. However, your body is now one of the main assets in your modeling career, and you need to think carefully about what you put into it. We’re going to have to completely rework your diet.”

Kurt feels ashamed of what his diet has become. He was so good at eating nutritious meals when he was in Lima, and even devised a healthy eating regime for his father. It all went by the wayside when he arrived in New York and started working at the Spotlight Diner. There wasn’t time to cook healthy meals, and Rachel was a walking disaster in the kitchen.

“I’m going to start you off with a meal delivery plan that will provide you with your main meal of the day. I also have these vitamin supplements that will improve your overall health. Here is a list of food that you can eat for your other meals and a list of banned food. If in doubt about what you should eat, opt for colorful raw food, such as vegetables. And stay away from processed foods and carbs. I want to see you back here in a week so that you can tell me how it’s going and we can fine-tune your diet plan.”

Kurt agrees and takes a look at the food list. Cheesecake will be a distant memory from now on.

When they leave the nutritionist’s office, Wes bids his farewell. “Kurt, I’m off to another appointment I couldn’t rearrange. There is one more stop for today, but you’ll be in Isabelle’s capable hands. Call my office and arrange a meeting for two weeks from today. You can tell me how you are getting on with your new exercise and diet regimes, and I can report back what is happening at Vogue and its future plans for you.”

Kurt shakes Wes’ hand. ‘Thank you so much for everything. I’m going to follow all the advice I
received today as best I can. I’ll set up that meeting tomorrow.”

Monday, 4pm – M-Star Spa

“Isabelle, I’m exhausted. I’m not sure whether I’m up for another make-over stop today. My brain is drowning with all the new information I’ve already received and I don’t know if I can absorb anything more.”

“Oh sweetie, I know that today has been tough. But I promise you that this last stop will be enjoyable. Trust me.”

The car pulls up along the curb to the M-Star Spa. When Kurt enters the spa, all his senses are sent into overdrive. There are dark wooden floors and rich jewel-toned silk curtains adorning the windows. A variety of candles are lit, sending a sandalwood scent into the air. Meditation music is playing through the sound system and a delicious looking tray of fruit is on display.

After Isabelle has checked them in at the reception, Kurt is led to a backroom and asked to undress and slip on a silk robe. A masseur leads him to a table and he smells sweet almond as the massage oil is warming up. For one hour, his muscles are kneaded, loosened and soothed. As his body relaxes, Kurt decides that he should trust Isabelle in the future because this is the best idea for the end of the day ever. The massage is over too quickly for Kurt’s liking and he is soon taken to a room where Isabelle is already seated. Two therapists arrive to give them their last treatment of the day – a manicure and pedicure. Isabelle opts for a deep-red lacquer to be painted on her nails, and Kurt’s are simply buffed.

“I never realized how much personal maintenance there is involved in being a model. Keeping up appearances is a full-time job,” Kurt says with a sigh.

Isabelle laughs at Kurt’s observation. “Yes, there is a whole lot of work that goes on behind the scenes in being a model. I find that there are good-looking models that don’t put in the effort, but their careers are short-lived. The really successful ones put in the necessary hours to keep themselves healthy and fit. It pays off in the end.”

“But why do I read about supermodels living life in the fast lane? Clubbing, staying out all hours, and dabbling in drugs?” Kurt asks.

“There are a few models that are at the top of their field and have a heady lifestyle, but they are the exception and not the rule. For the vast majority of models, it is just hard work and plenty of rest.”

“Is that true for all the staff at Vogue?” Kurt probes.

“I’m afraid it is. Sure, there are lots of glamorous events like the National Awards ceremony last Friday night. However, most days it’s noses to the grindstone.”

Isabelle has just given Kurt a way to shift the conversation to what he really wants to talk about - Blaine and Sam. He knows that Isabelle is a close personal friend of Blaine and would like to hear from her what exactly is going on in the Blam relationship. “I watched the National Awards on livestream last Friday night. Vogue won all of the awards in the categories that it was nominated in. I watched Blaine accept the ‘Magazine of the Year’ award. I can definitely add public speaking to the list of Blaine’s many talents. I can’t believe that he hinted at me as a fresh face for the May issue.”
Isabelle smiles and replies, “Well, you are the fresh face for the May issue and Blaine is excited about it. Blaine even mentioned me during his E! Online red carpet interview. That kind of public recognition of others is what makes Blaine a great leader. It motivates people to try their hardest.”

“That it does,” Kurt comments. “I also saw the photos of Blaine and Sam on the red carpet, at the event and the after-party. They certainly make a handsome couple. How long have they been dating? Are there wedding bells in the cards?”

Judging by Isabelle’s expression, Kurt can sense that those were the wrong questions to ask. After a long pause, Isabelle replies. “Blaine and Sam have known each other since they were 18 years old and living in Boston. They are very tight and are good for each other. Both Blaine and Sam are very protective about their private lives and I am not one to gossip about them. I suggest that if you really want to know, you ask either Blaine or Sam.”

Kurt nods his head in understanding. On the one hand, he is disappointed not to learn more about Blaine or Sam. On the other hand, Kurt respects Isabelle for keeping tight-lipped and realizes that he might have a secret or two in the future that will be safe with Isabelle. Based on the evidence he has seen and heard since Friday, it reaffirms his belief that Blaine and Sam are indeed a couple. Kurt feels a tiny piece of his heart shatter at this realization… and he can’t understand why.

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That evening, Kurt takes a sip of his chamomile tea as he relaxes on the couch. He is entering his new appointments and daily tasks into his tablet’s calendar, and jotting down notes of important things to remember. He now understands the hard work involved in maintaining himself to be ‘model-ready’. He’s going to treat the make-over as a job – an important one - and that means that he has to organize his days around it. Kurt doesn’t want to let anyone down – Isabelle, Wes, Blaine, Unique, Paul, and everyone else he met last Friday at Vogue. As he looks over his notes to see if anything is missing, his phone pings and whirls with a series of incoming text messages. Kurt picks up his phone and reads that there are 4 new text messages from Chandler.

Hey u;)

You look great today. How do I know? Because you look great everyday.

How was your make-over? As fun as you expected?

I’m at the new coffee shop near the Vogue offices and they make a mean mocha. Let’s try it out together.

Kurt smiles and he quickly types a reply about the make-over. Even though Chandler is a little bit over the top, Kurt likes the way Chandler makes him feel. He likes the compliments and they make him feel special. Kurt wishes that Blaine had sent him those messages, but that’s not going to happen – not when Blaine’s in love with Sam.

“What’s got you smiling at your phone?” Rachel asks when she enters the loft. She takes off her coat, toes off her boots and joins him on the couch. Kurt can tell she is expecting an answer.

“I just received some texts from the stylist I met last Friday at the Vogue photo shoot. Nothing that special.”

Rachel grabs the phone from Kurt’s hand and reads the texts. “What do you mean they’re not
special? He’s flirting with you! Are you going to take him up on his coffee date offer?”

Kurt shakes his head. “Chandler is just a flirty sort of guy in general. I can see him being a friend, but I have no romantic interest in him at all. Guess what? I signed the modeling contract with Vogue this morning. I then went out with Isabelle and Wes for a make-over. You won’t believe everything involved in maintaining yourself to be model-ready!”

Rachel jumps up and gives Kurt a hug. “That’s wonderful news. Let’s go out and have a celebratory ice-cream while you tell me all about the make-over.”

They bundle up with their coats and boots and head to the nearest ice-cream parlor. When Kurt is deciding between the chocolate chip cookie dough and the dolce con leche flavors, he remembers what the diet the nutritionist set out… And ice-cream is definitely on the banned list. He slips out of the ice-cream parlor to the juice bar next door and orders an Iron Maiden - a blend of spinach, parsley, carrots, and spirulina. Kurt can’t believe that this is now his life.

Chapter End Notes

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. Here is the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics.

I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr. Reviews are like a day at the beach on a hot summer’s day.

Next up: The New York Fashion week.
February

At 8am on Saturday morning, the sun pours through the bedroom window and Blaine cautiously opens an eye. His head is pounding, and Blaine quickly realizes that he is sprawled on top of his bed, still wearing last night’s tux. He groans and slowly moves to the window to close the blackout curtains. When Blaine returns to his bed, he notices that Sam has left a huge glass of water and two pain relievers on his nightstand. Best. Roommate. Ever. He strips to his boxer briefs and crawls under the sheets for a few more hours of sleep.

At 11am, Blaine wakes up to the smell of bacon and sausages frying in the kitchen. He feels infinitely better than he had at 8am, but not all that great. He takes a brisk shower to liven himself up and changes into sweatpants and a T-shirt. When Blaine approaches the kitchen, he sees Amy, his housekeeper, making western omelets. Sam is sitting at the breakfast bar, sipping at a cup of coffee and chatting away to Amy.

“Good morning, Blaine,” Amy greets when she sees him. “There’s freshly brewed coffee in the pot and breakfast is almost ready. Nothing like a greasy meal to soak up all the excess alcohol swimming around in your body.” She quickly places the dishes on the table, along with Blaine’s tablet, which she charged up earlier in the morning. “I’m off to tidy up your bedroom and see what needs doing with last night’s outfit. Just holler if you need anything.”

When Amy disappears, Sam chuckles at Blaine’s state. “You know, Amy spoils you rotten. Once she saw the photos of you last night at the National Awards after-party on Instagram, she was googling hang-over remedies. She even popped out to the corner shop to buy you some Alka Seltzer and energy drinks.”

Blaine drops his head onto the table top. After the National Awards ceremony, Blaine and Sam had been whisked away to Variety’s after-party. Blaine was in such a happy place with the coveted ‘Magazine of the Year’ award, that he broke his sobriety in public rule and had two glasses of the delicious vintage champagne. The rest was just a fuzzy memory of singing and dancing. Blaine shyly looks up and asks, “I didn’t do or say anything really embarrassing, did I?”

“Of course not, Blaine. I wouldn’t have let that happen– I had your back the entire evening. Tina was there too, looking out for the paps. However, you did sing ‘Magic Man’ during karaoke and rambled on about blue eyes. Everyone thought you were referring to Frank Sinatra, but I knew better.” Sam starts to gently sing.

_Cold late night so long ago_
_When I was not so strong you know_
_A pretty man came to me_
_Never seen eyes so blue_
Okay… Blaine did remember that part of the evening. The lyrics of ‘Magic Man’ do refer to a pretty man and eyes so blue, but he had definitely not been thinking of Frank Sinatra when he sang the song. He digs into his breakfast and mentally thanks Amy for the greasy offerings - he’s feeling better already. “Did anything embarrassing hit social media?”

“Relax, nothing really embarrassing. Blam is still trending world-wide on Twitter. I can’t decide which photo I like best – the one of you kissing my cheek when you won the ‘Magazine of the Year’ award, or the one of us walking out of the Variety party with arms wrapped around each other. That last photo looks more like ‘we can’t wait to be alone together’, and not like I am holding you up.”

Blaine chuckles at the thought. He trusts Sam’s judgment and decides to leave the review of the social media sites until later in the day. He notices that Sam has been staring at him for some time, but doesn’t understand why. “What? Why are you staring at me?”

Sam takes his and Blaine’s coffee mugs and he refills them before rejoining him at the table. After a sip, Sam starts to speak. “I know I’m not a genius, but I can tell that you are really taken by Kurt. I can see it in your eyes, and we both know why you sang ‘Magic Man’.”

Blaine ducks his head and blushes furiously. “Well, maybe I do find Kurt Hummel rather intriguing. It’s not so much his looks, but how he treats me. Kurt is the first genuine person I have met in a long, long time. But, nothing is going to come of it… It’s never going to happen. He must think of me as an old man. After all, I’m ten years his senior.”

“Well, old men can be sexy too. Think of Hugh Jackman, George Clooney, and Colin Firth, to name a few. And you’re not that old.”

“It just wouldn’t work. Ultimately, I’m his boss. Nothing good can come from mingling business and pleasure.”

Sam shakes his head vehemently. “Dude, what do you mean by that? You’re my best friend and I work for Vogue. It doesn’t hurt our relationship because I’m not working directly for you. I really think you should give Kurt a chance. Start off with baby steps and let him be your friend. If you ever want to become more than friends, you just take one small step at a time. If you want to tell him about our ‘relationship’, you can. No problem.”

“I would never do that. We let ‘Blam’ flourish in the media to take the pressure off the both of us. The more people who know, the bigger the chance our real status will leak to the press. I only met Kurt on Friday… I barely know him. There’s no way I’ll risk our privacy… At least not until Mercedes finishes her national tour.”

Amy returns from the bedroom and glances at the wall clock. “Blaine, you have 15 minutes before you are expected downstairs at the gym. I’ve booked you a session, with a sauna afterwards. Whatever alcohol is remaining in your body after that greasy breakfast, you can sweat out.”

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Blaine hates to admit it, but Amy was right. A gentle exercise session at the gym, followed by a sauna, has left him feeling refreshed. Amy is one of his best finds. She’s been working for Blaine for two years now and is the rock in his personal life. Not only does she take care of the usual housekeeping duties, but she makes sure his personal life runs smoothly. She pays the household bills, manages his computer back-ups, and runs all his personal errands. She reminds him when Mother’s Day is approaching and bookmarks web pages for potential presents. Most importantly, he
Blaine takes a long shower and changes into his pajamas. Who cares that it’s 4pm? He’s not going out and he isn’t expecting any visitors. He enters the living room and feels the warmth of the logs burning in the fireplace. He gets himself comfortable on the couch, with his tablet in hand. This seems the best time to take a look at what the Internet has to say about last night. Before Blaine can power up his tablet, Amy enters the room and sets down a drink. “I read that coconut water is really great at curing hangovers. When you were at the gym, I took the liberty of going to that health food store you like so much and they recommended this brand. I’m going to be in the kitchen to make you and Sam a lasagna, but let me know if you need anything.”

Blaine quickly rises from the couch and gives Amy a hug. He whispers into her ear, “Nobody takes care of me like you do. What did I do to deserve you?”

“You do plenty, Mr. A. Now go relax on the sofa and I’ll tuck that throw blanket around you. They’re predicting it’s going to be cold tonight and you need to keep warm.”

Now snugly warm in his living room, Blaine checks the social media sites about last night’s awards and the after-party. Sam was right – the photos of them leaving Variety’s after-party looked more like they had intimate plans for the rest of the evening and not like Blaine was buzzed from a few glasses of champagne. Blaine knows he’s a lightweight when it comes to drinking, and reaffirms to himself that it won’t happen again – at least not at high-profile public events.

Blaine watches a video on YouTube of his acceptance speech for the ‘Magazine of the Year’ award. He feels that he might have been foolhardy alluding to the special features in Vogue’s May and June editions. But at the time, he was so happy and it had felt so right to include them in his acceptance speech. He had wanted to demonstrate that under his realm, Vogue was going to be number one for a long time ahead.

The YouTube side bar shows a video entitled ‘Sebastian Smythe and Elle’s reaction to the National Awards’. He clicks on the link and soon the screen is filled with Sebastian’s face. “…Vogue deserves the ‘Magazine of the Year’ award, but time will tell whether it’s a result of Anna Wintour’s final influences before her retirement or Blaine Anderson’s leadership. I’m betting on the former.”

Blaine tosses his tablet to the other side of the couch and finishes off the coconut water. The nerve of Sebastian Smythe! Of course he would find a way to devalue his contribution to Vogue’s success.

Blaine has known Sebastian since their Dalton days. During his sophomore year, Sebastian transferred to Dalton. In Blaine’s eyes, Sebastian seemed like the height of sophistication. He had just moved from Paris and spoke impeccable French. Sebastian was oozing with confidence, out and proud, and wasn’t shy about he wanted… And he wanted Blaine.

Blaine was initially flattered with the attention that Sebastian gave him. He agreed to a coffee date at the Lima Bean within a week of their meeting. Blaine enjoyed all the compliments that Sebastian gave him. It made him feel special to have someone as sophisticated as Sebastian notice him. When they were at the Lima Bean, Blaine agreed to go to Scandals, the local gay nightclub, the next Saturday night. Sebastian promised he would organize the fake IDs and Blaine felt like he was off on a new adventure…. a new gay adventure. The reality was slightly different than Blaine had expected.

Scandals was a dive that attracted all sorts of gay men, both desirable and undesirable. However, Blaine didn’t notice the crowd, having just finished his first beer ever.
“Hey, Blaine. Let me buy you another beer. You sucked that one down really fast.”

“Thanks Seb. It’s hot in here, and I’m feeling really thirsty.”

After Blaine had finished his second beer and was pleasantly buzzed, Sebastian led him onto the dance floor. ‘Dancing Queen’ was playing and Blaine shook his booty for all it was worth. Sebastian was smiling and soon encroached on Blaine’s personal space.

“What do you say we go to the restroom and I’ll fuck your sweet little ass? I’m sure you’ll love it.”

“I don’t think so,” Blaine tentatively replied.

“Why the shy act, Blaine? You’re shaking your ass like crazy, so clearly you’re desperate for some action. I don’t usually bother with virgins, but you’re sex on a stick and sing like a dream. Let me fuck you. I’ll soon have you singing my name so loud that everyone in the club will hear you. You’ll be feeling it for days.”

Blaine didn’t want his first time to be ‘fucking’ in the restroom at Scandals or any other place, for that matter. “I’m not going to fuck anybody unless I’m in a committed relationship with him. I think that I’m worth more than that.”

Sebastian raised an eyebrow and drawled, “Are you now? Well, I think you’re a cock-tease, and no gay man wants that. You need to learn how to live for the moment and get some when you can if you want to be a gay man. ‘Put out or get out’ as they say.”

Blaine quickly rushed out of Scandals and was relieved that Sebastian didn’t follow him.

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Blaine places another log on the fire and thinks back to that night in Scandals. In many ways, he’s glad that it had happened. It had made Blaine think about what he wants from another man, and a casual fuck is not it. Blaine has always desired a loving relationship. He wants the dates, the romance and someone who will love him, warts and all. Blaine wants the emotional stuff, as well as the physical, with the man of his life. Now, sitting alone in his penthouse, it seems like that it’s a pipe dream.

Blaine thinks back to the Dalton years after the Scandals night. When Sebastian realized that he wasn’t going to get into Blaine’s pants, he started resenting Blaine’s ‘holier than thou’ attitude and soon became his rival. Sure, Blaine was the Warblers’ lead soloist and had a say in what they would sing. That all changed once Hunter Clarington became head of the Warbler Council… and Sebastian had his ear. Sebastian bagged himself a few of the solos, choosing lewd songs – how could Blaine forget ‘Blow my Whistle’? Sebastian then went one step further and had spread rumors that Blaine was frigid and a cock-tease. While Blaine had loved his time at Dalton, he’d been very happy to graduate and move away from Sebastian.

However, that was not meant to be. Sebastian had attended Yale University and also majored in business studies. They were both members of their universities’ debate teams and went head to head at intercollegiate challenges.

“…and I’m looking forward to marriage equality in all 50 states. Thank you.” Blaine felt he had done his best to put forward his team’s case for gay marriage equality. He had touched upon all the...
points he wanted to make – separation of church and state, an increase in adoption and foster parents, no effect on the heterosexual community, gay marriage already a reality, etc.

Sebastian soon stood up to represent the Yale team. He spouted off the cons for marriage equality – tax hikes, church rights, high divorce rates, violation of tradition, etc. Sebastian took a long cool look at Blaine and then added, “Besides, real gay men don’t care about a committed relationship. The great thing about being gay is you can get some without any strings attached. I should know, I’m gay and proud of it.”

Of course, the Yale team lost with Sebastian’s closing remarks. Sebastian just couldn’t keep his temper in check around Blaine, and he had retorted with vindictive remarks aimed at Blaine.

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In a way, Blaine thinks that Sebastian has always been destined to be the editor-in-chief of Elle magazine, Vogue’s main competitor. Blaine followed Sebastian’s career after graduating Yale. Through his father’s connections, Sebastian landed a job at Elle Magazine upon graduation and made his way up the ladder to editor-in-chief. There were rumors about how this happened - sleeping with right people, blackmailing higher-ups, and stealing other people’s ideas. Last year the contents of Vogue’s Christmas edition was leaked to Sebastian and Elle released its own version of it one week earlier than Vogue. It made Vogue look like a copycat. The mole inside Vogue was identified and fired, but Blaine had no doubts that Sebastian will find other means to find out their well-kept secrets.

Blaine makes a vow to himself that he won’t say another word about the May and June issues and will keep their contents under wrap. Sebastian would stoop very, very low to get a whiff of Vogue’s brilliant ideas. Blaine goes to the dresser in the entrance way and pulls out a photo from his wallet. It’s a picture of Blaine and Sebastian from their Dalton Warbler days. Blaine keeps it in his wallet as a reminder that Vogue does has real competition with Elle and he needs to work hard to keep Vogue on top.

*****

The New York Fashion week is a whirlwind of events for Blaine. He has front row seats for all the top runway shows and VIP passes for the after-hour parties. Tina does her best to minimize schedule conflicts and Bentley gets him to the right place at the right time. In general, Blaine isn’t impressed with the new lines - not enough fashion houses have taken risks in their new designs. However, it will make Marc Jacob’s Hamilton-inspired line even more impressive when it’s released in June.

Blaine manages to catch up with his mother at the Small Boutique event. It’s held in a large convention center that houses row upon row of stalls, containing the offerings of smaller design houses that are just starting off. As they examine the booths, Blaine notices that his mother is in her element. She loves talking to the boutique owners and independent designers. While she’s discussing the pros and cons of varying dress lengths, Blaine walks ahead and examines some vintage-styled brooches at a jewelry stall. He eyes an intricate bird brooch and thinks of Kurt. On impulse he whips out his phone, takes a photo of the brooch, and sends it to Kurt with the message “Crazily busy times at FW, but this reminded me of you. Birds are hippos’ friends, but far less dangerous.”

Blaine momentarily panics about having sent the text. Was it too much? How will Kurt react to it? When his phone pings, and Blaine quickly looks down at the new message, “Ha! Wish I could see the brooch for real. Keep looking, you might find other ‘friends’. – K”
Blaine smiles at Kurt’s response. He’s done the right thing sending the text, and maybe, just maybe, it’s the start of a new friendship. Blaine returns his focus to the stall and a vintage styled butterfly brooch studded with blue and green gemstones catches his eye. The jewels remind him of Kurt’s eyes and the butterfly design prompts him to think about how the insect can change from an uninteresting cocoon into a gorgeous creature.

The stall owner notices Blaine’s interest and cautiously approaches him – Blaine’s the editor-in-chief of Vogue after all. “You have a good eye for jewelry, Mr. Anderson. That’s my personal favorite from my collection. The gemstones are sapphires, emeralds and diamonds. Each one of them is unique in form and color. Are you buying for someone special?”

Blaine ducks his head so that the stall owner can’t tell that he’s blushing. “Uh… – I guess it does remind me of someone special. The brooch is beautiful, and I can’t pass it up.” Blaine takes out his credit card and adds, “I’ll buy it. Is it possible for you to send it to my office?”

As the stall owner processes the credit card and Blaine writes down Tina’s contact information, his mother approaches and glances at the piece of jewelry. “Oh Blaine, this brooch is exquisite. Are you buying it?”

“My, I am. It just… reminds me of someone.” Blaine’s nervous because his mother can read him like a book. Blaine doesn’t want to get into a conversation with her about Kurt and what he means to Blaine… because he doesn’t know exactly what Kurt means to him.

Once the sales transaction is completed, Pamela comments, “Well, that someone must be very special. I’m sure he’ll love it. Now come over here with me. I need your opinion on these hats.”

“F*ck you, I have Mr. Kurt Hummel here to see you,” the receptionist announces.

“Thank you. Send him in.” Wes gets up from his seat, approaches the office door and greets Kurt warmly. “Kurt, it’s great to see you again. Wow - look at you! Could you slowly spin around please?”

As Kurt spins around, Wes can already see the effects of the make-over and the two weeks of training and diet. Kurt’s shirt fits that much more snugly and accentuates his newly acquired muscle definition. His hair is even more impressive, with a higher quiff and a few selected highlights in the front. Kurt still has the flawless porcelain skin, but his cheeks have a healthy glow. In a nutshell, Kurt is a perfect male specimen and a modeling agent’s dream. “You look wonderful, Kurt. Please have a seat and tell me how the last two weeks have gone.”

Kurt sits down on the upholstered seat and recounts his time since he last saw Wes. “I have to admit it’s been a tough two weeks. Chrystal might appear sweet on the outside, but she’s as tough as army boots on the inside. Did you know that she can tell when I haven’t completed all my daily exercises at home? She’s given me some equipment, like hand weights and an exercise ball, to make the daily routine a bit more interesting.”

Wes laughs at Kurt’s remarks. “Chrystal is one of the best in the business, and she didn’t get there by being sweet. I can see the results in your upper arms already. Just make sure you don’t bulk out. Beefy-looking models come a dime a dozen. How about your new diet regime?”

“There have been some highs and lows. It’s much easier to eat healthily since I quit my job at the
Starlight Diner. I’ve banned my roommate, who also works there, from bringing home any doggie bags. And the meal delivery system is really working. It helps that my main meal of the day is prepared for me and I just need to heat it up.”

“So what are the lows?” Wes asks.

“It is so hard to keep to the approved food list when I am working out so much. Exercise makes me hungry! I’ve seen Oz Garcia four times since the initial consultation and we’ve devised a strategy of what to eat before and after exercising. He also has given advise how to allow myself to indulge on treats on occasion. I hope you don’t mind that I’ve seen him so often. I’m sure he must cost a pretty penny.”

Wes waves his hand to dismiss that idea. “Nonsense, Kurt. Judging by your look, he is worth every penny spent. I consider his consultation fees an investment in your future.”

“Speaking of my future, what’s happening? I feel guilty that Vogue is paying me so well to just take care of myself. Don’t they want me to work?”

Wes chuckles and replies, “You’re an eager beaver, Kurt. I met with Blaine before the New York Fashion week and he wants to keep you under wraps until the May issue is released.”

“But that’s months away!”

“Yes, it is. Blaine has made a business decision that you are to be Vogue’s fresh face, which he referred to during his acceptance speech at the National Awards ceremony. And in order to be a fresh face, you need to keep a low profile until May. Timing is key in the fashion industry, and Blaine knows what he’s doing.”

“Okay, I can see your point. So do I just continue to look after myself for the next few months?”

“Yes,” Wes confirms. “Blaine and I have already agreed that you’ll be part of the Hamilton-inspired photo spread that will be in the June issue. The photo shoot will happen sometime in May.”

“What? A Hamilton-inspired photo spread? I only casually mentioned the idea to Blaine two weeks ago!”

“One of Blaine’s many strengths is his ability to act on great ideas quickly. He has already discussed it with Marc Jacobs, who is designing a Hamilton-inspired summer fashion line.”

“Marc Jacobs? The Marc Jacobs likes the idea? And he’s designing his summer line around it?”

“Yes, he likes the idea and his new summer line includes Hamilton-inspired designs. The fashion industry can move quickly when it wants to. I’ve agreed with Blaine that not only should you continue with your make-over regime over the next couple of months, but you should also brainstorm about the variety of ways in which Vogue can use Broadway in its June issue. Blaine plans to call you soon to go over your ideas.”

Wes grins to himself when he sees the shocked expression on Kurt’s face. Blaine has given Kurt the opportunity of a lifetime, both behind the camera and behind the scenes. Wes has a feeling that Kurt will be up for the challenge.

“I’d better get going, Wes. I have some research to do, and I need to get my ideas ready to present to
Blaine. This has been the most interesting meeting.”

*****

With the New York Fashion Week behind him, Blaine can now focus on the day-to-day running of Vogue. He looks at the final mock-ups for Vogue’s May issue and is pleased with the results. The editorial committee has picked four wonderful photos of Kurt to be included in the May issue. He loves one of the photos in particular – it perfectly captures Kurt’s smile and the feeling of hope. Blaine decides that the photo will be on the cover of the May issue. He then contemplates where to put the framed cover in the office. Should it be on the opposite side of his desk so that he has a good view of it? Or should it be on the wall directly facing the office entrance so that visitors will see it? As he daydreams about what the cover will look like, Tina buzzes him. “I’ve got Wes Montgomery on line one for you.”

After thanking Tina, Blaine picks up the phone. “Hey, Wes. I trust you’re calling about your meeting with Kurt this morning?”

“Yes, I am, Blaine. He’s ready.”

“Ready for what? Don’t leave out any details.” Blaine can hardly contain his excitement with the prospect of Kurt being ‘ready’.

“You are going to be impressed with Kurt’s make-over. I can hardly believe the results myself – and that’s just after two weeks. I didn’t give him a thorough inspection, but his upper arms are definitely more toned and have the perfect muscle definition for his build. His hair is even more amazing than before. But most importantly, he is positively glowing.”

Blaine shakes his head to get rid of the image of an even more perfect Kurt. “How did he seem emotionally? Is he still on board with the modeling career?”

“Yes, he is totally on board with being a model. However, I sense that he’s bored and wants to prove his worth to Vogue over the next few months… before his next photo shoot. I told him about the Broadway theme for the June issue and how you really want to tap into his ideas. I could practically see the wheels turning in his head. He left the office with a new sense of purpose. You are going to meet with Kurt to explore his ideas, aren’t you Blaine?”

“Yes, of course. Now that the New York Fashion Week is over, I have more available time in my diary. I’ll set up a meeting sometime next week.”

“Great, Blaine. I think that you can get a lot of useful ideas from Kurt, with a little bit of encouragement and direction. Let me know how it works out.”

“I’ll talk to you soon, Wes,” Blaine replies and hangs up the phone. Blaine looks at the photo of Kurt that will adorn the May issue. He can hardly imagine what a new and improved Kurt Hummel will look like. He trusts Wes and knows that when he says Kurt’s ready, Kurt is really ready.

Blaine considers the best way to approach a meeting with Kurt. Of course, the editor-in-chief side of him wants to explore Kurt’s ideas on the Broadway theme. However, the man inside of him – the man who is lonely and doesn’t let people in – wants to get to know Kurt better. He decides against a meeting at his Vogue office, which puts it on an entirely professional footing. But he can’t be seen in public with Kurt either - there are too many prying eyes, and he wants Kurt’s first public appearance as Vogue’s fresh face to occur in May. He finally makes up his mind.
Blaine walks to his reception area and approaches Tina. “I need you to arrange for Kurt Hummel to come over to my place for lunch on Saturday. I want to explore his ideas on the June issue. Do you still have his contact details?”

There is a stunned expression on Tina’s face. “Sure, I’ll organize it right away, Blaine. But your place? I’ve never known you to conduct business at your place before. Is this a date?”

“No, of course it isn’t a date. I don’t want to come into the office on Saturday and we can’t go out publicly until May - I want to avoid the paparazzi. The only logical place is my penthouse.”

Blaine cautiously looks at Tina and wonders whether he has gotten away with this cover story. Secretly, he’s thinking of it as a ‘date’ date and is already planning the menu.

Tina smirks and replies, “Whatever you say. I’ll call Kurt now and I’ll let you know afterwards.” As Blaine returns to his office, Tina starts gently singing ‘Anything could happen, anything could happen…”

Chapter End Notes

Song that Blaine sings at Variety’s after-party – Magic Man by Heart.
Song playing at Scandals – Dancing Queen by Abba
Song that Tina sings in the office – Anything Could Happen by Ellie Goulding
I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen.
Here is the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics.

I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr.
Reviews are like an iced-cool lemonade during a hot summer’s afternoon.

Next up: Kurt has lunch with Blaine.
The Lunch Date

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“The best thing a man can do on a first date is be a friend. I think that's the biggest mistake men make on the first date. Just get to know me. Be my friend. Just kick it with me as if I was hanging with a homeboy. It shouldn't be this awkward situation. It should be that we're there, having a great time.” - Adrienne Bailon

March

Sam rolls his eyes at Blaine. “Okay, got it. I need to make myself scarce tomorrow. I wasn’t planning to be here anyways. Yesterday, Henry bought the last of the Mass Effect Trilogy, so we’ll be on the Xbox all day at his place. Maybe we should have a signal – like you leave a tie on the door if you don’t want me to come in. I really don’t want to catch you guys going at it in the living room.”

“Sam!” Blaine exclaims. “That’s not going to happen. Didn’t you hear the part about how I’m taking your advice and spending time with Kurt to get to know him better?”

“Well, there’s lot of different ways you can get to know somebody. Don’t write off the physical stuff. You haven’t gotten any in ages, and Kurt is hot!”

“How many times do I have to tell you that I won’t mix business with that sort of pleasure. Besides, I want to take things slowly… get to know Kurt… see if we click together first. I’m a long way off from taking Kurt to bed.”

Sam gets up and gives Blaine a hug. “I know, bro, but rules are meant to be broken. I want you to be happy and find someone who will treat you like you deserve. I just have this feeling that Kurt could be the one. But you’re right. Take things at your own pace. Now, I’m off to bed. I need a good night’s sleep if I want to kick Henry’s ass on Xbox tomorrow.”

*****

“Now, you’re sure you know what you’re doing, Mr. A?” Amy, his middle-aged housekeeper asks. She has never seen her boss in the kitchen before, and she can barely contain her giggles when she notices Blaine wearing her frilly purple apron.

“How many times do I have to tell you that I won’t mix business with that sort of pleasure. Besides, I want to take things slowly… get to know Kurt… see if we click together first. I’m a long way off from taking Kurt to bed.”

Sam gets up and gives Blaine a hug. “I know, bro, but rules are meant to be broken. I want you to be happy and find someone who will treat you like you deserve. I just have this feeling that Kurt could be the one. But you’re right. Take things at your own pace. Now, I’m off to bed. I need a good night’s sleep if I want to kick Henry’s ass on Xbox tomorrow.”

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“You spoil me rotten, Mr. A. Now, just in case, there’s a chicken casserole in the fridge with the heating instructions on top. If you don’t need it, I’m sure Sam will polish it off when he gets back later. I’ve checked the guest bathroom and it’s all in perfect order, along with the rest of the apartment. Oh, I didn’t check Sam’s room, but I doubt you’ll be using it.”

Blaine kisses her on the cheek and then helps her put on her thick winter coat. “You spoil me rotten too, Amy. Now get out of here and go have some fun!” With a quick wave, she’s out the door and enters the private elevator.
Blaine is relieved that Amy has left before Kurt arrives. It isn’t like he needs to be totally alone with Kurt - obviously not for their first casual ‘meeting’. However, it’s important to Blaine that he’s the one to cook the meal for Kurt, to top up his drink, to attend to his every need. He wants to take care of Kurt. Amy is too darned good at her job and she wouldn’t let Blaine do a single thing. Blaine chuckles to himself at the thought of having to get rid of Amy temporarily because she is too efficient.

Blaine also doesn’t know what Kurt’s reaction would be if he learnt that Blaine employs a full-time housekeeper. Take that back, he does know what Kurt’s reaction would be. While Blaine thinks that Amy is essential to keep his private life humming along smoothly, Kurt would think the whole concept of having a full-time housekeeper is extravagant and overindulgent. Blaine really wants to make a favorable impression on Kurt today, so it’s easier to give Amy a special day off.

Blaine goes through his mental checklist to make sure everything is ready for today’s lunch with Kurt. Food prep… done. Dining table set… done. Candles… done. Music playlists… done. The only thing left is to check is his outfit one last time. Blaine dashes into his bedroom and stands in front of the full length mirror. He roars with laughter when he realizes that he’s still wearing Amy’s frilly purple apron. That’s definitely not the look he’s after. He immediately discards the apron and looks at himself critically.

Blaine has picked out today’s ‘date’ outfit with care. He’s wearing his favorite pair of slim-fitting blue jeans. He faces away from the mirror so he can check the back. Blaine’s pleased that the jeans still hug his ass as snugly as when he was a teenager. He smoothens down the crisp white cotton shirt and the green shawl-collared cardigan, ensuring there’s no lint to be seen. Lastly, he double-checks that his check-patterned bowtie is straight. He doesn’t often wear bowties in public anymore – Blaine needs to project a different image as Vogue’s editor-in-chief. But he still loves the whimsy of bowties and wears them in his private life. The gentle press against his throat grounds him and makes him feel in control. Blaine’s thought about slicking back his hair, but ultimately decided against it – his curls would definitely break away from the steam in the kitchen while cooking. With a final glance in the mirror, Blaine concludes that yes, he is ready for his ‘date that isn’t a date’.

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Kurt exits the subway stop and has plenty of time to spare before he’s expected at Blaine’s. He adjusts his messenger bag, which contains his tablet full of sketches and ideas for the Broadway-inspired Vogue issue. For the past five days, Kurt had spent every spare waking moment thinking of the Broadway-inspired issue. He hopes that Blaine likes his ideas and gives him guidance on how to focus his future efforts. Kurt considers this a huge opportunity to prove that he can be useful at Vogue for more than just modeling.

As Kurt walks along the sidewalk, he notices fresh flowers on display at the corner bodega. They look colorful and remind him of spring. He quickly focuses on a bunch of red and yellow roses. They are so beautiful, and he’s not sure why, but they remind him of Blaine. Kurt decides on a whim to buy them. His father has taught him that he should never go to a meal at someone’s home empty-handed. It seems like an old-fashioned custom, but he thinks that Blaine will appreciate the sentiment.

Kurt checks his watch as he enters Blaine’s building. Man, this is an impressive entrance. It’s bigger than my entire apartment in Bushwick. He takes a deep breath and confidently walks to the concierge desk, where he announces, “I’m Kurt Hummel. I’m here to visit Blaine Anderson. I believe he’s expecting me.”
The attendant stares at him for a full minute. It makes Kurt feel very uncomfortable, but he thinks it might be some sort of security inspection to make sure he isn’t carrying a bomb or other weapons. So he patiently waits. “Yes, Mr. Anderson is expecting you. The elevator is the last one on the right over there.”

The attendant keeps staring, which peaks Kurt’s curiosity. “So I have to ask… Why are you staring at me? Do I have food stuck in my teeth? A stain on my clothes?”

“I’m terribly sorry, Mr. Hummel. It’s just that Mr. Anderson has lived here for nearly two years, and with the exception of family, you’re the first gentleman caller he’s received.”

“Well then, this will be our little secret,” Kurt replies with a tightly-pressed smile. While Kurt walks towards the elevator, he thinks about the interesting bit of information that the concierge has just given him. Maybe Blaine spends the night at Sam’s apartment, or rents a hotel room for their evenings together. That must cost Blaine a fortune! When Kurt enters the elevator, he recognizes ‘Defying Gravity’ playing in the background, and he hums along appreciatively. He glances at himself in the wall mirror and double-checks that there isn’t any food stuck between his teeth and no stains on his clothes. Nope, Kurt Hummel is good to go.

When the elevator doors open, Blaine is immediately standing there to greet him. “Oh wow, how did you know it was me?” Kurt asks.

“Well… umm… it’s kind of my own private elevator. And Enrique buzzed me to let me know you were on your way up,” Blaine replies, looking rather sheepish.

Kurt pushes the bunch of flowers he’s holding towards Blaine. “Here, I got these for you. I’m not sure what the protocol is for this sort of meeting. But when I saw these flowers at a corner bodega along the way, they reminded me of you and so I decided to buy them. I hope you like them.” Kurt starts blushing with that admission.

“Aw, you didn’t have to… but I’m so glad you did. They’re wonderful, Kurt. And so thoughtful. I’m truly touched,” Blaine replies as he takes the bouquet in his hands. He raises the flowers to his face and closes his eyes, taking in the heady fragrance of the roses. Blaine is blown away by the gesture. He loves the flowers, he loves that Kurt thought of him when he saw them, and he loves the romantic feeling of it all. Blaine moves forward to give Kurt a hug, and he soon feels Kurt’s arms wrap around his back and pull him in. Kurt is several inches taller than him, and Blaine thinks that Kurt is the perfect height as he nuzzles into his neck. Blaine deeply sighs with contentment.

Kurt chuckles as he slowly lets Blaine go. “You really like hugs, Blaine.”

Oh god, he heard the sigh.

Once they enter the apartment, Blaine is able to get a closer look at Kurt. He is positively glowing. His hair is coiffed just that little bit higher, if that is even possible. The skinny jeans hug his body in all the right places and the knee-high boots accentuate his long legs. Kurt is wearing a pale blue shirt that complements his eye color and makes them pop. Blaine can see the newly formed muscles in Kurt’s arms. The outfit includes a dark grey waistcoat and a scarf from the Hermes Spring collection two years ago. Wow, Wes was right. Kurt is so ready. He’s the absolute package.

Blaine doesn’t even realize he’s staring openly until he hears Kurt’s voice, pitched lower than usual,
and with a hint of amusement. “Like what you see?”

Blaine blushes furiously before responding. “Kurt, you look fantastic. I can see that Isabelle has worked her magic on you with her one of her infamous make-overs. I think you’re her best result to date.”

Kurt gently smiles at the flattering remark. “It was a very busy day, but I’ve been working really hard for the past two weeks to keep up the diet and exercise regimes.”

“You should be pleased with the results then. Now, let me put these flowers in water and finish preparing our lunch. What can I get you to drink?”

“A Diet Coke would be great, if you have it. Otherwise, water is fine.” Kurt hears the music playing in the apartment and remarks, “Hey, the Wicked soundtrack was playing in the elevator as well. What are the chances of that?”

Blaine clears his throat before replying. “Umm… well, the elevator is for this apartment exclusively, so I can control what music is piped in. It’s all controlled through my home sound system. So yeah, I picked it out. I thought that Broadway tunes might be inspirational for our discussion today. Go make yourself comfortable in the living room. I’ll be back soon.”

After a few steps towards the kitchen, Blaine turns his head to ask Kurt whether he prefers his ice, and catches Kurt glancing at his ass. Blaine smirks and asks, “Do you want crushed or cubed ice?”

Kurt’s mouth gapes wide, and Blaine can see Kurt’s cheeks flush. “Crushed ice, please,”

“Crushed it is,” Blaine replies with a wink. And if he swings his hips just a little bit more on the way to the kitchen, it’s because he’s thrilled that his assets are appreciated.

When Blaine has finally left for the kitchen, Kurt has the opportunity to take in Blaine’s penthouse apartment. Its living area is absolutely massive. It has beautiful natural red oak floors scattered with richly-colored oriental carpets. The large leather sectional couch looks inviting and the flat-screen TV is the largest Kurt has ever seen. He browses through the large built-in oak bookcase, which is crammed with books, trophies and photos. The framed photos are mostly of family, but he can recognize a younger Sam and Tina in some of them. In the corner of the room is a baby grand piano. Kurt goes to the floor-to-ceiling windows, admiring the view of Central Park.

Blaine enters the living room, placing the flowers on a side table. He quickly returns with the drinks. “As luck would have it, I do have Diet Coke. Come take a seat.” Luck hasn’t had anything to do with it. I casually asked Unique what Kurt’s drink of choice was during the photo shoot.

Kurt sits down on the leather couch, taking in the surroundings. “Now it’s my turn to be impressed. Your apartment is amazing. It’s spacious but cozy. Contemporary but homey. It’s on trend but comfortable. And this couch feels like one enormous hug. It’s very you.”

Blaine beams at the praise, because what Kurt has just described is exactly what he has tried to create in the penthouse. He works extremely long hours at Vogue. He wants a home that reflects who he really is, and that is comfortable enough so that he can unwind and relax during his downtime.

Kurt offers him some suggestions to enhance the home décor accents and Blaine hums in approval. But Blaine’s secretly daydreaming of one-day arriving home, with Kurt waiting for him as he walks through the door.
Blaine has prepared a delicious lunch of Fettuccini Alfredo, including a fresh garden salad. When he brings the serving platters to the dining table, the aroma of pasta and cheese fill the air. Blaine serves Kurt a portion, offering freshly ground black pepper and parmesan cheese. Blaine serves himself and then secretly glances at Kurt to gauge his reaction to the meal.

Kurt expertly twirls the pasta on his spoon and takes his first bite. Kurt closes his eyes and lets out a big groan. When he has finished the bite, Kurt remarks, “This tastes like heaven. You’ve cooked the fettuccini to perfection.”

They are silent as they dig into their meals. After a few minutes, Kurt slides his plate to the side and serves himself a generous portion of the garden salad. Blaine notices that Kurt has only finished half of the serving and his face falls. It seems obvious that Kurt really didn’t like it. “I’m sorry, Kurt. I have plenty of other food in the fridge. Would you like me to get you something else?”

“Oh no, Blaine. I loved the fettuccini. It’s just that pasta, cream and cheese are on my forbidden foods list.”

Blaine mentally kicks himself that he didn’t even think about Kurt’s diet… the diet that he had instigated at work. How could he be so unthoughtful when he had tried to think of Kurt’s every need in preparation for the lunch?

Before Blaine can chastise himself further, Kurt adds, “The diet is impossible for me to stick to, so Oz García I have come to an agreement that I can have food from the forbidden list as long as I limit myself to six bites. And trust me, those six bites of Fettuccini Alfredo were the best I’ve eaten since I started this diet. Besides, I love salad and this one looks so yummy.”

“Well, I’m glad about that. Are you sure that the salad will be enough?”

“Yeah, it’s fine.”

“So what other things have you been doing as a result of your make-over?” Blaine asks.

“I have a membership at the E at Equinox gym, where I work with a personal trainer and do boot-camp aerobics classes. I also do stretching and exercises at home. I can really tell that my body is getting more toned. I now have abs. Want to see?”

Blood courses throughout Blaine’s body at the proposition. How can someone so young and so innocent say things like that? Surely Kurt’s not flirting with me?

Blaine then realizes that he did after all inspect Kurt’s body during his office visit a few weeks ago. “Umm… No, that’s not necessary. Believe it or not, I don’t like looking at models’ bodies. It makes it feel like looking at a man isn’t anything special… like it’s supposed to be.”

Blaine can see Kurt visibly relax, nodding his head in approval of Blaine’s response.

The meal has been cleared away and they are still sitting at the dining room table, discussing the Hamilton-inspired spread for the June edition. Blaine brings Kurt up-to-date with the progress he has
made to bring the idea to life.

“Blaine, I’m really impressed where you have taken the idea in so little time. Now I’m afraid to show you my drawings or tell you my ideas.”

Blaine preens at the compliment, but is quick to soothe Kurt’s fears. “Well, it’s easy to get things started when the original idea is so inspired. Now, tell me your ideas and get your drawings out because I really want to look them over. There’s still a long way to go before the Broadway-inspired idea is fully fleshed out.”

Kurt goes to his messenger bag and returns with his sketches. “I had the same thoughts with period jackets and frills on shirts. And you know I love knee-high boots. But I had two additional thoughts. The first one is about accessories… specifically, hair accessories. There are scrunchies and headbands that are unisex and could fit in with the look. If you’re interested, I could see what type of hair pins are available that have a more masculine look.”

Blaine looks over the designs carefully and remarks, “I can see that we’re on the same wavelength about the outfits for the spread. That’s an excellent idea about the hair accessories. Let me talk to Mark Townsend to see if he has further ideas about them. I can also get my staff do some research on the hair pins. They’re paid to do that kind of thing. But do you mind if I run your ideas past them? I’ll let you know what they come up with.”

Kurt is pleasantly surprised that Blaine wants his further input on his staff’s future research - like his opinion really matters.

“What’s your other idea, Kurt?”

“Well, I googled Hamilton and noticed that the set was rather stark with wooden structures on various levels. That could work to Vogue’s advantage when there’s a photo with a few models. However, the background is a brick wall and that won’t look good in print. I was thinking about a collage of images from the period – a flag, a pistol, a judge’s powdered wig. That sort of thing.”

“Great idea! The Marc Jacobs line should be simple in design, so there should be no conflicting patterns. We can use our regular fantastic set designer to come up with images behind the scene for our shoots. Can I put her in touch with you? Perhaps you can brainstorm together?”

Kurt’s jaw drops open, before a huge smile appears. It is one thing to take a look at what the Vogue staff have come up with. It’s an entirely different matter to provide direct creative input at the ground level. “Yes, of course. I would love to do that!”

Blaine smiles back at Kurt. “Keep coming up with those ideas. I would love to hear them all. Now, shall we go to the living room for coffee and dessert? Oh, my bad. I bought a cheesecake at Eileen’s, but I assume that it’s on the banned food list as well? Perhaps a fruit platter instead?”

“For a slice of cheesecake from Eileen’s, I’m willing to sacrifice all treats for a month!” Kurt replies, excited for a taste of the famous New York cheesecake.

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After polishing off their slices of cheesecake, the conversation quickly turns to more personal subjects and they find a lot of common ground. They are both from Ohio (“How did we not meet each other, living so close?” “Maybe we did without realizing… Crossed each other on the street…””)
and they were both members of their high school glee clubs (“We competed against the Warblers at sectionals!”). They have both faced bullying because they were gay, and they have both fled to more liberal cities after graduating.

Kurt is excited as he says, “On the count of three, name your favorite Vogue cover of all time. 1...2...3!

“Marion Cotillard!” they both shout together.

“Oh my god, stop it!” Blaine laughs. He blushes when he thinks of Kurt adorning the May issue’s cover. Blaine will soon have a new favorite Vogue cover of all time. His thoughts are interrupted by the ping of Kurt’s phone. Kurt giggles when he reads the new message and Blaine gives him a quizzical look.

“Oh, it’s just a message from Chandler. You know, the Vogue stylist that was at the photo shoot? He sends the silliest of messages. Check this one out.”

*Can you sing to my voice mail? I want to make your voice my ringtone.*

Kurt’s phone pings again and he smiles again. “Chandler just sent another.”

*Do your feet hurt? ... You’ve been wandering in my thoughts all day long....*

“I’ll turn off my phone now. That was rude of me.”

Blaine can’t help but feel jealous about the flirty text messages. Blaine wishes that he could do the same, but his position at Vogue would make them take on an entirely different meaning. “So, you and Chandler…. Are you seeing him?”

Kurt throws back his head and laughs. “No, of course not. He’s a flirt with everyone. Chandler is a bit over-the-top, but he makes me smile. I can see him being a casual friend.”

*No! I don’t want Chandler to make you smile. That should be me!* Blaine vows to himself that Chandler won’t ever be present at Kurt’s photo shoots again.

They continue their discussions about their favorite things – book series (Harry Potter), Disney film (The Little Mermaid) and musical (‘Sound of Music’ for Kurt and ‘Singing in the Rain’ for Blaine). Blaine feels like they click in all the right ways and wonders how he could manage to get to see Kurt again outside of work.

Soon, the light begins to fade and Kurt makes his move to go. Blaine helps Kurt with his jacket, and when they are standing at the door, he gets an idea. “Kurt, have you actually seen Hamilton yet?”

Kurt ducks his head and shyly replies, “No… No, I haven’t. The ticket prices weren’t in my price range when I was a waiter… The tips weren’t *that* good. And now that I have a little more money, the tickets have already sold out.”

“Well, there are some perks to being Vogue’s editor-in-chief, and one of those is being able to get hard-to-find tickets. Are you free next Saturday to see Hamilton?”

“Yes… Yes, I am. I would love to go see Hamilton with you.”
They stare into each other’s eyes, unsure how to end this ‘date but not a date’. Blaine looks at Kurt’s lips and wonders whether a kiss would be appropriate. However, his thoughts are quickly disrupted when Sam enters the apartment.

“Hi Blaine! Hi Kurt!”

“Sam! I wasn’t expecting you back so soon. Kurt’s just leaving.”

“I’m off to the bedroom so you can say your goodbyes. Come join me later. I’ve got something special to show you,” Sam replies, waving at Kurt before he disappears.

“Were you expecting Sam?” Kurt asks cautiously.

“Sort of,” Blaine hedges. “He lives here too, but he wasn’t due back for a while.”

Kurt gives Blaine a quick hug. “I’ve got to go, and you shouldn’t keep Sam waiting. Thanks for the lunch and everything. Let me know about Hamilton.”

After Kurt has left, Blaine goes to Sam’s room. “You have terrible timing, Sam!” Blaine groans, and he flops onto Sam’s bed.

“Man, I told you we should have a signal…. A tie on the door.”

“So what’s so special that you had to interrupt me and Kurt?” Blaine asks.

“KrianFeels has finally updated their fic! And the chapter is about 15,000 words long! Don’t you remember the big cliffhanger at the end of the previous chapter? Krian go to the prom together and Kevin gets crowned Prom Queen. Brian saves the day by asking Kevin for the dance when the Prom King runs away. Once the prom is over, they head back to the hotel where Kevin has booked a room. This chapter promises to be the smutty stuff that goes down after the prom.”

“You interrupted us for THAT?”

Blaine and Sam are fans of Breakaway, a new cutting-edge TV show about teenagers coming of age. When Sam was looking for new Star Wars fanfiction to read, he noticed that there were fics for Breakaway as well. Sam soon discovered KrianFeels’ stories about their favorite ship, Kevin and Brian, which are full of smut. They check their e-mails constantly on Saturdays, the usual update day.

“Dude, you’re into man-on-man stuff, so I thought you’d want to read it straightaway.”

Chapter End Notes

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. Here is the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics.

I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr. Reviews are like like eating a slice of New York City cheesecake.
Next up: The Hamilton date.
“How does a bastard, orphan, son of a whore and a Scotsman, dropped in the middle of a forgotten spot in the Caribbean by providence, impoverished, in squalor, grow up to be a hero and a scholar?” – Hamilton on Broadway
knots it at the front. He then focuses on his hair and instead sculpting it into his usual quiff, he works his hair back to give it a long, wavy look. Cristiano Cora has given him really great tips on how to create a variety of fabulous styles.

Kurt moves to the kitchen and is grateful that Rachel isn’t home. He’s nervous enough as it is, without her giving pointers on how to behave on his ‘not-quite-a-date’. He knows that Blaine’s invitation to see *Hamilton* is motivated by business. Blaine is smart that way - Kurt needs to see the play if he’s going to give Vogue the best creative ideas for the June issue. However, no matter how many times Kurt rationalizes tonight in his mind, his heart thinks of it as a date.

After drinking a glass of water, Kurt sits down on the window seat, lost in his thoughts, waiting for Blaine’s arrival. When he sees a Mercedes-Benz pull along the curb, he jumps up. In his neighborhood, the sedan is a rare sighting, and Kurt knows it has to be Blaine. Kurt puts on his washed-brown John Varvatos jacket and has one last look at the mirror before the intercom buzzes. “I’ll be right down, Blaine.”

It’s a cool March night, and Kurt can see Blaine shiver as he opens the apartment complex’s door. Kurt thinks that Blaine looks stunning in his gray slacks and Hugo Boss wool plaid sports jacket. The whole outfit pops with the the cobalt-blue polo he’s wearing underneath. Kurt is surprised that Blaine is clean-shaven and his curls appear more tamed than usual, brushed away from his face. Kurt’s gaze is interrupted when Blaine says, “Hurry inside the car. It’s freezing out here!”

Blaine opens the back door for Kurt to slide in. He quickly rushes to the other side of the car and when he enters, Blaine blows on his hands in an attempt to warm them up. Kurt impulsively takes Blaine’s hands in his own, and rubs them to create some heat. Judging from the smile on Blaine’s face, Kurt knows he has done the right thing.

“Directly to the Richard Rodgers Theater?” Bentley asks, hating to interrupt the hand-holding in the backseat of the car. He likes Kurt already – likes the way he’s taking care of Blaine, even if it’s only of his cold hands.

“Yes,” Blaine replies, reluctantly taking his hands away from Kurt’s. “Bentley, this is Kurt, who also works for Vogue. He’s been helping me out with the June issue.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you,” Bentley says, smiling at Kurt through the rearview mirror.

“Same here,” Kurt replies, with a questioning look to Blaine.

“Bentley is my driver, so you’ll probably see him a lot. He knows New York City like the back of his hand. Between him and Tina, they make sure I’m where I need to be.”

*Of course Blaine has his own personal driver. It must be a perk of the job. And Blaine thinks I’m going to see him a lot? Sometimes Kurt has difficulties remembering that the incredibly sweet man sitting beside him is a powerful mover and shaker in the fashion industry.*

“So Kurt, the brooch… it’s rather unusual,” Blaine praises as he glances at the zipper tied in a bow, with silver buttons on the knot.

Kurt preens at the comment. “I made it myself, but it’s inspired by a Jill Pineda creation. I think the little row of buttons might work well with the *Hamilton* theme.”

“You’re unbelievable, Kurt. I’m so glad I found you,” Blaine says sincerely.
Bentley briefly glances in the rearview mirror at Kurt and realizes that he is looking at Blaine’s blossoming flower from their conversation last month.

As the car approaches the theater, Blaine quickly sends a text. “Bentley, drop us off in front of the backstage door.”

There is a huge throng of fans standing at the front door, with phones held up high. “What’s going on?” Kurt asks.

“It’s the Ham4Ham preshow performance,” Blaine explains. It happens twice a week and fans get something special. It might be a song from the show, a poetry reading, or a silly dance. No two performances are alike, and a variety of people come out to perform. It’s aimed at those that can’t get tickets, but want to see something.”

Bentley pulls along the curb near the backstage door. Blaine immediately jumps out of the car, rushes along to the other side, and opens the door for Kurt.

“I could really get used to your dapper ways,” Kurt says, smiling, as he takes Blaine’s offered hand.

Once they’ve waved Bentley goodbye, Blaine keeps a hold of Kurt’s hand as they walk towards the backdoor. It’s immediately opened by a guard, who gives Blaine a quick glance and a nod, and allows them to enter. They follow the guard along the windy passage ways, until they are in front of a door with a gold ‘VIP lounge’ plaque. The lounge is small, but comfortable, with a leather sofa and chairs. “A Diet Coke?” Blaine offers as he approaches the small buffet with drinks and canopies.

“Sure. I can’t believe that we’re backstage. How are we even here?”

Before Blaine can answer, Lin-Manuel Miranda barges in, half-dressed for the performance. “Hey, Blaine. Glad you could make it tonight.”

Blaine rushes over to shake his hand, and then goes behind Lin-Manuel to do up the back buttons on his shirt. “Well, thanks for getting me the tickets on such short notice. I’d like to introduce you to Kurt Hummel, who I’ve told you about.”

Lin-Manuel gives Kurt a broad grin and a one-hand wave. “Great to meet you, man. Blaine’s told me of your ideas for a Hamilton-inspired photo spread. That’s so cool. I can’t wait to see it all pulled together.” Lin-Manuel turns his head and adds, “Blaine, you forgot to tell me how dishy Kurt is!”

Kurt ducks his head and blushes at the comment.

“Between you and me, Kurt will be Vogue’s fresh face in the May issue. Top secret info,” Blaine informs.

“My lips are sealed. I’ve got to get going… I’ve got a show to get on. Enjoy the performance.” Lin-Manuel dashes out of the lounge as quickly as he entered.

I can’t believe that I just met Lin-Manuel and didn’t even say a word. I stood there like a blushing bride on her wedding night.

“Wow! How do you know Lin-Manuel and when did you discuss me?” Kurt asks.
Blaine smiles, before relating their recent meeting. “I met with Lin-Manuel last Monday to tell him the plans for Vogue’s June issue. He was really excited about it and agreed to allow us access to the wardrobe and set departments to throw around ideas. And I might have mentioned you and how I wanted to take you to see the show this weekend.”

“You certainly have friends in high places,” Kurt replies, in awe of Blaine’s business acumen.

An usher arrives and leads them to their seats in the theater – center stage, sixth row, in the orchestra section. There’s a buzz in the audience and Kurt can feel himself practically bouncing in his seat. “This is the first time I’ve been to a Broadway show. I’ve seen bootleg copies on the Internet, but this is really something special. And these seats are perfect. I can see the entire stage. I might have to pinch myself to make sure this is real. Do you mind if I take a selfie of us? I want to remember this night forever.”

After a quick selfie or two are taken, Blaine softly smiles at Kurt and gives his hand a gentle squeeze. It’s exactly what Kurt needs to calm down before the performance begins. The lights start to dim and the orchestra begins to play. Kurt is soon transported into another world.

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When the curtains close to the last round of thunderous applause, Kurt is standing with a huge smile on his face and his body literally humming. “I’ve never experienced anything like that! The musical numbers! The set! The acting! The energy! It’s made me see hip-hop music in a whole new light!”

Kurt turns to Blaine who gives him a close-lipped smile. His eyes are warm and sparkling with delight.

“You’ve seen this before, haven’t you, Blaine?”

“I saw *Hamilton* when it was playing off-Broadway and made sure that Vogue published a review. Then, Lin-Manuel sent me tickets to the Broadway opening night as a token of his appreciation.”

Blaine shuffles his feet, puts his hands in his pockets and softly adds, “But it felt like a whole new experience, sitting next to you.”

The usher that seated them earlier in the evening is now back, and they are soon following her to the backstage door. Fortunately, they have beaten the crowds of fans and Blaine whisks Kurt to the Mercedes-Benz, waiting at the curb.

“Thank god you’re here, Bentley. I can already see the fans coming this way. I think we’d better get going quickly.”

Bentley pulls the sedan away from the curb and safely drives to the next block. “Where next, Blaine?”

Kurt takes a deep breath before he hears Blaine’s reply. He doesn’t want the evening to end so soon. He wants to spend more time with Blaine… just a little bit longer.

“How about we go for a drink and brainstorm some ideas?” Blaine suggests.

“Sounds perfect to me,” Kurt replies with a huge toothy grin.
“There’s a jazz club in Greenwich Village that I like. It’s pretty low-key, but the music is amazing. I know it’s a lot different from the hip-hop we just heard, but we won’t be bothered.”

“I’ve never been to a jazz club before in New York… or anywhere for that matter. It’s like a big new exciting adventure. I’m so game!”

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When they enter the Treble Clef Jazz Club, the hostess immediately comes over and greets them warmly. “Long time no see, Blaine. Marley Rose thought you might be stopping by tonight. Follow me.”

Kurt is amazed at just how many people Blaine knows in the city. Sure, Blaine’s ten years older, but he’s so sophisticated, so cultured, so experienced, so accomplished. Kurt wonders if Blaine has taken Sam here before, but he can’t quite see Sam enjoying this kind of club.

As the hostess leads them inside, Blaine places his hand on Kurt’s back, guiding him along the way. The gentle press of Blaine’s hand makes Kurt tingle inside, and he can feel the warmth radiate along his back. It makes him feel special and really taken care of. They are soon at a table, just off-center at the front of the stage. There’s plush half-moon seating and as Kurt sits down, he scooches to the center so that his thighs are almost touching Blaine’s.

As Kurt looks around, he can tell that they have the best seat in the house. The club is dark, but the slow-burning candle on the table provides a soft glow and the perfect amount of light. The walls are wood-paneled, with little scratches, and the varnish is fading in places, as a reminder that the club has been around for a while. There are framed photos scattered along the paneling with musicians performing - some famous and some not - and Kurt feels like he has been transported to another New York City altogether. The place is sophisticated, yet cozy, and reminds him of Blaine.

“I’ll have a whiskey and soda. Kurt, what will you have?” Blaine asks when the waitress is at their table.

“A soda water with lemon, please,” Kurt responds. He doesn’t want to remind Blaine that he is too young to order an alcoholic drink, so when the waitress leaves, he adds, “It’s my go-to drink when I’m out. It’s definitely on the approved list on my diet.”

They are silent as the musicians start up with a new song, and the music fills the club with its sounds. As he listens to the music, Kurt thinks that the bass clarinet might be his new favorite instrument. When the song is over, the band announces a break, and soon after, their drinks are served.

“So what’s your favorite type of music, Kurt?”

“I really love show tunes, but I also like pop. As you probably know from the photo shoot, Lady Gaga’s my absolute favorite.”

“Well, my guilty pleasure is Katy Perry,” Blaine retorts.

They soon get into a Katy vs Gaga debate, laughing at each other’s absolute conviction that their artist is best. The conversation soon drifts to Kurt’s attempts at a musical theater career.

“When I was rejected by NYADA, I decided to come to New York City anyways and try to make it on the big stage. But I was typecast at every audition I went to. I was told that I was suited more for
the best friend, the brother, that sort of thing. Always the supporting character. So I decided to take a break and then this Vogue gig came up.”

“Don’t give on your dreams, Kurt. You’re still young. If Lin-Manuel can make a success of a show based on Alexander Hamilton, anything is possible.”

Kurt laughs at his comment. Maybe his Pippa Middleton play idea wasn’t so bad after all. Blaine’s right. There are still endless possibilities for him in the New York theater scene. He just has to find them and get the timing right.

“Besides, you must be an incredible singer, Kurt. Your voice is so beautiful… I can’t even imagine what it sounds like when you sing.”

Kurt blushes at Blaine’s flattering comment. “Well, one day, I just might sing for you, but you’ll have to bribe me first!”

The discussion is abandoned when the owner comes on stage to announce the next act. “And now, for the highlight of the evening, please welcome Marley Rose.”

Kurt sees Blaine’s genuine smile and how enthusiastically he applauds the singer walking onto the stage. The slender young woman must be one of Blaine’s favorites. Marley Rose starts the set with ‘New York State of Mind’, and she has the audience in the palm of her hands by the end of the song. As she sings through her set, there are various couples out on the dance floor. Kurt loves to dance, but doesn’t feel confident enough to ask Blaine for a spin.

“Thank you. You’re a really great audience tonight. Before I finish the set, I have a really special treat for you. A very good friend of mine composed a song recently, and it’s beautiful. I’ve never sung it in public before, but I want to share it with you. I expect to see a lot more couples dancing to this song.”

Kurt notices that Marley Rose is smiling at their table and thinks that this might be a hint to ask Blaine for a dance. As the piano starts the opening notes, Kurt quickly stands up and asks Blaine, “May I have this dance?”

Kurt is surprised to see Blaine blushing so furiously, but is relieved when Blaine nods his head and softly replies, “Yes. Yes, you may.”

Now it’s Kurt’s turn to place his hand on Blaine’s back and gently guide him to the dance floor. Kurt places one hand on Blaine’s shoulder and gently tugs him closer as he clasps Blaine’s hand. They are close - but not fully touching - as their bodies sway to the music.

Dancing in my arms
Search your heart - search your soul
Find the real me
A hundred thousand things to see

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah

The music is led by the piano and there is an underlying bluesy melody to the song. As Marley Rose sings, Kurt gets caught up in the song’s feeling and pulls Blaine close to his chest.
You holding me in your arms
At last my dreams come true
You are so beautiful to me
Some things are meant to be

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah

Kurt feels Blaine’s arms shift as they engulf his back. Blaine is gently humming as he rubs soft circles on Kurt’s back. It feels so good, and Kurt has never felt so connected with another person - with a man - before. He feels safe and cocooned in Blaine’s arms and never wants to leave.

I’ve been looking for you forever
They don’t know how long it takes
I love your smile, your laugh
For you are mine...

Kurt hears Blaine gently sing the chorus and loves his rich tenor voice. Kurt loses himself to the sensations – the beautiful sounds in his ear, the press of their bodies together, the piano playing an interlude the background. The dim lighting makes it feel like a dream, and Kurt rests his neck along Blaine’s shoulder. He slowly inhales and takes in the smell of cologne, a freshly-laundered shirt and something else… that is utterly Blaine. Kurt’s never felt this way before and he isn’t sure how to label it. But it feels so good, so right.

Say you love me every waking moment
That you understand the man deep inside
Tell me I’m worth tryin’ for
And we were meant to be

Oh, Yeah, yeah, yeah

The song soon ends and the piano chords slowly fade. Soon, there’s a huge round of applause and Kurt steps away from Blaine to join in. Kurt smiles broadly when he notices that Blaine’s eyes are sparkling and full of something… maybe hope.

“Thank you very much, folks. I’ll let the composer know that you loved the song as much as I do. I’ll be here again next Tuesday night and hope to see you then.” The audience applauds Marley Rose and she bows before exiting backstage.

Blaine steers Kurt back to their table, both sliding in so their thighs are connecting.

“Blaine, you have a beautiful voice. I could get lost in it forever. But there’s something I don’t understand. Marley Rose said the song was recently composed. How did you know the lyrics?”

“Becauseiwroteit,” Blaine mumbles quickly, and immediately looks down at his lap.

“You what?!”

“I wrote the song. It’s no big deal, Kurt.”

“Blaine, look at me.”
Blaine slowly looks up, as if he’s afraid of what he may see. Kurt immediately takes one of Blaine’s hands, pulls it to the table and encases it with his own, slowly moving his thumb over the top. He can see Blaine visibly relax, so he continues.

“Of course it’s a big deal. That song is so beautiful. You are talented in so many ways. How long have you been writing songs?”

“Look, I’ll answer all your questions, but I need to go to the restroom. I’ll be back soon with another round of drinks.” Before Kurt can respond, Blaine dashes off.

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Blaine splashes water over his face in the restroom. He mentally kicks himself for not thinking through the idea of bringing Kurt to the Treble Clef Club. He should have known that Marley Rose was performing tonight. That she would sing the song he had shared with her only days ago. Of course she would want him to see the audience’s reaction firsthand. And when she smiled at the table before performing the song? She was like a siren luring them onto the dance floor. Kurt didn’t have a choice but to ask for a dance.

Blaine hands tremble and his heart races as he thinks back to the dance floor, when he had held Kurt in his arms. He wants to sob at the memory because it had felt so good… so perfect. It was everything he’d imagined it would be. But he can’t let Kurt know that he composed the song thinking of him. It’s too soon, it’s too much, and Blaine feels too vulnerable and emotionally exposed. But maybe he can open himself up to Kurt a little bit more. Tell him about his aborted music career. Peel off a layer to reveal more of himself. With his newfound courage, he quickly goes to the bar and orders another round of drinks, before returning to the table.

“I’m so glad you’re back, Blaine. I was afraid I’d scared you away. You don’t have to tell me anything about your music if you don’t want to.”

“I…I want to, Kurt. But it’s a long story.”

“Well, then it’s a good thing that there’s nowhere that I’d rather be,” Kurt replies. He encases Blaine’s hand in his own and gives him a reassuring look.

Blaine is pleased that Kurt is gently rubbing his thumb over the top of his hand once more. It makes him feel grounded and at ease.

“Music has always been a part of my life. My father is an accomplished sax player and my mother is a piano teacher. Growing up, we went to lots of live music performances in the area and spent many a night jamming at home. I even performed with my brother at the local theme park during the Christmas and summer holidays. When I went to Dalton in high school, I joined the glee club and was their lead soloist. I really wanted to pursue a music career.”

“So what happened?”

“I came out to my father…. That’s what happened. All of a sudden, he wasn’t supportive anymore of my love of music.” Blaine shakes his head slowly, before he adds, “I’m not sure whether it was because he didn’t think I was good enough to make it… or whether he was worried about what type of Bohemian lifestyle I would lead around so many gay guys.”
Blaine chuckles softly as he adds, “Little did he know that I would pick the fashion industry to work in, which has even more gay men.”

Kurt rolls his eyes. “I can’t believe he doesn’t love you for who you are. How can he not love you and support you?”

Blaine isn’t sure how to take Kurt’s remark, so he decides to continue with the story.

“My father did love me… does love me. He just has a different way of showing it. During my senior year at Dalton, when I was trying to decide on a college and a major, my father refused to fund the tuition for any studies relating to music. When I received the letter accepting me at Harvard, he was over the moon… so proud of me. He went on and on about Harvard’s business studies department and how the degree would set me up for life. I just couldn’t reject Harvard… and my father’s acceptance. I really wanted him to be proud of me.”

“Did you like Harvard?”

“I loved Harvard, Kurt. I found I was a natural at business and got involved in all sorts of clubs. I even ran the LGBT club for two years. Back then, I’d decided not to pursue anything musical, as it would have only have created tension between me and my father. So I focused on another love of mine – fashion. And that was the beginnings of my ‘Bowties and Suspenders’ blog. The rest, as they say, is history.”

Kurt takes a sip of his club soda and Blaine can almost see his mind whizzing away at a thousand miles per hour. “So, when did you get back into music?”

“Umm… Last weekend,” Blaine replies. He hopes Kurt doesn’t put two and two together and realize that it was after their lunch date at his place. “I mean, I always play the piano, as it relaxes me, and I love listening to all types of music. When I woke up on Sunday morning, there were a few music notes playing in the back of the mind. By the time I’d eaten breakfast, the notes had formed the beginning of a tune. By the time I sat at the piano at noon, the lyrics were coming out of my mouth and I had the song composed before sunset.

“So, how do you know Marley Rose? How did she get your song?”

“I used to come to this club every Saturday night, when I first arrived in New York. The music reminded me of the jam sessions we used to have back at home. Marley Rose is a songwriter as well, but isn’t as good at musical composition. We have spent many a Sunday afternoon at my place, fleshing out the music to her songs. She is always encouraging me to compose an original song of my own, so when I did, I showed it to her. I had no idea that she was going to sing it tonight.”

“I’m glad she did, because otherwise, I wouldn’t have learnt about this fascinating side of you. Now that you have your songwriting muse, are you going to continue composing?”

Blaine laughs internally at Kurt’s turn of phrase. *I most certainly do have a songwriting muse. You just don’t know that it’s you.*

Blaine’s not sure whether Kurt is just being polite with his comment. “No, I don’t think so. I mean, I love composing music, but the Vogue job is pretty full-on. I don’t have a lot of spare time left after work and the related night-time functions.”

“You’re your own man now, Blaine. You can do anything you want to. As a wise man once told
me, don’t give up on your dreams. You’re still young.”

Blaine’s eyes widen when he hears Kurt repeat his very own words back to him.

“Blaine, you need to make sure that you put your happiness first – top priority, so to say. Are you happy?”

Blaine gently nods in appreciation of Kurt’s sentiment. He loves that his happiness is important to Kurt.

“So are you…you know…happy?” Kurt asks shyly again.

Blaine laughs and replies, “Yes, I am. Right at this moment, I’m really, really happy.”

“But usually?” Kurt prods.

“Y…es… Yes, I am. However, there’s one last puzzle piece to put in place in order for me to be ecstatically happy.” Blaine hopes that Kurt hasn’t figured out that he is the missing puzzle piece.

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Bentley pulls the Mercedes-Benz sedan to a stop in front of Kurt’s Bushwick apartment. As Blaine walks Kurt to the apartment complex’s door, he’s wondering whether the evening should end with a kiss. Kurt looks so damn sexy, and Blaine worries his bottom lip with his teeth, deciding what he should do.

“Was this a date, Blaine? I don’t have much experience, but it certainly felt like one.”

Blaine is thrilled at Kurt’s question. It had felt like it was a real date to him as well. But shyness takes over and he ducks his head so that Kurt can’t see him blush. He peeps up over his eyelashes and replies, “Only if you want it to be.”

At the worst moment possible, Bentley’s window goes down and he shouts, “Hey, Blaine. I’ve got Sam on the line. He’s wondering if we can pick him up on the way home. Is that okay with you?”

Blaine can see Kurt startle, but he can’t read the expression on Kurt’s face. He wants to say something, but words won’t form in his mouth.

“Anyways… I had a great time tonight. Thanks for inviting me out,” Kurt says in a breathy voice. Kurt gives Blaine a quick kiss on the cheek before rushing inside the building.

Blaine now knows how Prince Charming must have felt when Cinderella disappeared from the ball at midnight.

Chapter End Notes

The songs Marley Rose sang in the jazz club were

‘New York State of Mind’ by Billy Joel
‘I’ve Been Looking for You Forever’ by me. Let’s just say that I’m not giving up my day job anytime soon xD.

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. Here is the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics.

I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr. Reviews are like watching Blaine Warbler sing ‘oh, yeah’, pursing his lips together and making ridiculous faces.

Earlier this week I posted a short story called 'Friday Night Dinner’. Please check it out and let me know what you think.

Next up: Kurt feels confused about his feelings for Blaine… but he comes up with a plan.
Mixed Signals

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“The most confused you will ever get is when you try to convince your heart and spirit of something your mind knows is a lie.” – Shannon L. Alder

March

When the alarm clock goes off the next morning, Kurt reaches to the bedside table, slams the ‘off’ button, rolls back, and buries his head beneath the pillows. He’s had a restless night’s sleep, filled with tossing and turning, and fitful dreams. He quickly goes to the bathroom to relieve his bladder and returns to the warmth of his bed. He lays his head on one pillow, while he takes the other pillow and hugs it close to his body. At last, he feels comfortable and snugly warm.

His thoughts drift to last night – seeing Hamilton and visiting the jazz club. Being with Blaine. He recalls what Blaine was wearing - how gorgeous he had looked. The outfit was a perfect combination of smart and casual. Blaine’s curls had a glossy shine, but looked so soft that Kurt’s fingers had twitched, suppressing his desire to run them through Blaine’s hair. Kurt was surprised that Blaine was clean-shaven and had worn contact lenses. However, he wasn’t complaining because that way, he got a better view of his warm hazel eyes.

When Kurt thinks back to the evening, he appreciates how Blaine was so attentive to him, as if he were someone special. Opening doors, guiding him as they walked, buying him drinks, and keeping up a steady flow of interesting conversation. Blaine has an effortless sophistication about him that Kurt loves. But beneath all the charm, Kurt knows Blaine can be silly and spontaneous as well. He laughs when he thinks of the photo shoot and Blaine singing and dancing along to the Spice Girls.

And the dance at the jazz club… It was everything to Kurt. To feel Blaine’s compact body against his. To feel Blaine’s hands on his back, gently rubbing circles. To feel Blaine’s warm breath on his neck, softly singing in his ear. Kurt had never felt so connected with a man before in his life. If ever someone were to ask him to pick the moment when his heart started to belong to Blaine, that moment would be on the dance floor, swaying to the music and listening to that song. Kurt squeezes his pillow tighter around his arms, imagining it’s Blaine.

Finding out that Blaine had composed the song had been quite a surprise. Of course Blaine would be talented in anything he chooses to do. But the song was about finding someone special and falling in love. The song conveyed a certain vulnerability… about opening yourself up to reveal the real you. Could Blaine, who is popular and comes across as so confident, ever feel like this?

Kurt could tell that Blaine was initially uncomfortable talking about his music, but he had slowly opened up and had related his past with music. Kurt is surprised that Blaine’s father, who clearly also enjoys music, hadn’t been supportive of him studying it in any sort of capacity. He wonders what Blaine would have been like if he’d had a father like his own, or even Rachel’s.

Kurt closes his eyes and remembers the end of the evening, when Blaine had walked him to the door of his apartment building. When Blaine had said that he could consider the evening a date if he wanted to, Kurt had felt desperate for his first kiss – or the first kiss that counted – to be with Blaine. It would have been a perfect ending to a perfect evening. Blaine had leaned in so close that Kurt
could almost feel Blaine’s lips on his… until stupid Bentley reminded Blaine of stupid Sam.

Kurt had noticed the surprised look on Blaine’s face. And all of a sudden, Kurt couldn’t bear the thought of another man having Blaine - his kisses, his heart, well, his everything. Kurt grimaces when he thinks of the awkward good-bye, and throws the pillow he’s hugging off the bed.

Kurt quietly goes to the kitchen – Rachel’s still sleeping - to make a cup of coffee. With a steaming mug in his hand, he slips back into bed and reaches for his tablet. After checking his e-mail, Kurt decides to indulge in his own personal version of hell – he googles ‘Blaine Anderson and Sam Evans’.

There are about 37,600 results to the search, so he starts with the images. Blaine and Sam on the red carpet at the National Awards Ceremony, at the New York Fashion Week, at the opening of a trendy boutique. There are also a bunch of images of them with friends – at a bar, at a party, or at a friend’s house. What strikes Kurt is that there are no casual sightings of just the two of them. No walks through Central Park, no restaurant dates… Nothing to indicate that they spend loads of time together. However, Kurt knows better. They’re living together, after all.

Kurt then presses ‘video’ on the search results and watches the first half dozen YouTube videos. These paint a slightly different picture. He can see Blaine looking at Sam’s lips, Sam’s arm casually thrown over Blaine’s shoulder. He can see quick glances they share that are a whole conversation in themselves. He groans as he tosses his tablet to the foot of the bed. Kurt’s never felt so confused in his life.

Kurt hears Rachel stirring in the kitchen. He throws on his fluffy terrycloth robe and leaves his curtained-off bedroom. It’s still early on a Sunday morning, and he’s not quite ready to start the day. “Good morning, Rach,” he says upon entering the kitchen.

Rachel is peering into the fridge as if looking for something good to eat. “Hey, Kurt. I wasn’t expecting you up so early. You got home pretty late last night,” she adds with a wink.

“I didn’t sleep so well. How about I make us some cinnamon-apple pancakes? You slice the apples and I’ll start on the pancake batter.”

Rachel readily agrees and they work together silently in the kitchen. Rachel brews another pot of coffee and sets the table for their breakfast. After a few bites of pancake, Rachel takes a good long look at Kurt. “So how was your date last night?”

“Umm… It wasn’t a date… It was just a night out to research Vogue’s June issue,” Kurt replies. Rachel raises an eyebrow in total disbelief.

Kurt capitulates with a sigh. “Okay, I think it was a date, and it was the best night of my life. Seeing a Broadway show was a dream come true. *Hamilton* was an incredible performance and something I will always remember. I even met Lin-Manuel Miranda in person before the show!”

Kurt can see a frown on Rachel’s face, conveying her jealousy at Kurt attending the hottest show in town and meeting Lin-Manuel. Kurt gently rubs her arm and adds, “Of course, the experience will fade when I see Rachel Barbra Berry perform her dream role at *Funny Girl’s* opening night. I will be basking in the glory of it for decades to come.”

Rachel grins broadly and bounces gently in her seat. “So, what did you do after the show? You must have done something, because you didn’t get home until the wee hours of the morning.”
“Blaine took me to a jazz club. It was perfect. We talked for hours and even slow-danced together. The night was perfect, except at the end.”

“Why’s that?” Rachel asks, as she digs into another apple pancake on her plate.

“I’m not exactly sure. When Blaine walked me to the front door, I really thought we were going to have a goodnight kiss. But then his driver shouted something about picking up Sam, and the mood suddenly changed. It was just a reminder that Blaine isn’t mine to kiss… A reminder that he belongs to someone else.”

Kurt takes a sip of his coffee before continuing. “The trouble is that Blaine Anderson is pretty perfect… At least perfect for me. I’m just going to have to shut down these thoughts.”

“Kurt, last night he took you to see Hamilton and to a classy jazz club. He must have some level of interest in you. I think you should use it to your advantage.”

“What do you mean, Rachel?”

“Blaine Anderson is the freaking editor-in-chief of Vogue! He can open doors for you, introduce you to the right people. You’ve already met Lin-Manuel Miranda, for crying out loud. Did you mention that you are a music theater performer? A singer? A dancer?”

“N… no, I didn’t. It was all over so quickly.”

“Kurt, you’re probably Blaine Anderson’s flavor of the month. He’ll tire of you when you are no longer Vogue’s fresh face. So accept every invitation, let him wine and dine you, and introduce you to New York’s movers and shakers. And make sure people know about your talents away from the modeling set.”

“I don’t know, Rach. It doesn’t feel right.”

“Grow up, Kurt! We’re not in Lima, Ohio anymore. We’re in New York City, and it’s a jungle out there.”

*****

Kurt steps out of the bathroom, still toweling his hair. He’d thought that a long shower would wash away his problems, but Rachel’s words still sting. There might be different rules of the game in New York City, but he is still Kurt Hummel, and has a firm set of values – family and love and commitment and acceptance of others. He’s a man who wants to experience the Big Apple, but on his own terms. He’s a man who wants to fall in love.

Kurt is relieved when he hears Rachel leave the loft for rehearsals, because her advice doesn’t sit quite right with him. He doesn’t want to hear any more about it from Rachel. He throws on some yoga pants and a sweatshirt and moves to the living area, with his tablet in hand. He knows who he needs to talk to and he opens up Skype.

“How ya doing, kiddo? What’s got you sitting at home in sweats on a Sunday?”

“Hi, Dad. I had a really late night yesterday. It’s raining outside and I don’t feel like going out.”
“So tell me about your night. Did ya do something fun?”

Kurt recounts to his dad about seeing *Hamilton* and going to a jazz club. He gushes about Blaine and the song that he’s written. Unfortunately, there is nothing that escapes his father’s notice.

“This Blaine Anderson sounds like somebody special to you.”

“Well, he is. I like him… I mean I ‘like’ like him. But there’s a catch. He’s already in a relationship, and living with the guy. Sam’s great and he really clicks with Blaine. But Blaine keeps giving me vibes that he’s really interested in me. You know, in that sort of way. I know nothing can come of it, but I can’t help wishing for it.”

Kurt can see his dad remove his baseball cap and rub his head. It’s always a signal that he’s thinking.

“I don’t know what to tell you, Kurt. It seems like you already know the answer. Nothing can come of it except heartbreak and unhappiness. Maybe you should just distance yourself for a while until you get your feelings under control.”

Kurt nods his head in agreement. “I spoke to Rachel this morning and she advised me to go out with Blaine as often as possible - that I should use his position of power to my advantage to further my career.”

“That sounds like something Rachel would do. But you’re not Rachel. Do you want to use Blaine like that, Kurt?”

“No. No, I don’t. Blaine’s such a wonderful guy. He’s smart and creative, but can be caring as well. When I’m with him, he makes me feel like I’m the most important person in his life… Like I matter.”

“You do matter, Kurt. And Blaine matters too. Using him doesn’t feel right in my books. I know Lima isn’t New York City, but people are the same the world over. Blaine has feelings and vulnerabilities just like you do.”

“I know what you mean. I think behind Blaine’s outer sophistication, there’s a guy who is lonely and wanting a friend. His building’s concierge told me that I was the first guy Blaine had invited to his apartment since he moved in two years ago.”

“So maybe you should be that friend for Blaine.”

“Maybe I should.”

After shutting down Skype, Kurt sends a text message to Blaine. *Thanks for last night – it was really special. I can now check off Broadway and a jazz club from my bucket list.*

*****

Blaine enters his apartment, hot and sweaty from his run. He’s had a restless night’s sleep, filled with tossing and turning, and fitful dreams. He takes a leisurely shower before joining Amy in the kitchen. She turns off the blender and pours Blaine’s fruit smoothie into a glass, before handing it over.

“You’re up early for a Sunday, Blaine.”

“Yeah, I didn’t sleep so well last night. I thought a run might help, but it didn’t. I just can’t shake him
“from my mind.”

“Guy problems?”

“Major guy problems. I went out with Kurt last night and we had a wonderful evening. We saw *Hamilton* on Broadway and then I took him to the Treble Clef Jazz Club. It was the perfect date, except at the end.”

“What happened?” Amy prods.

“Bentley mentioned Sam, and the mood suddenly changed. Before I knew it, Kurt had dashed into his apartment building.”

“And why do you think he rushed away? Have you told Kurt that you and Sam are just friends?”

“No, of course I haven’t. There are only a handful of people who know our secret and I need to keep it that way. Mercedes is on tour. But it doesn’t really matter, because I think that Kurt has a crush on Sam.”

“Why’s that?”

“Well, Sam was friendly with Kurt when they were at the photo shoot last month. You know what Sam’s like. He can be flirty without even knowing it. And we’re talking about Sam here. He’s a gay man’s fantasy come true… I should know. He’s tall and good-looking and his body’s just perfect. You could get lost in those abs. And yet he has a boyish charm about him. There’s no way I can compete with that.”

Amy pours two cups of coffee before joining him at the breakfast bar. “Don’t sell yourself short, Blaine. You’re quite the catch yourself. And Kurt’s not spending time with Sam. He’s spending time with you.”

“I know, but Kurt is so young, and he’s told me he hasn’t had a boyfriend before. And he’s so beautiful, both inside and out, and once he’s on the cover of Vogue, he’s going to have men falling at his feet. I’ll be like leftovers from last night’s dinner – a little old, stale and unappealing.”

Blaine takes a sip of his coffee before continuing. “And what happens if we do get together before then? I’m scared that one day he’s gonna wake up and realize that he doesn’t really love me.”

Amy rises from her kitchen stool to give Blaine a hug. “I think you’re getting ahead of yourself, Blaine. You’re talking about love and relationships. I know they’re important to you, but baby steps first. Spend some more time with Kurt and get to know him better. But most importantly, let him get to know you better. Sometimes the prize outweighs the risks when opening yourself up to someone.”

Blaine’s not sure what to say in response. What Amy says makes total sense. But it doesn’t stop the butterflies that flutter in his stomach. He is scared. His phone vibrates on the kitchen counter and Blaine quickly glances at the message. It’s from Kurt, thanking him for last night.

“Kurt?” Amy asks when she notices Blaine’s huge grin.

“Yeah.”

“Well, if a simple text can make you smile like that, I’d say he’s worth taking a chance on.” Amy
squeezes his arm and leaves for the laundry area.

Blaine looks down at his phone again and composes his reply. "You’re welcome. Anything else we could cross off your bucket list?"

*****

April

It’s a Saturday afternoon, and Kurt is flopped out on the couch after a particularly grueling workout session with Chrystal. It’s the first chance he’s had to relax over the past few weeks. Kurt’s been busy writing an article for the Vogue website about Hamilton, behind the scenes. Blaine has arranged for him to have access to the show’s set, wardrobe, and make-up departments. Kurt has loved interviewing the staff and getting first-hand knowledge of what happens behind the scenes to make Hamilton a successful show. He handed in the article to Isabelle Wright yesterday, and now he finally has a weekend to himself.

But Kurt’s bored. There are lots of things he could do, but he wants to do them with somebody. Kurt feels like he has been so focused on his new modeling career that he hasn’t really given any thought to his private life. He hardly sees Rachel anymore now that she’s in rehearsal for Funny Girl. His thoughts quickly wander to Blaine.

Blaine has been quiet as well over the past few weeks. They’ve exchanged a few work-related e-mails about the Vogue website article, but there have been no invitations to meet up soon. Isabelle did mention in passing that Blaine has just returned from India. He’s attended the Fashion Week in Mumbai to get a feel of where the top Indian designers were heading. Kurt thinks that an Indian-focused issue would be pretty interesting.

The truth is that he misses Blaine. Kurt enjoys spending time with him, and he still wants Blaine in his life. And if that means just being friends, then that’s what they’ll be. Kurt has reconciled himself to the fact that Blaine will never be interested in him – he has Sam after all. He wants Blaine to know that he is comfortable with that. When Kurt thinks back to the time he has spent with Blaine, he realizes that they never talk about Sam, or when he does come up, it’s all kinds of awkward.

Kurt vows to himself that he will prove to Blaine that he understands and supports his relationship with Sam. He’ll show interest in what Sam’s doing and make sure to invite Sam along on some of their outings. Kurt will show Blaine that he’s happy to be his friend and just enjoy his company.

Kurt looks at his phone and pulls up Blaine’s contact details. He takes a look at the photo of Blaine at the New York Fashion Week, one that he pulled off Twitter. Blaine looks like a rock star with his tumble of curls, face stubble and sunglasses. He wants a new photo of Blaine - one of Blaine shyly smiling, or blushing, or him laughing from the bottom of his belly. A photo that reflects the person Kurt’s getting to know. He decides to send Blaine a text. "What’s up? Bored @ home... Do you have plans for tomorrow?"

Two minutes later, Kurt receives a text from Blaine. "Getting ready to go out to a restaurant opening tonight. No plans for tomorrow that I can’t change. What do you have in mind?"

Kurt thinks about his reply. He knows he wants to hang out with Blaine, but in a more casual setting than they usually do. He looks at the weather forecast which is 62F and sunny skies. He then has a brilliant idea. He types Let’s go out and experience some of the Big Apple. I’ve got a great idea... but it’s a surprise. Another thing to tick off my bucket list ;)"
Twenty minutes go by, and Kurt is getting worried that he hasn’t heard from Blaine yet. Maybe he has crossed a line by being the one to initiate getting together? Or the winky face? After all, he’s dealing with the Blaine Anderson. Kurt is busying himself in the kitchen, preparing dinner, when his phone goes off.

“Hey, Kurt. It’s Blaine. Sorry I didn’t get back to you sooner. I had to leave my apartment and tell Bentley where to take me. I’ve got this restaurant thingy I’m expected at tonight.”

“Rather you than me, Blaine. Your life sounds exhausting. So can we meet up tomorrow? I’ve got to warn you - my idea is going to take most of the day.”

“I’m not sure how to say this, but I can’t go out with a guy all day in New York City without attracting the paparazzi. And I’m trying to keep you under wraps until the May issue is released. It’s only a few more weeks.”

“There won’t be any paps where I plan to take you. As a matter of fact, I doubt anybody there will know who you are. The only attention you’ll get will be some casual stares. You’re a good-looking man, after all.”

Kurt face-palms himself for the last remark. He realizes that staying in the friend zone will be harder than he thought.

“Umm… Thanks. Flattery will get you everywhere. Can you give me a hint about tomorrow so that I can be prepared?”

“It has something to do with accessorizing your penthouse, and I’m not telling you any more than that. If you want, I can tell Bentley where we’re going in case you want to get away fast. Will that work for you?”

“Yeah, that sounds like a plan. Now I’m curious about what we’re going to do. Can’t you tell me just a little bit more?”

Kurt squeals into the phone, so happy that Blaine has agreed. “Nah-uh. Where would be the fun in that? You just need to be casually dressed and leave all the bells and whistles at home. And that includes your pink sunglasses, mister! Oh, and be prepared to walk a lot. I’ll pick you up at 10am. Does that work for you?”

“Yeah, that’s fine. I can’t wait to see you again, Kurt. It’s been a while.”

“It’s been too long, Blaine. I can’t wait to see you either. Have a good evening, and I’ll see you in the morning.”

*****

Blaine presses the ‘end call’ button on his phone and squeals like one of his fangirls. He’s been hoping that Kurt would initiate their next meeting. But to surprise him with a whole day planned out with Blaine in mind? This is beyond his wildest dreams. He feels like a teenager about to go on his first date. Kurt hasn’t mentioned the word ‘date’ in the conversation, but it certainly feels like it might be.

Bentley drops Blaine off in front of the Beso restaurant. It’s owned by Eva Longoria, of Desperate
Housewives fame. Based on the Latin American restaurant’s success in Hollywood, she is expanding her empire to include a restaurant in New York. The Latino dynamo has invited anyone who matters to attend the grand opening. She personally called Blaine yesterday to confirm that he still planned to attend.

Blaine enters the Beso restaurant and takes a good look around. The floors are dark oak and polished to a high shine. The restaurant is long and narrow and its ceiling is arched, as if it used to be a warehouse in decades past. Curtains cover the long windows and give the restaurant a cozy and intimate feel. There’s a musician in the corner, strumming a guitar, and the space is filled with Latino music.

Blaine takes a drink from the bar when he hears a familiar voice behind him.

“Well, if it isn’t my teenage dream.”

Blaine shudders in disgust as he turns around to face Sebastian Smythe. Blaine quickly looks him over and notices that Sebastian has retained his classic good looks. However, there’s now a hardness to his eyes that wasn’t there before, and some bags underneath them from too many nights out partying.

“So, did you bring your ‘fresh face’ with you? That is one man I definitely want to meet.”

“Sebastian, it’s been a while,” Blaine responds, as he offers his hand in greeting. “What makes you think that Vogue’s fresh face is a man?”

“Because when you mentioned that Vogue had a fresh face at the National Awards Ceremony, I saw your heart-eyes. Don’t forget, I know you well, Blaine.”

Blaine’s cheeks flush and he hopes that Sebastian doesn’t notice. “I think that’s a figment of your imagination. Hot male models are your fantasy, not mine.”

Sebastian smirks at Blaine. “I don’t believe you, but I’ll find out soon enough. The May issue will hit the newsstands in a few weeks. And I think you’ll find that I have a few tricks up my sleeve.”

Blaine glares at Sebastian before heading towards the crowd surrounding Eva Longoria. He doesn’t trust Sebastian one little bit. And he’ll be damned if he will let Sebastian anywhere near Kurt.

Chapter End Notes

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. Here is the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics.

I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr. Reviews are like a freshly-brewed mug of coffee on a Sunday morning.

Next up: The date that Kurt plans.
“Life is either a daring adventure or nothing at all.” – Helen Keller, the Open Door

April

“That’s great, Coop. I’m really happy that you’ve landed the role. Looks like you’re going to have a steady job for a while.”

“I’m hoping so. I’m getting chummy with the writers so that they don’t kill off Dylan for a while. Do you think personally autographed photos are too much?”

Blaine chuckles as he imagines Cooper flirting with the writers, both the men and the women. “Yeah, that’s too much. Why don’t you try buying the first round at the bar after work? Or arranging food to be delivered for them when they’re working overtime rewriting scenes? I’m sure they’ll appreciate that more.”

After a long silence, Cooper replies, “Since when did you get to be so smart, squirt?”

“I have a big magazine empire to run, remember? Anyways, I’ll be watching The Young and the Restless each night when I get home from work.”

“Don’t you have better things to do, like dating hot men?”

“M…Maybe?” Blaine replies cautiously. He’s not sure how much he wants to tell Cooper about Kurt.

“Maybe sounds like a definite yes to me. Spill!”

“Okay. So I’ve met a man and he’s pretty terrific. We have loads in common and he seems to like me, well…for me.”

“Is he cute?”

“The cutest,” Blaine sighs. “As a matter of fact, he’s taking me on a date today.”

“I’m happy for you, squirt. Just make sure you slip a condom – or six – in your wallet. I want you safe.”

Blaine rolls his eyes at Cooper’s comment. “I’m going to take that in the spirit it was meant... about me being safe. But no, sex isn’t on the cards for today. We’re taking things really slowly.”

“Well, don’t take things too slowly. You’re so uptight all the time. You need a good lay. Now, go get yourself ready for your hot date. I’ll talk to you soon.”

Blaine grimaces at Cooper’s closing remarks and presses the ‘end call’ button on his phone. He checks the time, and when he realizes that he only has an hour before Kurt arrives, he dashes to his
bedroom to get ready.

*****

At 10am sharp, the building’s concierge phones to inform him that Mr. Hummel has arrived. Blaine takes a last look in the mirror and is pleased that his curls are behaving for once. He’s really got to send Unique flowers for giving him a product that can tame his curls. He has opted not to shave – it’s Sunday after all – but he did put in his contact lenses. When Blaine is satisfied with how he looks, he pats his pockets to make sure that he has his keys, wallet and phone, and then takes his private elevator.

Blaine enters the lobby area, sees Kurt and immediately bounds over to him, arms open for a hug. Kurt gives him a quick hug – much too quick for his liking – and takes a long look at Blaine. Blaine feels a bit self-conscious and hopes he’s appropriately dressed for their date. He’s wearing tight-fitting distressed jeans with strategically placed rips along his thighs and knees. A simple white V-neck T-shirt gives a glimpse of some chest hair, and over the top is Blaine’s favorite worn leather jacket. Blaine notices Kurt’s eyes take everything in, including his converse sneakers.

“Oh my god, Blaine. You look like every bad boy fantasy I ever had in high school!”

Blaine throws his head back in laughter, and he can feel his curls tickle the back of his neck. “Some day, I’m going to find out about every high school fantasy and every item on your bucket list,” Blaine replies with a wink.

Then a thought occurs to Blaine. “Kurt, before we leave, I just want to make sure that you did speak to Bentley.”

Kurt slowly moves closer to Blaine and squeezes his arm. “Yes, I did. We’re taking the subway there, but Bentley is going to pick us up later in the day. He insisted. Bentley did mention something about wanting to know his ringtone in exchange, but I didn’t understand what he meant.”

“Bentley’s ringtone on my phone is classified information, Kurt. If he asks you again, tell him it’s ‘The Lost Art of Keeping a Secret’. He’ll understand what you say.”

Kurt gives Blaine a quizzical look, but lets the conversation slide. Kurt’s finger pulls Blaine’s chin up so that they are looking each other in the eye. Kurt’s eyes are beautiful, and as Blaine is trying to figure out their color, Kurt starts to speak.

“Blaine, I would never place you in a risky situation. I want you to relax and enjoy yourself. You can let yourself go and just be you. I promise to keep you safe. If at any point you don’t feel comfortable, just say the word and we’ll leave. And if there’s any problem today, we’ll figure out what to do together. I’ll be there for you, because you’re my friend, and so special to me.”

Blaine’s heart melts when he sees the sincerity in Kurt’s eyes. “I trust you, Kurt. I know you’ll keep me safe. A… And you’re special to me too,” Blaine’s lips slowly turn up into a smile. “I’m really excited to find out what we’re doing. I can’t remember the last time someone surprised me.”

As they exit the building, Blaine takes a beanie out of his pocket and puts it on. Kurt stops abruptly and gapes at Blaine.

“Blaine, only you could make the bad boy look so freaking adorable. And by the way, adorable dorks are also on the high school fantasy list.”
Blaine shakes his head in gentle laughter as they walk to the nearest subway station. He loves how things are so easy when he’s around Kurt - the banter and the casual flirting. He loves how Kurt makes him feel. Blaine can already tell that this is going to be a special day.

*****

While they’re waiting on the subway platform, Blaine remarks, “I haven’t been on the subway in years. It’s still as grimy and crowded as ever.”

“Welcome to my world, Blaine. It’s not so bad. I don’t know how you can stand to sit in traffic jams all the time. It would drive me insane.”

The train stops along the platform and when the doors open, Blaine can see that it is crowded. “Let’s wait for the next train. There’s no room for us.”

Kurt chuckles as he takes Blaine’s hand. “Of course there’s room. Follow me and hold on tight.”

That is one order that Blaine has no problem with. They enter the compartment and squeeze into a corner. Blaine’s fingers are tightly gripping a pole and Kurt is pressed against his back, arms wrapped around him, to hold onto the pole as well. As the train exits the station, he can feel Kurt swaying, muscles flexing with every movement. Blaine feels so connected and safe in Kurt’s arms, like he’s being taken care of. Blaine wonders why he ever would want to ride in an empty compartment with Kurt - ever.

After half an hour, Kurt indicates, moving his head to one side, that the next stop is theirs. Blaine quickly takes Kurt’s hand as they exit the train and walk out of the subway station. Fortunately, Kurt keeps ahold of his hand as they walk along the street. It feels so warm and soft. Blaine still hasn’t figured out where they are going and why they are in Brooklyn of all places. “Uh… Kurt? Where are we going?”

“We’re heading to 37th Street just up ahead. When we turn the corner, we’ll be where I want us to be. That’s all I’m saying.”

Kurt laughs as Blaine picks up the pace in their walking, like an excited kid on Christmas morning. As they round the corner, Blaine sees the sign for their destination. “The flea market?”

“The flea market,” Kurt confirms. “You weren’t expecting me to take you to Armani Casa or some trendy home furnishing store like that?”

“Of course not,” Blaine huffs. “I’ve never been to a flea market before.”

Without overthinking it, Blaine grabs Kurt’s face with his hands and plants a big wet kiss on his cheek. He quickly pulls back and says, “Best. Idea. Ever. Let’s go!”

They enter Industry City, a building used for manufacturing in days gone by, and they can see row upon row of vendors selling housewares, vintage clothing, antiques, collectibles, jewelry, art, furniture, and a whole lot more. Kurt checks the time on his phone. “I haven’t been here before, but I’ve spent some time checking it out on the Internet. I think the best strategy is to have a quick go around, grab a bite to eat, and then zoom in on the home furnishings in the afternoon.

They both enjoy examining the vintage clothing, and Blaine buys a blouse for his mother. They
eagerly look at the jewelry stalls to see if there are any brooches to add to Kurt’s collection. Blaine pulls Kurt back as they pass a stall selling antique pocket watches. After a few minutes of discussing the watches with the vendor, Blaine turns his head and says, “Go ahead, Kurt. I’ll catch up with you soon. I’m going to spend a little bit of time here.”

Blaine notices Kurt stop a few stalls ahead to look at some old sheet music. After learning more about the pocket watches, he thanks the vendor and walks quickly to catch up with Kurt. “Sorry about that. I’ve always loved pocket watches. My grandfather had one. He died when I was young and it’s one of the few things I remember about him.”

“No worries, Blaine. I bought some sheet music of old Broadway tunes. I figure it will be a great present for Rachel on her next birthday. Hungry yet?”

“Starving!” Blaine admits. As if on cue, his stomach starts rumbling, and they both giggle.

“Right. There’s a section here called ‘Smorgasburg’, which has about 100 food vendors. I’m sure we’ll find something yummy to eat.”

There’s a lot of tempting food on offer, and they both decide to get something from ‘Best Buds Burritos’. After their order has been taken, Blaine reaches into his pocket and takes out his wallet. Before he can open it up, he can feel Kurt’s hand gently pushing his arm away.

“Put that wallet away, mister. I’m in charge of the date, so it’s my treat. Go grab a seat and I’ll join you when the burritos are ready.”

Blaine finds a small table near a window that’s a little out of the way. He thinks that it’s in a perfect position because the cozy nook gives them a little bit of privacy. Once he sits down, Blaine can feel his heart racing and he can’t help but release a little squeal. It’s not because Kurt’s paying for lunch, although he loves the idea that Kurt is taking care of things… taking care of him. It’s because Kurt said that four letter word - ‘date’. When Kurt asked him out, Blaine had hoped it was a date. And it certainly feels like a date. But to have Kurt confirm that it really is a date… Wow.

“Penny for your thoughts?” Kurt asks as he sits down and arranges the food and drinks off the tray.

“This is a pretty perfect date,” Blaine says with a soft smile. He can’t help but push it and see how Kurt is going to respond.

“No, a perfect date is seeing Hamilton and dancing at a jazz club. This is just a great way to explore new things.” Kurt takes the wrapper off his burrito and takes a big bite.

As they eat their California burritos, Blaine thinks about what a fun day he’s having. No-one has bothered them so far, and he feels like it’s the first time he’s been able to relax in public in years. He knows that it’s all down to Kurt. He glances up and notices that Kurt is staring at him. “What?”

Kurt leans forward and Blaine can feel his knees bump against his own. Kurt presses his hand to the side of Blaine’s face. He gently swipes his thumb along Blaine’s lips to the side of his mouth. Blaine resists the temptation to kiss Kurt’s thumb or move his face so that his cheek rests on Kurt’s hand. As Kurt moves his hand away, Blaine notices some guacamole on the tip of his thumb. Kurt slowly puts his thumb into his mouth and licks the avocado off with his tongue. “Some guacamole escaped your burrito,” Kurt says, stating the obvious. “Now, let’s talk home furnishings. I’m thinking of…”

Blaine tries to pay attention to Kurt’s ideas about color palettes, textures and finishing touches. He
really does. But he fails spectacularly. Blaine thinks he’s going to self-combust at any moment as heat rushes from his feet to the top of his head. That whole guacamole thing is the hottest thing he has ever seen in his life. Kurt is so naturally sexy. What astonishes Blaine is that Kurt doesn’t even know it. He shudders at the prospect of men asking him out once Vogue’s May issue is in circulation. He won’t have a chance when Kurt realizes he’s desirable to so many men.

“Damn, I forgot about Sam. Do you think he’ll like the ideas?... Blaine, are you with me?” Kurt asks.

Blaine pulls away from his thoughts immediately. “What? … Sam?”

“Yes, Sam. You know, the guy you live with? Do you think he’ll be on board with everything? Should we send him photos as we shop?”

“That won’t be necessary. Sam won’t care,” Blaine answers dismissively.

“But what if Sam doesn’t like what we buy?”

“Kurt, it’s my penthouse and I can do anything I want with it. If Sam really doesn’t like it, he can always move out.”

“That’s a bit harsh,” Kurt whispers.

“Sorry, Kurt. I didn’t mean for it to sound that way. Let’s forget about Sam.” Before he says something he might regret, Blaine collects the wrappers to toss into the trash. He looks up when he feels Kurt’s hand rubbing the top of his thigh.

“I’m sorry too, Blaine. I didn’t mean to upset you. I wasn’t sure how important Sam’s opinion might be in the decision-making. So now I know that it really doesn’t matter. That gives us lots of options to explore. Ready for your penthouse make-over?”

Blaine bends in half, roaring with laughter. “A make-over, Kurt? Now I know you’re in the fashion business.”

“Oh, I know all about make-overs. Nothing too drastic, but a tweak here and there. A signature style, but with an added touch of fun and whimsy.”

Blaine blushes furiously as he recalls the conversation about Kurt’s make-over with Wes and Isabelle. “You’ve got me there, Kurt. I bet Wes told you that.”

“I can’t remember if it was Wes or Isabelle. But that’s not important now. Come, we have some serious shopping to do!”

****

Blaine quickly realizes that shopping with Kurt is an experience in itself. No item in the home furnishings section has gone unnoticed. Kurt’s got a good eye for this sort of thing. His true skill comes in taking seemingly random items and creating a uniform, pulled-together look. Blaine longs for Kurt’s approval on his furnishings, so he defers to all Kurt’s choices. Soon Blaine’s arms are weighed down by a multitude of bags containing throw cushions, candlesticks, photo frames, vases, and a throw blanket.
Kurt is currently eyeing a metal peacock sculpture with a colorful plume. “Do you like it, Blaine? I think the colors will really work well with the throw cushions we bought.”

“Yeah, let’s get it.”

“Are you sure? I don’t want to feel like I’m pushing you into anything.”

“I’m gay, Kurt. Of course I like peacocks! Now, let’s just buy the damn thing,” Blaine chuckles.

When Blaine is paying for the sculpture, he notices that Kurt is furiously texting, with a smile. He prays that it’s not an exchange with Chandler, who’s already in his bad books.

“Shall we take a break before hitting the furniture section?” Kurt asks. “I noticed a juice bar at the end of the aisle.”

“That’s the best idea ever,” Blaine confirms.

Blaine groans softly as they sit down with their freshly-squeezed juices in hand. “Kurt, I’m not sure about the furniture section. I don’t think I can carry another bag. They’re heavy enough as it is.”

“That’s where I come in.” Blaine whips his head around and sees Bentley, grinning broadly.

“B…but how are you here? How did you know where to find us?” Blaine asks.

“Kurt phoned me last night and told me where you were going today. He explained that you would need some help hauling away your loot. I’ve borrowed my brother’s van for the day, and my nephew is here as well to help.” Blaine waves at the scrawny teenager, who is partially hidden behind Bentley.

“When you were buying the peacock, Bentley texted me that he was here. So I arranged for him to meet us at this juice bar to take the bags to the van. Mystery solved,” Kurt adds.

“Kurt Hummel, you’re just full of surprises today. I love it!” Blaine suppresses the urge to add ‘I love you’ at the end.

Soon after the bags have been transferred to Bentley and his nephew, Kurt and Blaine stroll to the furniture section. There is an assortment of antiques and used furniture to peruse. Blaine buys a coffee table and an antique chest. Kurt fires off texts to Bentley arranging for him and his nephew to collect the items.

They arrive at a stall where Kurt’s eyes fall on some dining room chairs. He gets them out for inspection and has a long discussion with the vendor. It ends with Kurt shaking his head and moving towards the next stall.

“What’s wrong, Kurt? I thought you liked those chairs.”

“I do. They would be perfect for my Bushwick loft. But they’re too expensive for my budget.”

“Let me buy them for you.”

“I can’t let you do that, Blaine!”
“Of course you can. I want to buy them for you. It’s the least I can do after all the help you’ve given me for my penthouse make-over.”

Kurt places his hands on Blaine’s shoulders and gazes into his eyes. “No, Blaine. You really can’t. You’re a wonderful and generous man, and I’m sure you want to buy the chairs for me. But it’s too much. I…I don’t want you to be my sugar daddy. We’re not on a level playing field to begin with, and I can’t even begin to match what you have to offer. So thank you, but no thanks. We’re going to walk away from those chairs now and go home.”

Blaine gives Kurt a brief nod. As they walk to the van, he thinks about what Kurt had said. Yes, he is ten years older, but he doesn’t think about their age difference when they’re hanging out. They click together like connecting pieces of a puzzle. And yes, he is more affluent than Kurt, but Blaine has never considered the idea that he could be a ‘sugar daddy’. It’s not how he sees them. He very much sees Kurt as his equal, as a potential partner. It hurts him that Kurt thinks he doesn’t have as much to offer. In Blaine’s opinion, Kurt has so much to offer, and in ways that money can’t buy. He’s not sure how to convince Kurt of this, but he’s determined to do so soon.

*****

They arrive at Blaine’s penthouse and unload the bags and furniture. After that, Blaine toes off his shoes and collapses on the couch. “My feet are so sore,” Blaine groans.

Kurt chuckles and replies, “Back in Lima, the only way I could get friends to go Black Friday shopping with me was the promise of a foot massage at the end of the day.”

“I like the sound of that,” Blaine sighs. “Can I get one of those friendly massages, please? I think today’s shopping at the flea market was just as intense as Black Friday bargain hunting.”

Blaine pairs his request with his most pathetic expression and large pleading eyes.

Kurt sucks in a breath, his eyes widening. “You really want me to give you a foot massage? I mean, I’ve only ever done that for my closest girlfriends.”

Blaine sits up straight, suddenly wide awake again and cursing at himself for putting Kurt on the spot. “Forget it, Kurt. I didn’t mean to make you feel uncomfortable or assume anything. I think it was my achy feet talking instead of my brain. I’ll soak them later after you are gone, but I hope that won’t be for a while, because I want to hang out with you.”

“They’re really that sore?”

Blaine wriggles his toes and winces. “The sorest.”

“Okay, I’ll give you a foot massage,” Kurt sighs. “Go clean your feet and grab a pillow, a towel and some sort of oil or lotion.”

“You’re the best!” Blaine exclaims.

Blaine walks gingerly towards the bedrooms, and five minutes later, he returns with two pillows and a fluffy towel. When he hands over a bottle of rosemary and eucalyptus massage oil to Kurt, he asks, “Are you sure you want to do this? You can always back out of it.”

Kurt smiles and nods. “I’m sure.”
Kurt raises his hands and adds, “These magic hands are going to get your feet right back to their happy place. Now put your feet up on the coach, lie down and relax. Are you okay with me hooking up my phone to your sound system?”

After Blaine agrees, Kurt quickly goes to the Sonos music app on his phone and soon the piano notes of Debussy’s Clair de Lune waft through the air. Kurt plumps one pillow and tucks it under Blaine’s head. Kurt covers the second pillow with the towel and places it under Blaine's feet. He warms up the oil in his hands and then starts the massage.

“Aaahh, right there. That feels amazing. You’re amazing. You really are full of surprises. So you shop ’till you drop on Black Friday?”

“Blaine, my Black Friday outings are legendary! How do you think I can afford my fabulous outfits?”

Blaine wants to reply, but he doesn’t have the energy to form words. The massage feels wonderful as Kurt kneads, loosens and soothes his aching muscles. Blaine feels his trouser legs being pushed up and Kurt starts to massage his calves. The classical music is perfect for unwinding at the end of the day, and soon, Blaine can hardly stay awake. As his eyelids start to droop, Blaine starts rambling, “So good… You’re so good to me… You’re so good for me… You make me feel so good…. Say you’ll be mine….”

*****

Blaine wakes up the next morning with the sun streaming in his eyes. He rubs the side of his face against the soft cashmere blanket. He smells a lingering aroma of rosemary and eucalyptus and his eyes snap wide open when he remembers the massage. He’s now aware that he’s lying on the couch with the newly purchased throw blanket tucked around him. Blaine realizes that he must have fallen asleep as Kurt was massaging his feet.

When Blaine sits up, he notices that he’s no longer wearing his jeans. He blushes at the thought of Kurt taking them off and seeing him in his snugly-fitting bikini pants. He prays he wasn’t hard at the time – he was definitely having that problem when Kurt was giving him a massage. He closes his eyes for a moment, remembering the dream he had last night. The dream of doing unmentionable things to Kurt, and Kurt doing unmentionable things to him. Parts of it had felt so real, and other parts were a hazy blur of ecstasy.

Blaine gets up from the couch and takes a good look around the room. Kurt has organized all the new purchases, and they look incredible in the space. The color scheme works well and is all pulled together with the throw cushions in the living room area. The antique chest looks perfect in the corner. The photos have been swapped to the new frames and the knick-knacks are dotted throughout the room. He smiles when he sees that the peacock has a prominent place on top of the side table. The little finishing touches pull the room together and make it feel so cozy. Most importantly, they are so ‘Kurt’. He likes the idea that a part of Kurt will be with him at home – even when Kurt himself is not.

When he walks to the kitchen to start up the coffee maker, he discovers a note on the countertop.

*Dear Blaine,*

*You fell asleep during your foot massage and I didn’t have the heart to wake you up. I hope you*
don’t mind that I took off your jeans. I figured you wouldn’t be comfortable sleeping in them. I wasn’t sure when you would wake up, so I bought some minestrone soup from the deli around the corner. It’s in the fridge and there are some fresh crusty bread rolls on the counter.

You probably know by now that I unpacked the goodies and set them out in the room. Feel free to move them around or remove things if you don’t like where they are. I think we made some really great buys and they make your place look homey. It’s the finishing touches that make a house a home.

Blaine, I had a wonderful day with you. I’m so glad that we could tick off an item from my bucket list together. Sometime you’re going to have to tell me what’s on your bucket list!

Hugs,

Kurt

*****

Blaine’s almost finished preparing his breakfast when Sam enters the penthouse. He’s been in LA for the weekend to visit Mercedes and has taken a red-eye flight back to New York. Sam plops down his suitcase and flings off his shoes. “Dude, what happened here? Did you hire a decorator over the weekend or something?”

“No, it’s all down to one Kurt Hummel. We went shopping yesterday and bought everything together.” Blaine pours Sam a coffee and relates the details of yesterday’s date.

“It sounds like you had a great day, Blaine. So are you boyfriends now? Kiss and tell!”

Blaine shakes his head. “No, we’re not boyfriends, and the only kisses we’ve exchanged were so PG that they could have been given to our grandmothers.”

Blaine takes a sip of his coffee and decides to broach a subject with Sam that he’s been thinking about. “Kurt made a throw-away comment yesterday about how he didn’t want me to be his sugar daddy. You don’t think I’m too old for him, do you?”

“No, I don’t even think of our age difference when we’re together. It’s totally a non-issue for me. Sure, it’s obvious that Kurt is new to the city and he’s experiencing new things. But there is something else I need advice on. Kurt mentioned that we weren’t on an even playing ground and that he couldn’t match everything I have to offer. I don’t understand how he can even think that way.”

Sam rolls his eyes. “Dude, of course I get it. Let me break it down for you. You’re rich, he’s not. You hold a powerful position at work, he doesn’t. You’re famous. You can have anything, anybody, anywhere, anytime that you like. From what you’ve told me, Kurt was working at a diner and receiving rejections at every audition before he joined Vogue. How’s that hard to understand? Now, I need another cup of coffee if I’m going to make it through the day. Do you want one too?”

Blaine meekly nods. “Okay, I get your point. But those things don’t matter! Sure, the attention is exciting at first, but the thrill soon fades. It’s all because of my position at Vogue. However, that’s just one part of me. There’s another huge part of me that wants a connection, love, and mutual caring with another man. And that is something that I can’t have anytime I want it!”
“I hear ya, and I think that Kurt gets it. Think about what he gave you yesterday. He didn’t spend a load of dosh or take you to some swishy high-profile place. Kurt offered you something totally different. He planned the day around a conversation you had when he had lunch here last month, and he organized Bentley to show up with a van. He even gave you a foot massage. And when you were asleep, he organized the apartment, bought your dinner, and left you a ridiculously sweet note.”

“You’ve seen the note?” Blaine asks, quite surprised.

“Dude, you left it right here next to the coffee machine. But that’s not the point. The point is that he cares about you. These aren’t the actions of someone trying to get into the good books of Vogue’s editor-in-chief. They’re the actions of someone who cares about Blaine Anderson, a man that loves music and Broadway and is a great guy.”

“You really think so?” Blaine asks timidly.

“Ugh! What do I have to do to get through to you! Kurt’s into you, so grow a pair and go get him!”

*****

It’s business as usual as Bentley drives Blaine to the office. After checking his work related e-mails, he quickly opens up Twitter. Fortunately, there are no tweets or photos of Kurt and himself at the Brooklyn Flea Market. He grabs his phone and sends Kurt a message. *Thanks for yesterday. I had a great time. Sorry for falling asleep so quickly. The place looks amazing, and there’s not one thing I want to change.*

“Bentley, thanks for helping Kurt and I out yesterday. I didn’t think I could carry those bags one step further before you arrived. Kurt’s quite the shopper.”

“Your welcome, Blaine. Eric and I had a chance to look around the market when you were in the furniture section. Kurt even texted me with an idea for Marsha’s next birthday present. I can’t tell you what a relief it is to have something ready to give her.”

“Let me give you some money for Eric.”

“There’s no need. Kurt took care of that. Eric was thrilled to have the cash. He bought a couple of vintage band T-shirts at the market.”

Wow, *Kurt did think of everything*. Blaine’s phone vibrates a few times in quick succession and he immediately swipes the screen to read the new messages.

*I had a great time too. I’m regretting the burrito because Chrystal is making me do an extra 15 minutes on the running machine. Good thing I can text and run at the same time :)*

*You’re cute when you’re sleeping, so don’t worry about it. My hands must be magic :P*

Blaine smiles broadly at the messages. He’s happy that Kurt thinks he’s cute.

“Kurt took care of me too. We had an arrangement, but it backfired. ‘The Lost Art of Keeping a Secret’? You’re too much, Blaine.”

“Ha! I told Kurt you would get it. One day, my friend. One day, I’ll let you know.”
Blaine returns to his phone, and before he can compose a reply, he receives another two messages.

*I’m glad you like everything in your apartment. Maybe we can do the bedrooms next?*

*Do you have a bucket list?*

Blaine thinks about that for a moment. He doesn’t have a bucket list but it sounds like a great idea. He just hopes that the things that he wants to do match up with Kurt’s list as well.

*No bucket list, but I’m definitely going to put one together. So those high school fantasies… you’ll need to share those as well!*

Blaine isn’t sure whether he went too far to text about high school fantasies. He definitely doesn’t want to start sexting with Kurt. His phone vibrates again and he quickly reads the new messages.

*Honestly, they’re pretty tame. I used to think that a touch of the fingertips was as sexy as it got.*

*The other big fantasy involved a superhero who rescues me from the hell that was high school.*

Blaine laughs out loud and quickly types his reply. *I’ll have to wear my Nightbird outfit for you sometime ;)*

Blaine puts down his phone and thinks about the perfect date he had yesterday with Kurt. Well, it was almost perfect. Blaine wishes that he had stayed awake long enough to have the end of date kiss.

Chapter End Notes

Bentley’s ringtone that isn’t his ringtone – ‘The Lost Art of Keeping a Secret’ by Queens of the Stone Age.

I am now back in Thailand so you will find that updates will be earlier in the day for most of you (and possibly on Friday night in North America). This week I was reminded of how supportive and thoughtful my readers can be. I was informed that BBC2 in the UK is airing a two part programme called ‘Absolutely Fashion: Inside British Vogue’. A documentary maker was given access to British Vogue for the first time in its history. I have downloaded the first part and will watch it this weekend. The second part airs September 12th for those that live in the UK (maybe the first part is on the BBC iplayer?).

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. Here is the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics.

I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr. Reviews are like the aroma of freshly baked bread. Trust me, every review, kudos, bookmark, and subscription makes me smile.

Next up: Vogue’s May issue hits the newsstands.
Fame

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I've seen your picture
Your name in lights above it
This is your big debut
It's like a dream come true
So won't you smile for a camera?
I know they're gonna love it
- Peg by Steely Dan

May

Kurt’s alarm clock rings at 6:00am. In spite of the hour, he quickly jumps out of bed and turns off the alarm. After a quick pit stop in the bathroom, he rushes back to his bedroom and quickly dresses in his favorite yoga pants and a long-sleeved T-shirt. As quietly as he can, since Rachel’s still sleeping, he leaves the loft and bounds down the stairs. He runs to Dekalb Newsstand just around the corner.

“Have they arrived yet?” Kurt pants, still trying to catch his breath.

“Yes, I’ve got them right here,” Ashley replies in a heavy Southern drawl. He pulls out a small stack of magazines from behind the counter and hands them over to Kurt. “Can you autograph one for me? The Missus would really appreciate it.”

Kurt’s jaw drops wide open when he looks at Vogue’s May issue. He can’t believe what he’s seeing. It can’t possibly be true. There, on the cover, is a photo of him. Kurt Hummel. In the wine-colored suit. With a huge smile on his face. Kurt squeals as he backs into the wall and slides down to the linoleum floor. Never in his wildest dreams did he think he would be on the cover of Vogue. Instinctively, he knows that it was Blaine’s decision, but he doesn’t understand why Blaine hadn’t told him before.

“You should have warned me. I would have tripled my order,” Ashley comments.

“I…I didn’t know. You have to believe me.” Kurt quickly scrawls his autograph on the front of a magazine and takes the six copies that he had previously ordered. “Thanks, Ashley. I owe you one.”

Kurt walks back home and takes a look at the neighborhood shops. They look run-down, but he loves that they are owned by people in the area, and makes it a point to patronize them. It’s just after 6:30am, so most still have their store front gates pulled down and black plastic garbage bags on the curb, waiting for collection. He spots a barista opening the front gate at the Little Skips Coffee Shop, and decides to treat himself to a grande non-fat mocha and two cronuts. Calories be damned – he’s got some celebrating to do.

After collecting his order, Kurt sits down in a comfy chair near the window. He closes his eyes for a moment, enjoying the early morning sun. His eyes snap wide open again, for he wants to have a really good look at Vogue’s May issue. His fingers tremble as he opens up the magazine to the centerfold. The ‘floral and pastels’ article is eight pages long, and there are three photos of Kurt.
included. Kurt looks at the photos closely. He can recognize himself… And then again he can’t. The suit looks like it was made for him, and he appreciates that Chandler is really good at his job. The suit hugs his body, making the most of his physique. Unique’s fantastic at her job too - his complexion looks flawless and his hair has a slightly tousled, but smooth look. He can tell that the photos chosen were from the photo shoot’s afternoon session, when Blaine was around.

What really takes Kurt’s breath away is his expression. He hasn’t seen a photo of himself smiling like that since his glee club won Nationals last year. He looks so genuinely happy. After devouring the article, he closes the magazine and further examines the cover. It’s a close-up of his face, with a beaming smile. Kurt takes a closer look at his sparkling eyes in the photo. Kurt gently chuckles to himself because he knows he was probably looking at Blaine dancing and his silly faces singing ‘Wannabe’ when the photo was taken. He looks at the image of himself as a whole and thinks that Isabelle was right. It does exude a message of innocence and hope, with a sprinkle of sexiness. It does feel like spring.

Kurt starts to devour the issue from the front cover to the back page. He slowly flips the pages until he gets to Blaine’s editorial, after the usual ads at the beginning of the magazine. The editorial starts off with an homage to Spring - which stands for fresh hope, symbolized by butterflies. The next few sentences make Kurt gasp.

*Vogue* found the perfect symbol of Spring in Kurt Hummel, our fresh face in this issue. Not only is Kurt an up-and-coming model, but he has his own unique flair for fashion. He’s the creative source behind next month’s issue and will be contributing to articles on the *Vogue* website. You’ll be seeing a lot more of Kurt over the next six months, exclusively in Vogue. I’m sure you will agree with me that there is more to Kurt than meets the eye.

Kurt is shocked that Blaine has already given him credit for the Broadway-inspired issue and is promoting his *Hamilton* behind-the-scenes articles. Kurt’s thoughts are interrupted when his phone starts to ring. He looks down and sees the photo of his dad as he swipes the screen to answer.

“Hey, Dad. What’s got you up so early?”

“Kiddo, I’ve been up for ages. I’m at the 7-Eleven and I’ve bought Vogue. You’re on the cover! Just a sec, Kurt…. Hey Al, come take a look at this. That’s my boy!”

Kurt smiles broadly when he thinks of his father at the Lima 7-Eleven, showing the Vogue cover to his cronies, who’ve come in to pay for their gas and pick up a cup of joe. Soon his father returns to the phone.

“Dave Karofsky works here as a cashier. You shoulda seen the look on his face when I bought the magazine. It was priceless.”

Kurt can’t help but grin at that last remark. That Neanderthal made his life a living hell back in high school. And here is Kurt Hummel, on the cover of Vogue, and Dave Karofsky, working for minimum wage at the Lima 7-Eleven. There is justice in this world after all.

“Son, you look real good in the photo. I’m so proud of you. I knew you could do anything you wanted, if you put your mind to it. It just takes hard work and a bit of luck.”

Before Kurt can reply, his dad continues to speak. “Kurt, I’ve gotta go. Sue Sylvester just walked in and I wanna show her the magazine. I’ll call you later.”
A few hours later, Kurt takes the elevator to the Vogue offices. There are people he personally wants
to thank for the opportunity to model for Vogue. When he exits the elevator, the receptionist jumps
up to greet him. “Mr. Hummel. You look great in Vogue this month! What can I do for you?”

“Is Isabelle Wright available?”

“I’m sure she’s available for you. Follow me.”

As the receptionist leads him to Isabelle’s office, Kurt can’t fail to notice everyone stopping to stare
at him along the corridors. It feels pretty awkward, but he makes it a point to smile at them.

As soon as he enters the office, Isabelle rushes over and gives him a big hug. “Kurt! I’m so glad
you’re here. You’re Vogue’s latest sensation!”

Kurt blushes at the compliment. “Really?”

“Oh my god, Kurt. You haven’t seen Twitter this morning, have you?”

“No, I haven’t had time. I wanted to come over right away and thank you personally for giving me
the opportunity to model for Vogue.”

“Kurt, you’re too humble. It should be Vogue thanking you for rescuing the May issue. Vogue’s
website traffic has quadrupled this morning. Come sit with me and I’ll show you the tweets.”

Kurt slides into the chair next to Isabelle, finding it unbelievable that there are tweets about him
already.

“Here’s a discussion about what color your eyes really are,” Isabelle points out as she scrolls through
#KurtHummel on Twitter. “There’s also a lot of comments about your long legs, your creamy skin,
your hair, and every other part of your body. Both the fangirls and fanboys think you’re sexy. Just
wait when they see you now, after your make-over. You’ll be trending!”

Kurt rolls his eyes, trying to convey disinterest, but inside he is squealing. People think he’s sexy? It
makes him feel so good, knowing that maybe he could be desirable to men. It’s a pity the only man
whose opinion matters to Kurt doesn’t think of him in that way.

“I can’t believe this is happening to me. It’s a lot to take in. I’m meeting with Wes after lunch to go
through future plans. But first, I have plenty of people to thank. Do you think Blaine will see me?”

“Of course Blaine will see you. I’ll let Tina know that you’re on the way up.”

While Kurt’s waiting for the executive elevator in the lobby, he thinks about the last time he saw
Blaine. He had so much fun that Sunday when they were at the Brooklyn Flea Market. As that
morning had progressed, he’d seen Blaine relax and really enjoy himself. And Blaine’s reaction to
his surprises – well, Kurt wishes that he had planned even more. He’s already e-mailed the pocket-
watch stall owner, who has placed the watch that Blaine really liked on hold for him.

The only downer of the day had been when he mentioned Sam. Kurt had been surprised how
Blaine’s expression and mood instantly changed, like he and Sam were having some problems. Blaine even said that Sam could move out if he didn’t like the penthouse make-over. What was up with that?

Blaine had certainly enjoyed his foot massage. Kurt was proud that he could make Blaine feel so good. His ramblings as he was drifting to sleep were adorable. Kurt only wished that Blaine would say ‘be mine’ in other circumstances.

However, what Kurt remembers most of all about the day was watching Blaine sleep after the foot massage. Blaine’s curls were splayed about the pillow, the ringlets looking soft and glossy. His full pink lips were slightly parted and he let out a soft snore. Only Blaine Anderson could make snoring seem so adorable. Blaine’s eyelashes swept across the top his cheeks, and Kurt had so desperately wanted to kiss each of his eyelids to feel those lush lashes tickle his face. Blaine had looked so peaceful, so happy, as if he was having a good dream. It had taken every ounce of self-restraint for Kurt not to lie down on the couch next to him, pull Blaine into his arms and never let go.

*****

When Kurt enters Blaine’s reception area, he’s immediately greeted by Tina. She gets up from her seat and gives Kurt a quick hug. Tina then pops out her hip and a fake pout forms on her face.

“Kurt Hummel! I should be angry at you. You’ve made my busy day even busier.”

“Oh? I’m sorry, Tina, but I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Ten minutes ago, Blaine authorized an additional print run for the May issue. I’ve got to go to the printers and convince them to work through the night without charging us overtime.”

Before Kurt can respond, Tina’s grabbing her coat and moving towards Blaine’s office door. “Blaine…. Kurt’s here. I’m off to the printers and won’t be back today. I’ll order you two lunch from the deli around the corner to be delivered. Cassie will be here after lunch to cover the phones.”

Kurt can hear Blaine reply, “Thanks, Tina. Send Kurt in.”

When Kurt enters the office, the first thing he sees is a poster-sized photo of the Vogue’s May issue cover framed in the most prominent place in the office. His attention moves to Blaine, who walks toward him and shakes his hand in greeting.

“You’re not getting away with just a handshake, mister. Come here,” Kurt says as he crooks his finger and gives him come-hither eyes.

Blaine eagerly moves forward, laughing, and Kurt wraps his arms around Blaine’s back. Kurt can feel the gentle vibrations from laughter fade and Blaine’s muscles relax. Kurt whispers in his ear, “Thank you, Blaine. It’s a dream come true.” Kurt’s not sure whether he means the Vogue cover or holding Blaine in his arms.

Once Kurt releases Blaine, he takes a good look at him. Blaine’s curls look tussled, like he’s been running his hand through his hair all morning. His beard stubble, as always, is the perfect length and looks sexy as hell. Designer glasses frame his face, giving him an intelligent look. He’s wearing Hugo Boss suit pants that accentuate his tiny waist. The sleeves of his crisp white cotton shirt are rolled up to his elbow and his tie is slightly askew. Kurt can’t resist straightening the tie before saying, “Sorry to bother you, Blaine. You look really busy. I just wanted to pop by and thank you.
“You’re not interrupting anything…but anything that can’t wait until after lunch. I’m glad you stopped by. I need a break. Come take a seat.”

When Kurt sits down on the sofa, he notes that the framed cover photo is still in prominent view. “I can’t believe the cover is already framed in your office!”

“I had the guys in maintenance hang it first thing this morning,” Blaine replies, as he glances over at the cover.

“It’s so big. Bigger than the rest.”

When Blaine turns his head back towards him, Kurt can see Blaine’s hands twisting in his lap, as if he’s nervous.

“Ww…ell, I like it. Err… I’m proud of it…. It’s my new favorite cover. Umm… so, yeah.”

“Better than Marion Cotillard?”

“Better than Marion Cotillard,” Blaine confirms with a laugh.

“So what’s this about an additional print run that has Tina’s knickers in a twist?” Kurt asks.

“Our distributors have reported a surge in demand for the May issue and are asking for more. So I authorized a print run for an additional two hundred thousand copies. That’s a little over 15% of our usual sales.”

Kurt whistles as he exhales. “That a huge number. I can’t get my head around it.”

“And it’s only the first of the month. On Friday, I’ve got to decide if we need another print run. I’ve got people poring over the stats, and financially modeling potential ad prices and distributions numbers for the June issue and beyond. I haven’t even begun looking at the international sales numbers.”

“Wow,” Kurt says, impressed with Blaine’s business sense.

“Just before you came, I was talking to our distributor for the Mid-West. They’re experiencing an unprecedented demand for Vogue. Apparently, every copy has been sold out in Lima. You’re the single most interesting man in all of Ohio.”

Kurt’s smiles broadly at this interesting bit of news. “I’m sure that’s down to my dad. He’s my number one fan.”

Kurt relates the conversation with his dad earlier that morning. He can’t help feel so happy about the Vogue issue sales and the attention he’s getting. It makes it even more special that he can share this moment with Blaine.

Soon the lunch is delivered, and a selection of sandwiches, salads and drinks are laid out on the small conference table. “Wow, Blaine. This is enough to feed an army!”

“Don’t worry about it. We’ll eat what we want, and then I’ll take the leftovers to the mailroom. They
always appreciate a free meal. I get Tina to over-order on purpose.”

Kurt mulls over the reply. This is one of the many reasons why he likes Blaine so much. He thinks about other people, what they might like, and then goes out of his way to make it happen.

“So what else have you been up to, other than work?” Kurt asks. He’s curious to find out what Blaine does in his spare time.

“Thankfully, I haven’t had to attend any events after work over the past week. So I’ve been doing evening runs in Central Park, playing the piano, reading, writing a bucket list… That sort of things.”

“What! Run that by me again. A bucket list?!” Kurt exclaims.

“Yes, a bucket list. Our date at the Brooklyn Flea Market got me thinking. I haven’t had a bucket list for years – work has been all-consuming. But there’s a lot of new things I want to do… Experiences to have. And you’ve taught me that there’s lots I can do without getting public attention. So yeah, a bucket list.”

“That’s great, Blaine. Now, I hope there’s something on the list that involves you wearing that Nightbird outfit. I kinda want to see you in it.”

Blaine blushes furiously and ducks his head. “Well, I’m sure that can be arranged. But I haven’t worn it in ages. I don’t think I have the best body for it anymore.”

“What do you mean by that? Your body’s fantastic! It might look even better on you now because the lycra will hug your body even more.”

Kurt hears Blaine’s quick inhale and sees his sandwich drop onto the plate. He’s almost afraid to look at Blaine. When Kurt finally looks up, he can see that Blaine’s pupils are blown wide and his eye color has darkened. It’s the first time that he’s seen Blaine look at him that way. Blaine clears his throat and quickly glances away. Suddenly, there is tension in the air and Kurt’s not sure what to do about it. He excuses himself for the restroom, which gives him time to cool off and figure out what he’s feeling.

Blaine shows him to his private bathroom (of course Blaine would have a private bathroom in his executive office!). Kurt does his business, and after washing his hands, he splashes water on his face. Kurt thinks he probably went too far with all the Nightbird comments. But shoot him, Kurt has fantasized about Blaine dressed up as Nightbird on more than one night. He’s a hot-blooded man after all. Kurt reminds himself that he only told Blaine the truth. Blaine does have a fantastic body.

Kurt closes his eyes and is transported back in time… to the penthouse, watching Blaine sleep. Kurt was sitting at the end of the couch, soaking in the beauty of one Blaine Anderson sleeping. Then Blaine started to wiggle his ass, as if trying to get comfortable. Kurt decided to remove his tight-fitting jeans, to help him sleep better. Kurt straddled his body, taking care not to put too much weight on his legs. He undid the button and slowly pulled down the zipper. Then ever so carefully, he peeled the jeans down. When they were off, Kurt carefully folded the jeans and placed them on the coffee table. Kurt’s attention went back to Blaine and his heart started to race.

Blaine’s legs were so muscular, and Kurt shuddered when he thought about what those powerful thighs could do. Blaine’s waist was so tiny, and not an ounce of fat could be seen. His T-shirt had ridden up, showing off his abs and the most delicious-looking olive-toned skin. Then Kurt spotted the dark hairs and followed the happy trail down… down… down. If Kurt thought that Blaine’s
jeans were tight-fitting, he was wrong. Blaine was wearing a pair of very snug, low-rise, red bikini pants. Kurt’s mouth moistened as he looked at Blaine’s cock - thick and hard, stretching the bikini to its max. He could even make out the vein running the length of his cock. Kurt felt like his face was on fire when he noticed the little damp circle where the underpants met the tip of Blaine’s cock. If Kurt needed any confirmation that he was gay, he just got it.

And just when Kurt didn’t think the view could get any better, Blaine started to wiggle his ass again. Only this time, he heard little moans escape Blaine’s mouth. Kurt quickly looked away, as if his face was being singed by fire. He carefully tucked the newly-purchased throw blanket around Blaine. He needed a diversion to stop thinking about what he just saw. So after a quick inspection of the fridge contents, he decided to go to the corner deli to pick up dinner and cool off at the same time.

As Kurt dries his face and hands, he wills his erection to go away. He can’t think of that vision of Blaine without getting himself (and his cock) worked up. His usual images of grandmothers and starving children and Rachel in animal sweaters aren’t working. So his mind fills with the image of the ultimate cock-blocker… Sam.

No matter how much Kurt wishes it otherwise, Sam is the one the Blaine belongs to. Sam is the one that gets to have intimate moments with Blaine and explore that delicious body. Kurt refuses to be the wrecking ball in that relationship - he thinks too highly of them both to do that. If the only way Kurt can have Blaine in his life is as his friend, he’ll take it. Blaine’s far too special not to have in his life.

When Kurt enters the office again, he sees that Blaine has just returned. The lunch has been cleared up, so he must have made a trip to the mailroom.

“Hey, Kurt. I’ve been thinking. There is one item you can help me cross off on my bucket list.”

“Ooh… I like the sound of that. Do tell.”

“It has something to do with going out to dinner with you on May 27th.”

“That’s my birthday. How did you know?” Kurt shyly asks.

“It’s on the resume you gave me when you came for the interview. I pay attention to details.”

Kurt nods his head, excited that he’s going to have another date with Blaine. He then scolds himself for the romantic visions floating in his mind. Kurt has got to stop thinking like this. Blaine’s just a friend, and it’s always going to be that way.

“I’d love to… you know, go out to dinner with you on my birthday. Do you want to invite Sam? I’m sure that I can rustle up a plus-one, even if it’s only Rachel.”

“Uhhh… No. I don’t want to invite Sam. I wanted it to be… just you and me.”

“Okay, that’s cool. It’s a date.”

*****

Kurt’s in Wes’ office, and after exchanging pleasantries, Wes gets down to business. “Vogue’s May issue is generating a lot of interest in you. I’ve already had a half-dozen calls, asking if you’re available for a modeling job. They weren’t too happy when I told them that you are under an
exclusive contract with Vogue for the next five months.”

“Well, I’m happy that I am. So what am I going to be doing next?”

“As you know, the Hamilton-inspired photo shoot starts next Monday. You won’t be the lead model on the spread – they’ve decided to use a person of color instead. But you’ll be in June’s issue.”

Kurt nods his head. “I think that Vogue’s made a wise decision. Just tell me I’m not going to be wearing an outfit to look like King George.”

“No, you won’t. Vogue wouldn’t do that to you. Besides, there are other developments. Marc Jacobs wants to use you in his ad campaign for this new Hamilton-inspired line.”

“What!? I didn’t know that! I just saw Blaine an hour ago. Why didn’t he tell me?”

“Trust me, Blaine desperately wanted to be the one to tell you. Blaine told me that you’re becoming friends and are spending time together. That’s why I told Blaine that it was my job, as your agent, to inform you about the proposed modeling job. That it was best to keep to the usual practices when you’re dealing with each other in business. Kurt, I will always have your best interests at heart. There might be a situation where Blaine may have to decide between something that is good for Vogue and something that is good for you. It’s better to have Blaine deal with me in all business matters.”

“Okay. That makes sense. How did Marc Jacobs know about me? The May issue hasn’t even been out for a day.”

“Blaine showed MJ the proofs for the May issue last week and made a convincing case as to why you should be selected.”

“Bb…ut, why would Blaine do that?”

“Kurt, if you think about it, it’s a brilliant move on Blaine’s part. He really believed that you would be a sensational hit once the May issue was released…. And he was right. By placing you in the Marc Jacobs ads, people will remember you as the face of Vogue and they’ll buy the next issue or go to the website to see more of you.”

“But Wes, why would Marc Jacobs agree?”

“Marc Jacobs is a big advertising revenue stream for Vogue. Blaine would have pitched it that you were going to be the next hottest supermodel in the industry, and Vogue was investing a lot of time and money to make that happen. Blaine would then have gone on to explain about the six-month exclusive contract, but would have made it clear he was willing to release you for MJ’s ad campaign. A special favor for a special friend.”

“Wow, Blaine is more business-savvy than I realized. But if I have an exclusive contract with Vogue, how can I be in Marc Jacob’s ad campaign?”

“Good question, Kurt. Your contract stipulates that you can engage in other modeling work, with Vogue’s approval. They are typically happy to give it, providing the timing doesn’t conflict with work at Vogue and the job is in line with their plans for you. And this job definitely ticks all the boxes.”

Wes adds, “Kurt, the decision is all yours. You don’t have to agree to be in Marc Jacobs’ ad
campaign if you don’t want to. Marc Jacobs knows that, so he is offering you $75,000 to sweeten the pot.”

Kurt’s jaw drops. “Oh. My. God. $75,000! I can’t believe it! In no lifetime of mine would I reject modeling work for Marc Jacobs. But I guess I should ask, what do you think? Is it a good offer, Wes?”

Wes nods his head. “Thanks for asking about my opinion, Kurt. That’s what I’m here for. Yes, I think you should accept the offer.”

*****

Sebastian scowls as he hurtles Vogue’s May issue across his executive office. Blaine Anderson has done it again. His college buddy, who runs a printing company, rang him ten minutes ago and told him that Blaine’s authorized an additional 200,000 print run. He’s looked over the stats at Elle. Sales are low and the traffic at the Elle website is dead.

Sebastian was right in thinking that Vogue’s fresh face is male. Looking at Kurt’s photo, Sebastian can tell that he’s just Blaine’s type - all pale and long legs, looking like the biggest twink in Twinkville. Blanderson can’t handle real men like himself. Sebastian decides to make it his top priority to poach Kurt to Elle magazine. He can’t wait to rip those heart-eyes from Anderson’s face and, once and for all, prove he’s the best man.

Sebastian jots down notes, and his lips curl up in a wry smile. He has the beginnings of a new plan, which he’s calling ‘Operation Gay Face’.

He buzzes his assistant. “Phone Chandler Kiehl and tell him to haul his ass here pronto. And when you’ve done that, come here. I’ve got something in my pants that needs taken care of.”

Chapter End Notes

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. Here is the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics. I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr.

A reader sent me an ask on Tumblr asking if something will happen in the future that could be a trigger. I'm more than happy to answer any questions privately, but I don't want to spoil the story for other readers. Therefore, could you please send me any asks off anon (and that includes the previous ask).

Next up: The Hamilton-inspired photo shoot, Funny Girl’s opening night and Sam gives Blaine a make-over.
In order to be irreplaceable one must always be different. - Coco Chanel

Blaine quietly enters the Brooklyn warehouse and stands just inside the door, taking in the activity all around him. His messenger bag is slung over his shoulder and he’s holding two cups of coffee in his hands. He senses the excitement in the warehouse as his staff are getting ready for the first day of the Hamilton-inspired photo shoot.

The Brooklyn warehouse is a hive of activity. A massive set has been built, resembling the one on the Broadway stage. The wooden structure is an intricate mix of stairs and platforms at varying heights. Behind the set is a tall white screen and the techies are testing that the images will be clearly projected. In addition to the usual crew, there are people from Hamilton on hand in an advisory capacity. The Hamilton soundtrack is blaring from the speakers, filling the space with the hip-hop music. Racks of clothing delivered from Marc Jacobs are rushed across the space to the stylists, eager to work their magic on the models. The warehouse is chaotic, but there’s a buzz in the air… like everyone knows that a trend-breaking fashion spread is about to be shot.

Tina has cleared Blaine’s diary so he can be at the Brooklyn warehouse during the entire photo shoot. He has told her he wants to be actively involved in the photo shoot, to make sure that Marc Jacobs is happy with the shots for his ads. If he’s honest, though, it’s just an excuse to spend more time with Kurt.

“Blaine! I wasn’t expecting you here on the first morning of the photo shoot!” Paul, the lead photographer, exclaims.

“How could I miss the first day of this historic shoot? I know I can count on you – and every single person working here today – to knock this out of the park. We’re going to take the fashion industry by storm with the retro 1700s look. Don’t mind me. I’m going to blend into the background and watch until the first photos are ready for my initial review.”

Paul chuckles. “Blaine, there’s no such thing as you blending into the background. If you want, come have a seat next to me when we start shooting.”

“I’ll join you in little while, Paul. There’s just a few things I need to take care of first.”

Blaine waves at those who have spotted him, but his eyes dart around the room trying to find the one person he really wants to see. He soon spots Kurt sitting in a chair in a far corner of the warehouse, engrossed with his tablet. Blaine waves and winks when Kurt notices him. The smile that appears on Kurt’s face makes him feel warm all over. Blaine slowly makes his way over, stopping along the way to greet staff, and after fifteen minutes he is finally in front of the model.

“Morning, Kurt. I have a cup of coffee for you. What are you doing here in the corner? Shouldn’t you be getting ready?”

“Hey, you. I’m not needed until later this morning, but I came in early in case there’s a schedule change. But it looks like the shoot is going to be delayed a bit – Marc Jacobs only delivered the
Kurt takes the cup of coffee from Blaine and opens the lid to let some of the steam escape. “You know my coffee order?”

“Of course I do.”

“I’ve already seen Unique, and she told me that Chandler’s not going to be here on this shoot. What’s up with that?”

Blaine nervously looks down, since he’s the one who has made sure that Chandler isn’t going to be here… or anywhere near Kurt. “Chandler’s needed on another photo shoot. Besides, it gives Liam a chance to shine. He’s an excellent stylist too.”

They settle down into a comfortable silence. Blaine makes business calls and reviews draft articles for the June issue. Kurt nudges him every now and again to show him YouTube videos of particularly cute fluffy kittens. Blaine can’t help but laugh at their antics and welcomes Kurt’s interruptions. Blaine can’t help but feel like they’re hanging out together.

Far too soon for Blaine’s liking, Kurt is called back to get ready, so he joins Paul by the cameras and focuses on the photo shoot. After 45 minutes, Kurt arrives on the set. Blaine’s mouth dries when he takes a look – Kurt is so beautiful in the outfit chosen for him, which accentuates his sleek muscular lines. The knee-high black boots make his legs look like they go on forever, and Kurt’s hair is artfully sculpted off his face in loose waves. But not everything’s perfect and Blaine quickly waves Liam over.

“Where’s the brooch? Kurt’s not wearing a brooch! I thought I made myself perfectly clear that brooches are Kurt’s signature piece.”

Liam hurries to the models’ curtained-off area and quickly returns with a selection for Blaine’s decision. Blaine chooses the gold-plated quilled pen and it is carefully pinned on the lapel of Kurt’s jacket.

While the techies make the final lighting adjustments, Blaine rushes to the set in front of Kurt. He adjusts a hair out of place and brushes the shirt to make sure all the frills are perfectly in place. And if he enjoys feeling the taut muscles across Kurt’s chest, well, nobody needs to know. “You look really… umm…. great, Kurt. Just remember to relax.”

Satisfied with how Kurt looks – how could he not be – Blaine returns to his seat next Paul and smiles proudly as Kurt moves seamlessly from one pose to the next.

*****

“That’s a wrap for the morning. We’ll start up again in an hour, after lunch,” Paul shouts.

As the staff tidy up their areas and Kurt retreats to the model’s fitting area, Blaine shoots across to the food buffet to get Kurt’s and his lunch. Last week, he had Oz Garcia e-mail him Kurt’s diet, so Blaine carefully selects only those items that he’s allowed to eat. He sits down at the cafeteria-style table and soon Kurt slides into the bench across from him.

“Is that for me? Thanks, Blaine. You really know how to find the healthy food from the buffet.”
Blaine preens at the compliment and then slowly takes a small box from his lap and presents it to Kurt.

“What! A surprise for me?” Kurt asks.

Kurt carefully opens the box and takes out a small, but perfectly-formed cupcake, topped with a swirl of vanilla icing and multi-colored sprinkles.

“Oooh…. A baby cupcake!” Kurt exclaims, wiggling in his chair and his eyes widening with excitement.

“I spotted it when I was getting the coffees this morning. It was sitting there begging me to buy it for you. It’s definitely less than six bites. You deserve the treat after your great session on set this morning.”

Kurt blushes at the remark and Blaine thinks it’s the most adorable thing he’s ever seen.

“I’ve been meaning to ask you, Blaine. *Funny Girl*’s opening night is in two weeks. Rachel gave me two tickets, and I was wondering if you wanted to go with me? I also have passes for the after-party.”

“I would love to, Kurt.”

Blaine has a fluttering feeling in his stomach. Kurt’s asked him to be his date at a high-profile event. Kurt’s not embarrassed to be seen out with him. Kurt wants to be seen out with him – wants them to share that special night.

“You don’t need to clear it with anybody, like with someone at work? Tina? Or even Sam?”

“Nope. I go to the events that I want to attend. Tina’s job is to make any diary conflicts go away. And I definitely want to attend Rachel’s opening night with you.”

“But what about Sam? There will be paparazzi on opening night and I want to make sure that you and Sam are comfortable with that. Comfortable that there might be pictures taken of you and I together.”

Blaine clears his throat. He’s desperate to tell Kurt about his arrangement with Sam. But he can’t. He can’t reveal his best friend’s secret relationship with Mercedes, especially not now that she’s on her first national tour.

“Sam will be cool with it. Trust me.”

Mark Townsend, a leading New York City hair stylist and the shoot’s consultant, joins them and the conversation quickly moves to hairstyles and trends. Paul announces that the shoot will be continued in five minutes, and Blaine is left alone to finish his coffee.

“Stop with those heart eyes!”

Blaine glances up from his tablet to see Unique slide onto the bench at the other side of his table, where Kurt was previously sitting. “Ww…hat? What are you talking about?”

“Don’t act all innocent with me. If Unique says you’ve got heart eyes, then you’ve got ‘em!”
Blaine is embarrassed that Unique has noticed. He’s not sure how to reply, so he bows his head.

“Look at me, Blaine.”

Blaine meekly raises his head and gives her a weak smile.

“I’m happy for you, really I am. I’ve never seen you look so dopey around another guy before. I wish a guy would look like that at me. And Kurt is certainly enjoying all of the attention. But what I’m saying is that you have to rein it in - keep it under wraps - before other people notice and the gossip starts.”

Blaine lets out a deep sigh. He knows Unique is right.

“Got it, Unique. Maybe I’ve been a little over the top…”

“Just a little? Honey, you brought him a baby cupcake, for goodness sake!”

“Okay, you’re right. Maybe the cupcake was too much. Point taken. And thanks, Unique. Thanks for pointing it out to me.”

*****

When the afternoon’s shoot continues, Blaine is busy looking at the photos taken earlier that morning. They are amazing, even better than Blaine had hoped for. The set design, backdrop of images and props pull everything together and create the late 18th century feel. Mateo is on set for an individual shoot and the other models are hanging out in the warehouse, waiting for their next turn.

Blaine looks up as he hears Kurt’s laugh – his beautiful, high-pitched, angel-like laugh. But his smile quickly disappears as he spots Sam and Kurt together. Kurt has his hands on his hips, one of which is popped to the side. Sam is squatting in front of him, adjusting Kurt’s right bent knee to the proper position. Kurt’s laughing as he teeters, trying to keep his balance. Sam laughs back, stands up and gives Kurt a hip check. Soon they’re bent over in peels of laughter. When they straighten up, Blaine can see Kurt wipe a tear from one eye, like he’s having so much fun with Sam. Then Kurt places his hand on Sam’s shoulder and pulls him closer to whisper in his ear. Sam throws his head back in laughter, and Blaine can tell he’s really enjoying Kurt’s company.

Kurt’s goofing around with Sam. He looks so happy.... all smiley and looking at Sam like he’s the best thing ever. And he’s flirting with Sam! And Sam’s enjoying himself too. He’s so natural and cool talking with Kurt. Not like some awkward dork, like me. Oh my god! Kurt’s just glanced at Sam’s lips. I know what that means. I knew I was right! Kurt’s into Sam! And Sam doesn’t even know it. He’s so oblivious!

Blaine quickly focuses his eyes back on the computer screen but he can’t concentrate on the images. His heart feels like it has dropped to the pit of his stomach. Sure, he knows that Kurt likes him – they hang out together and text all the time. But as a friend only. And regardless of what has Sam told him, Kurt’s not really into him. Not like the way that he’s into Kurt.

*****

“Sit right here, Marc. We’re doing the final shots with Kurt Hummel for your ad. We’re using the same set as used for the Vogue photo spread – a visual reminder of your brand when readers see the
Once Blaine has Marc comfortable, he takes a look at the set. Unique is fussing around Kurt making sure his make-up and hair are just right. After the first day, he has kept his appearances at the warehouse to late afternoons only - to review the day’s shots and ask for any additional ones needed. Unique was right. He has to control himself around Kurt at work before gossip starts… and before Kurt notices as well. Blaine knows that deep in his heart, that this isn’t the only reason he hasn’t been at the warehouse all day. He can’t bear to see Kurt and Sam together, to hear Kurt’s laughter and see Kurt flirt with Sam.

When Blaine raised the subject at dinner last Monday night, Sam quickly scoffed at his concerns and said he was being ridiculous. That Kurt was pumping him for information about Blaine - like his birthday, what he likes to do on the weekends, his favorite meal, things like that. Sam had quickly changed the subject, asking if Blaine was going to watch *Breakaway* with him later. Blaine appreciates that Sam was trying to cheer him up. But eyes don’t lie, and Kurt’s eyes tell him that he really likes Sam.

Kurt’s eyes soon find his, and Blaine can tell that he’s nervous with Marc Jacobs sitting right next to him. Blaine can sense that Kurt is looking at him for reassurance. Blaine smiles and gives Kurt a small wave. He can see Kurt relax his shoulders and a sweet smile form on his face. Blaine sees a hanging thread from Kurt’s jacket and gets up, meaning to fix it, but a stern look from Unique has him calling over for Liam instead.

When the shoot begins, Blaine splits his attention between Kurt and Marc Jacobs, like watching a tennis match in slow motion. Blaine is relieved that they both look relaxed and happy. After an hour, when Kurt has run through all the poses, Blaine takes Marc Jacobs over to the bank of computers to look at the photos.

Kurt looks stunning in the Marc Jacobs outfit – like a swashbuckler - and he has his signature smile and sparkling eyes. But the expression looks different than the one given in the ‘floral and pastel’ theme photos. Sure, Kurt still looks innocent and hopeful for his dreams to come true. But he radiates confidence – it’s clear that he’s comfortable in the clothes, in their look and unique style. That he’s comfortable with himself.

“These look great, Blaine. I can’t think of another pose, so it’s a wrap. Let’s meet next Monday and pick out the photos to send to my ad agency.”

“Sounds like a plan, Marc. Let me know when and where you want to meet.”

“And, Blaine? If you can guarantee that Hummel will attend Vogue’s after-party the night of the Tony’s, wearing that outfit, I’ll fully fund the party. I’ll even throw in champagne, because that model in that outfit is going to get me a huge run of orders.”

“I know Kurt’s planning to attend the Tony’s, but I’ll confirm his agreement to wear the outfit at the after-party with you on Monday, when we meet up. I’ll also have the after-party’s preliminary plan and budget for your approval.”

“Good work, Blaine. I knew I could count on you.”

*****

Chandler tosses his cell phone down in exasperation. Things aren’t going his way. He’s sitting in
some hellhole in Yonkers as the photo shoot takes place. For some reason, Anderson has decided that he’s more urgently needed at the photo shoot for the fragrance article. *I’m a fashion stylist. I don’t do perfume bottles.*

Chandler’s been texting Kurt constantly and asking him about the photo shoot for the main spread, but by the Friday of the first week, his number was blocked. So he then focused his efforts to get info from his mates on the set. But they won’t tell him anything about the photo shoot’s theme and which models they are using, like it’s some big secret they don’t dare reveal. However, one person did mention in passing how Blaine has been on site much more than usual. How he spends a lot of time with Kurt, who likes to be wooed.

Chandler knows it’s not much, but Smythe has been putting the pressure on. So Chandler sends a quick text tell him this little bit of news.

*****

Kurt slides the loft door open and sees his date for *Funny Girl*’s opening night. “Hey, you. I’m almost ready. Give me a minute, okay?”

“Sure. Take your time, Kurt. I’m a few minutes early.”

When Kurt goes to his bedroom, Blaine checks his profile in the antique full-length mirror in the living area. He wants to look his best for the opening night… and for Kurt. He’s hasn’t seen Kurt since the *Hamilton* photo shoot. Kurt’s been too busy the past couple of weeks - spending every spare moment with Rachel, soothing her and boosting her confidence. Who knew that Rachel Berry needed even more confidence?

“I’m ready now. Let’s go!” Kurt exclaims as he heads towards the door. After they enter the Mercedes-Benz and Bentley starts to drive away, Blaine looks over what Kurt’s wearing tonight.

“Kurt, is that a vintage Givenchy suit?”

“Yeah, it’s from the Vogue vaults. And are you wearing a Dolce & Gabbana suit, Mr. McDapper?”

Blaine chuckles at Kurt’s remark and nods. “I like a man who knows his fashion. So… I’m pretty excited about going to *Funny Girl*’s opening night. I’m sure Rachel is going to be fabulous.”

“She better be. She’s been driving me insane for weeks. I’m really excited that the opening night is finally here, but I’m also kinda nervous.”

“Why’s that Kurt?”

“Because I’ve never been on the red carpet before. You and Sam handle it so well, and I don’t want to let you down… You know, embarrass you in front of the cameras and your fans.”

Blaine takes Kurt’s hand and squeezes it reassuringly. “I’ll never feel embarrassed by you, Kurt. Just stick close by, and if you get an awkward question, just give me a look and I’ll answer it for you.”

Bentley looks in the rearview mirror as they pull up in front of the St. James Theater. He smiles when he thinks about how Blaine and Kurt always manage to find opportunities for sitting close and holding hands, like it’s painful to be apart.
“We’re here, Blaine. Text me fifteen minutes before you want me to collect you.”

Blaine exits the car and quickly dashes to the other side to help Kurt out. When Kurt stands up at the beginning of the red carpet, his eyes snap closed, since the camera flashes are blinding. Blaine knows that feeling of being disoriented by the lights – a sense of being alone and confused - so he gives Kurt’s shoulder a squeeze. Kurt’s eyes slowly open and he gives Blaine a soft smile, as if telling him that he’s ready to walk along the red carpet. Blaine hooks his arm inside Kurt’s and leads him along.

“Look here! Look here!” is shouted out from the crowd. Kurt’s not sure where to look as Blaine guides him to the crowd behind the barrier.

“Blaine! Where’s Sam tonight? Are you and Sam all right?” a fan at the front asks, waving a photo of Blaine and Sam to be autographed.

“Sam’s doing just fine, thanks for asking. I’m with Kurt tonight to watch his close personal friend, Rachel Berry, on her opening night.”

“Kurt! What are your plans? All we’ve seen of you are the photos in Vogue.”

“My plan is to walk into the St. James Theater and watch one Rachel Barbra Berry perform the role that she was born to play.” Blaine’s impressed with Kurt’s answer and how smoothly he responds. When Kurt glances at Blaine, he tries to give him a reassuring look back.

“Can you settle this once and for all. What color are your eyes?” another fan shouts.

Kurt giggles at the question. “You’ll just have to buy more issues of Vogue to find out. I’m under contract with Vogue for another five months.”

Blaine checks the time on his watch. “Look, guys. I wish we had more time to hang out with you, but Kurt and I have to get inside before the performance starts. Make sure you check out Vogue’s June issue in a few weeks. If you like Kurt, I think you’re going to love it.”

As Blaine guides Kurt into the theater, he leans in and whispers, “You did great, Kurt. Tonight, on that red carpet, I was so proud to be with you.”

*****

Kurt and Blaine lean back against the bar as they watch Rachel perform yet another song on the corner stage at the after-party. The crowd has tapered off and most of the remaining party-goers are the play’s staff and family.

“That girl really can belt out a song. Her rendition of ‘People’ on stage tonight brought tears to my eyes.”

“Same here, and that’s after hearing the song at least a thousand times over the past few months. I’m really happy for her. The first reviews on-line are fantastic. It looks like Funny Girl is going to be in town for a very long time.”

Blaine is yawning and having problems keeping his eyes open. He hopes Kurt doesn’t notice and think that he’s too old to keep up with him.

“Blaine, its 2am. You should get going. I’m going to stay until Rach wants to go home.”
“That’s all right, Kurt. I don’t mind hanging out with you.”

“No, go! I insist, Blaine. You can barely keep awake. Besides, I should really pay more attention to tonight’s bright star.”

“Well, okay. I do feel really tired. Do you want me to send Bentley back to give you and Rachel a lift home?”

“God, no. Let Bentley get some sleep too.”

“Promise me you’ll text as soon as you get home so that I know you’re back safely? And call me if you get stuck anywhere.”

Kurt gives Blaine a lingering kiss on the cheek before he moves towards Rachel. Blaine touches his cheek gently and can still feel those soft lips on his face. He wishes he had been brave enough to move his face so that their lips met.

*****

Blaine wakes up the next morning and checks the time on his cell phone – 11am. He notices that he has three new messages on his phone, so he quickly swipes the screen to read them.

4:00 am Got home safely B and got Rach into bed thankfully. K x

4:20 am Good grief! Rach’s singing ‘I’m the Greatest Star’ in her sleep. K xx

4:25 am Thanx for coming tonight. It meant a lot to me. K xxx

Blaine puts his cell phone over his heart and burrows further into his pillows. He’s got a warm glowing feeling inside about one Kurt Hummel. Once they were at the Funny Girl after-party, Kurt went out of his way to take care of Blaine. Making sure his champagne flute was always topped up, introducing him to various cast members, including him in conversations… giving him soft touches and smiles, as if to remind him that he was special. He looks at his phone and replies to Kurt.

Thanx for inviting me. Loved every minute. Wanna meet up for a coffee later today? B x

Blaine throws on a pair of sweatpants and his old ratty Dalton T-shirt when he smells the coffee brewing in the kitchen. His phone vibrates and he quickly looks at the new incoming message.

I could drink a whole vat of coffee today. Meet me at Little Skips Coffee Shop at 2pm? It’s just around the corner from me. K x

Blaine smiles at the reply, particularly the kiss at the end, and is happy that he gets to see Kurt so soon again.

Sure. The first vat is on me. B x

When Blaine enters the penthouse’s main room, Sam is sitting at the dining table, reading the latest KrianFeels update to his favorite Breakout fic. Sam’s mumbling to himself “OMG… This is the hottest thing ever… What!... How did he get hard again so fast?... No way! He licked where?... Oh man, and they managed to do all that in the back of a Prius?”
“Hush! Keep your voice down, Sam. You don’t want Amy to know that you’re reading gay smut!”

“Blainers, you finally woke up. Don’t worry about Amy – she’s off food shopping and running errands. So, how was last night? Did you and Kurt figure out yet that you’re both into each other? Or are you two still playing that frustrating game of flirting and not seeing what’s in front of your faces?”

Blaine sighs as he pours himself a cup of coffee and joins Sam at the table.

“You’re ridiculous, Sam. Kurt is so not into me. And he doesn’t flirt with me! Sometimes he teases me, but that’s just the way he is... so effortlessly snarky and sexy. I’m like a total dork around him. I just don’t know if he wants to take our relationship to the next level, because Kurt rebuffs my subtle hints.”

“You need to get your flirt on, man.”

“What do you mean, Sam?”

“Ya know, compliment him and give him bedroom eyes and shit like that.”

“But I already do that! It goes down like a led balloon.”

“Let the master teach ya then. I’ve never tried out my signature lines and moves on dudes before, but I’m sure that they’ll work. So if I see a girl across the bar and I’m like, interested, this is what I do…”

Sam has Blaine practice lines and adjusts his body this way and that, to show that he’s available for more. Soon they are both lying on the floor in fits of laughter. Sam tickles Blaine’s tummy until he cries out ‘Uncle’.

“Go get ready, Blainers. Let me see what you’re gonna wear.”

Thirty minutes later Blaine enters Sam’s bedroom, wearing crisply ironed smart jeans and a polo shirt. He holds out three bow ties and asks, “Sam, which one do you think I should wear?”

“Bro, you look like you’re about to visit your aunt after church on Sunday.”

“Bb…ut Kurt says he likes my bow ties… Says they make me look adorable.”

“Maannn…. Haven’t I taught you anything! You don’t wanna look adorable. You wanna look sexy and available. Jeez… And you’re supposed be the one that knows all about fashion. Now let’s see what I’ve got in my closet.”

Blaine looks in the mirror and feels self-conscious wearing Armani board shorts and a graphic T-shirt. But Sam’s right – they do make him look casual and younger.

“You know what, it’s… You’re actually right. Thank you.”

Blaine bursts out in laughter as he hears *Oooh... oooh... oooh... oooh... I wanna sex you up* playing from the speakers throughout the penthouse.

“C’mon Blaine. Come dance with me. We’ve gotta get you into the mood.”
Blaine waits for Kurt outside the coffee shop, gently humming his new theme song. He’s wearing a pair of black wayfarers that Sam has picked out (‘Ya don’t wanna wear those pink ones. They make you look like you’re ready for a trip to the candy store’). He’s really grateful for the sunglasses, because he doesn’t want Kurt to see his reaction if things don’t go according to plan.

“Well, aren’t you a sight for these sore eyes.”

“So I look okay?” Blaine meekly asks when he gives Kurt a quick hug.

“You’re kidding me, right? You look like the cool hipster in every high school fantasy I’ve ever had. Now, let’s get some caffeine stat. I hardly slept a wink last night.”

“Just wait until you see me as Nightbird.” Blaine waggles his eyebrows as he opens the door for Kurt to enter the coffee shop. He gives himself a mental high-five. He can do this… He can get his flirt on with Kurt.

They collect their orders of coffee and biscotti from the counter and as they head towards the seating area, Blaine leans in closer to Kurt. “By the way, you look cute today. And I mean like, dirty cute.”

Kurt gives him a puzzled look. “Hardly, Blaine. Look at the bags under my eyes. Just when I had finally drifted to sleep last night, Rachel woke me up, squealing as she threw herself on my bed. She forced me to look at the Funny Girl reviews on the Internet. They are…”

Blaine hums and nods as Kurt relates the details of the reviews for Funny Girl. Still, he feels disappointed. Sam had convinced him that the tried and tested ‘dirty cute’ line would work. But he’s not giving up hope. Kurt seems to like the outfit and his face turned beet red when he mentioned Nightbird.

“Vogue’s bagged four tickets for the Tony Awards Ceremony. Two tickets are reserved for Anna Wintour and her plus one…. And I’ve got the other two tickets. Would you do me the honor of attending the Tony’s with me, Kurt?”

“Of course I will, you fool. I wouldn’t turn down a date at the Tony’s for anything in the world.”

“Vogue’s hosting a party after the Tony’s. It’s the same day that the June Vogue issue is released, so it should be quite an event. Will you come to the after-party as well, Kurt?”

“Blaine, wild horses couldn’t stop me from being there.”

“I want you at the after-party because you’re my friend, umm… but also because you’re Vogue’s top model. Err… so here’s the thing, Kurt. Would you mind wearing the outfit you wore on the last day of the Hamilton photo shoot? It’s just that Marc Jacobs said he would pay for the party if you come, wearing that outfit.”

“Really? I’d be happy to wear the outfit. I owe Vogue a favor or two. But I have to ask, don’t you want to take Sam to the Tony’s?”

Blaine looks down, thinking about how he’s going to reply. He really wants to be with Kurt at the Tony’s and share that special experience with him. But he doesn’t know how to say that without
revealing his feelings for Kurt.

“Broadway really isn’t Sam’s thing. I want to take you because I know you’ll enjoy it. And everyone will want to see Vogue’s fresh face. Besides, Sam will join us at the after-party.”

“Look Blaine, I’ve gotta go. My head is throbbing and I’m desperate for some sleep.”

Just like Blaine had practiced with Sam, he bows his head, then glances up through his eyelashes, batting them for good measure, before replying, “Do you want to use me as a blanket?”

Kurt tips his head slightly to the side, narrows his eyes and gives Blaine a tight-lipped smile.

“Have you been talking to Chandler lately? Because you’re starting to sound an awful lot like him. Chandler kept texting me during the photo shoot. It got to the point where I blocked his cell number. His texts were creeping me out.”

Blaine mentally kicks himself. Of course he’s coming across like Chandler. “I’m sorry, Kurt. I didn’t mean it like that. I must have spring fever or something else that clearly prevents my brain from thinking straight.”

After a quick hug goodbye, Blaine watches Kurt walk down the street. Maybe he will have to resort to his Nightbird outfit after all.

Chapter End Notes

Song that Sam plays in the penthouse - ‘I Wanna Sex You Up’ by Color me Badd

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. Here is the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics.

I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr.
Kurt groans and his sleepy eyes open when the loft’s intercom buzzes. Kurt quickly gets out of bed, grumbling, annoyed that his sleep-in was interrupted so early.

“Delivery for Mr. Kurt Hummel.”

Kurt buzzes the delivery man in and quickly pulls on his robe. When he slides the loft’s door open, the only thing he can see is a huge bouquet of spring flowers. It’s made of sweet peas, tall purple larkspurs, delicate pink cosmos, pale blue honesty, and bright red poppies, and many other flowers that Kurt can’t recognize but smell wonderful. Kurt hears a voice from behind the bouquet.

“How can you let me use your kitchen? I need to arrange the flowers.”

Kurt is puzzled because this seems rather odd, but leads the man to the kitchen. The delivery man takes a Waterford hand-cut crystal vase from his bag and soon has the arrangement finished and placed in the center of the dining table. When Kurt has given him a tip for his efforts and leads him to the door, the delivery man comments, “You’re one lucky guy. The bouquet costs a fortune and the gentleman personally delivered the vase to the shop.”

Kurt quickly goes to the bouquet to open the card propped in front. He can’t stop smiling when he reads the handwritten message inside. Happy birthday, Kurt. I hope you have a wonderful day. I’ll collect you at 7pm for our dinner tonight. Can’t wait to see you. Blaine x.

The envelope also includes an appointment card for a VIP treatment at the M-Star Spa for later that afternoon. No wonder Blaine texted him last week about his afternoon plans on his birthday. He grabs his phone and shoots off a text. The flowers arrived and they look and smell fantastic, B. Thank you! Looking forward to M-Star, but even more to dinner with you. K x

Kurt makes himself a cup of coffee and sits down on the couch, his eyes glued to the beautiful flowers on the table. They’ve eased into a pattern of going out every week, with plenty of texts and phone calls in between. In the last week or so they’ve stepped it up and have met for impromptu work lunches and coffee dates. And celebrating a special day does move things on even more.

After doing the necessaries in the bathroom, he takes a good look at himself in the mirror. Kurt can see that some of the baby fat has disappeared since he started the new diet, that his face has more angular lines. On the other hand, his chin still only has a soft dusting of scruff and his pointy ears gives him an elfin-like look. Innately, he knows that his boyish good looks are what make him a ‘fresh face’ model. But Kurt wishes he looked more his age, more masculine, more sophisticated, more… something that would get Blaine to look at him as a man.
His thoughts drift back to the conversation with Rachel after Funny Girl’s opening night.

“That Blaine Anderson really likes you, Kurt. When I was talking to him at the after-party, his eyes constantly flitted to you, as if he couldn’t bear to be apart.”

“Rach, he didn’t know anyone at the party once it was down to only the cast and their friends and families. Of course he was looking for me. Besides, I was getting him a refill. He was probably thirsty.”

“He didn’t look thirsty, Kurt. He looked hungry… for you.”

“I think you’re making it all up in your head, Rach. Blaine was the perfect gentleman last night, as he always is.”

“What I’m saying, Kurt, is that you’ve got Blaine’s attention. You need to start hinting that you want him to take you to some high-profile events. Ones where you’ll meet people who can open doors for your musical theater career. Blaine has a lot of important connections in the city.”

“Rach! Blaine’s my friend. I don’t want to use him that way. Blaine’s far too special and I want to keep him in my life. He would know if I was taking advantage of him, so I can’t… I don’t want to do it.”

“You’d be a fool to waste this opportunity, Kurt. Think it over.”

*****

“Happy birthday, kiddo.”

“Thanks, Dad. What’s up with you?”

“Oh, I think you know what’s up with me. My bank manager called this morning to tell me that my monthly mortgage payment has been reduced. When I asked why, he was surprised that I didn’t know about the $25,000 repayment last week. You wouldn’t know anything about that, would you, Kurt?”

“Well, I might,” Kurt replies, not looking forward to this part of the conversation. “I got paid a lot of money for the Marc Jacobs ad.”

“Buddy, that money is yours! Save it or splurge on the designer stuff you like. I can’t have you giving me money like that!”

“Dad, I got paid, like, a lot of money. I put most of it into my college savings account and left a bit for ‘fun money’. But I want to make your life a bit easier, take the pressure off the monthly payments. What’s done is done and I’m not taking it back.”

“You’re really something, Kurt. I guess you’ll get it back, eventually. Now tell me, what are your plans today?”

“I’m meeting with my agent in a few hours. Blaine sent me flowers this morning, and honestly, it’s the biggest bouquet I’ve ever seen outside a hotel lobby. Blaine’s organized a couple hours this afternoon at this fantastic spa that I love. And then Blaine’s taking taking me out to dinner…”
“Slow down, buddy. It sounds like this Blaine is pretty important in your life right now.”

“Yeah… I guess he is. I mean, we’re just friends and he’s still with Sam. But when he does things to make my birthday so special, I can’t help feeling… well, feeling more.”

“Son, you need to protect your heart. We’ve been over this before. If Blaine is with this Sam guy, you’re just opening yourself up for heartache. Is Blaine treating ya right? Not being inappropriate?”

“Yes, Dad. Blaine treats me fine,” Kurt replies, rolling his eyes. Even though he’s living on his own now, in New York City, his dad is so protective, and he kind of likes it that way.

“Well, now that I have some unexpected cash in my pocket, what do ya say about me visiting you in New York in July, when it’s slow at the garage? I wanna meet this Blaine guy and make sure he treats you with respect. Make sure he has the right sort of intentions.”

“Visit me in New York? I can’t wait to see you again, Dad. It’s like the best birthday present ever! Maybe if you meet Blaine, you can give me some advice. I’m no longer talking about Blaine with Rachel. She keeps harping on about how I should get Blaine to open doors for me, give me connections in musical theater. And maybe Blaine can, but it doesn’t feel right.”

“Well don’t listen to her, kiddo. Do what you think is right.”

*****

Wes indicates a seat with his hand, after greeting Kurt. “You are one popular guy, Kurt. We’ve already discussed the inquiries about your availability as a model. After your appearance at *Funny Girl*’s opening night, the invitations keep pouring in. Nightclub events, restaurant openings, fashion nights, that sort of thing. I’ve discussed this with Blaine and we both agreed that it’s time that you hired a PR agent.”

“A PR agent, Wes? Really?”

“You handled yourself well on the red carpet at *Funny Girl*, but it’s only going to get more complicated as your fame grows, particularly after Vogue releases the June issue and the Marc Jacob ads are plastered everywhere. You need someone to advise you about building your image and reputation in the media, and guide you into deciding which invitations to accept.”

“Okay, I understand now. But where do I find a PR agent?”

“Blaine has agreed that Vogue will pick up the cost until your contract is up. He’s already made a phone call to Big Picture PR, the same agency that Blaine uses.”

“Blaine uses a PR agent?”

Wes chuckles at Kurt’s question. “Blaine doesn’t like it, but Vogue’s board insisted when he was appointed editor-in-chief. Fortunately, he’s found an agent he likes. Someone who understands his commitment to LGBT causes and lets him keep his private life under wraps.”

“If the agency is good enough for Blaine, it’s good enough for me. I’m using Blaine as a role model in things like that.”

“I’d be careful, Kurt. Blaine doesn’t have it totally right.”
“What do you mean, Wes?”

Wes takes a long sip of water, as if wrestling with what to say. “What I mean, Kurt, is that Blaine is excellent at maintaining his public image. He only allows people to see what he wants them to see. But that comes with a price. Blaine closes the door at new opportunities, new chances, new people.”

“That’s not true, Wes. I’m a new friend, at least, I like to think I am.”

Wes gently chuckles and replies, “Yes, you are his friend, and you bring out the best in Blaine. You’re young, Kurt. Make sure you don’t let life pass you by.”

*****

Kurt towels off in the treatment room at M-Star, where he’s had a 60-minute Vichy shower and body scrub. He lies down and makes himself comfortable on the massage table, where a masseur is carefully laying hot stones along his back. Kurt loves all the pampering, especially on his birthday. And it’s all down to one Blaine Anderson.

Kurt thinks that maybe Rachel’s right, that he takes advantage of Blaine, but in a different sort of way. Take today for example – the flowers, the M-Star Spa, and then tonight - the chauffeur-driven ride, the best seats in a fancy restaurant, and the inevitable expensive birthday present. Blaine’s so generous, not only with ‘things’, but with his time. With his sweet smiles that make his eyes crease gently in their corners.

Kurt really wishes that he had more to give Blaine. But even with his ‘fun money’ from the Marc Jacob’s ad, there isn’t any special thing he can give him. Blaine can buy anything he wants. Kurt’s thinks hard about things to give Blaine that money can’t buy. Then Kurt’s lips slowly turn up into a smile when he gets an idea.

*****

Bentley stops the Mercedes-Benz in the Upper East Side, a few blocks from the Met. Kurt’s curious as to where they’re going because there are just rows of apartment complexes along the street. Blaine opens his door and offers his hand to help Kurt out of the car. Once they are both on the sidewalk, Blaine doesn’t let go.

“Where are we going, Blaine?”

“Shh, we’re almost there. You’re not the only one full of surprises,” Blaine replies as they turn the corner. Just inside the alley, Kurt spies a red-and-white striped awning with the words ‘Gabriel’s Bistro’ in gold fancy letters. There are half a dozen baskets hanging off the wall, overflowing with pansies in a variety of colors, and white laced curtains cover its windows. The bistro looks old-worldly and has a rustic charm in the sea of residential buildings all around it.

“Your table is ready, Mr. Anderson. Please follow me,” the hostess says, and Kurt’s impressed that she didn’t even ask for Blaine’s name.

As they walk through the restaurant, Kurt takes a good look around. A bar runs along one side of the narrow restaurant, and along the back wall is a long wooden-framed mirror, etched along its sides, and a blackboard listing the daily specials. On the opposite wall is a row of red-and-white
checker-clothed tables configured for either two or four diners. A few random circular tables are placed in the center to give a reprieve to the uniformed layout. At the end of the restaurant, a pianist is playing slowed-down versions of Kurt’s favorite songs, and a table for two is tucked into the opposite corner. It’s set with a crisp white linen tablecloth, multi-length candles burning and a small bunch of flowers as the centerpiece. Kurt quietly gasps when he sees the single long-stemmed red rose laid out on one plate.

“Everything looks so romantic, Blaine. If this is a proposal, my answer is yes,” Kurt quips, winking and smiling at Blaine to show him he’s only joking.

Blaine turns his head as he lets out a chuckle. “No… umm… It’s just…. I wanted to make your birthday night special, because you’re special to me.”

Blaine pulls out a chair for Kurt to sit down. A waiter comes over and unfolds the napkins and places them on their laps. Soon, a bottle wrapped in a white cloth appears and champagne flutes are filled.

“Umm, Blaine. You know it’s my 19th birthday, right? They’re not allowed to serve me champagne.”

“Just take a sip,” Blaine replies as he raises his glass and clinks it against Kurt’s. “Happy birthday, Kurt.”

Kurt takes a sip and enjoys the sensation of the tiny bubbles tingling in his mouth.

“It’s a brut produced by a small winery in the Napa Valley. It only makes non-alcoholic wines, but it has a steady business,” Blaine informs.

Kurt’s impressed that Blaine has gone to all the trouble to select a sophisticated fizzy drink – it makes his birthday feel even more special. He opens the menu and giggles. Blaine looks up and gives him a quizzical look.

Kurt colors and softly clears his throat, feeling a bit embarrassed. “Sorry, but it’s like I’m reading poetry instead of a menu! Look at those descriptions. I’m not really used to that. The fanciest restaurant in Lima is ‘Breadsticks’, which serves run-of-the-mill Italian pasta and pizza. These entrées look so interesting and complicated. I’m not sure what to choose.”

Kurt’s relieved to see a warm, sincere smile on Blaine’s face, instead of a smirk mocking him for his inexperience and lack of culture.

“Thank god we’re not in Lima then. Let’s order all three of the entrées, so that you can try them all. Do you want meat, chicken or fish for the main dish? I’ll make the selection.”

After Kurt has confirmed that he would like to stick with beef, Blaine orders the meal. “We will start with a platter of oysters, then the foie gras for me and the tartare de saumon for Monsieur. And for our main dishes, we will have the steak frite and the sole meunière.”

Kurt practically swoons when he listens to Blaine order in French - Blaine’s so confident, so suave, so sophisticated.

*****
Their polished-off plates are removed and Kurt feels full. They have shared tiny morsels of each other’s dishes throughout the meal. Kurt had proclaimed the foie gras too heavy for his liking, but he had loved the light raw minced salmon salad. Kurt was undecided about the oysters - they felt so slimy going down his throat, but he loved their taste. Blaine fed Kurt a bite of the sole that absolutely melted in his mouth. However, Kurt was happy with the grilled rump steak and French fries as they were a nice reprieve from the sophisticated offerings.

Soon a platter of artesian French cheeses, fresh crusty bread and some cut-up fresh fruit is placed on the table. Kurt can see the tension in Blaine’s back and his shifting in his chair. “What’s wrong, Blaine?”

Blaine gives Kurt the sweet smile he loves so much. Then Blaine reaches into his pocket and places on the table a beautifully wrapped small box topped with a bow. “Happy birthday, Kurt.”

Kurt carefully unwraps the present. He gasps when he opens the lid of the box and he takes out an intricately designed butterfly brooch. Kurt takes a minute to really examine it, for it’s not a cheap piece of costume jewelry. It’s made of white gold and it’s outlined with tiny diamonds. There are at least twenty gemstones on its body and wings in colors of blue and green. It’s quite simply the most exquisite brooch Kurt has ever laid eyes on.

He quickly brushes a tear from his eye and looks up at Blaine, who looks so shy and yet hopeful for Kurt’s reaction. Kurt knows that the brooch must have cost a fortune, and whilst that makes him feel uncomfortable, he knows it’s not important to Blaine, sweet generous Blaine. He was half expecting something expensive, but nothing so personally selected with his interests in mind. He remembers what his gift is for Blaine as a thank you for the day. Kurt gets off from his chair and moves towards Blaine.

“This is the most thoughtful present I’ve ever gotten. I’m speechless. This brooch is so stunning. Will you pin it on me?”

Blaine’s face visibly relaxes as he carefully pins the butterfly brooch to the jacket lapel. Kurt bends down and gives Blaine a soft kiss on his cheek before whispering, “I have a surprise for you too.”

“You don’t have to do that,” Blaine replies.

“Yes, I do, Blaine. You once wished for something and now I’m giving it to you.”

Kurt walks to the piano and whispers in the musician’s ear. The pianist nods and the song he’s playing soon fades out and the notes of a new song begin. Kurt stands in front of the piano and starts to sing.

*Blackbird singing in the dead of night
Take these broken wings and learn to fly*

Kurt glances over at Blaine and sees the surprised look on his face. Blaine’s probably remembering the time that he said he wanted to hear Kurt sing. Blaine gently smiles back, which gives Kurt the courage to continue singing.

*All your life
You were only waiting for this moment to arise*
When the applause quiets down, Kurt makes a final bow and returns to his seat.

“Kurt, that was amazing. You deserve to be the star of every Broadway show. Honestly, that was
the best present anyone has ever given me.”

Kurt smiles broadly back at Blaine, whose eyes are sparkling and watery and whose face is flushed.
Blaine’s expression isn’t one he has seen before, but he likes it. Kurt desperately wants to take
Blaine’s hand in his and tell him how crazy he’s about him, how he’s falling in love. As he stares at
Blaine, trying to decipher the expression, Kurt gives himself the wake-up call he needs. This man
before him is not his for the taking. Blaine’s in a committed relationship and living with Sam.

“Kurt. There is a moment when…”

“No, let me speak, Blaine,” Kurt interrupts. “I really, really care about you. You matter to me and
are so important in my life. But I… I’m clueless. The truth is I don’t know what I’m doing. And I
don’t want to screw things up.”

Blaine face pales and he slowly nods his head, before signaling to the waiter for the bill.

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Blaine arrives back to a dark and silent apartment. Amy has the night off and Sam is staying at
Henry’s for an all-night Tour of Duty Xbox session. He toes off his shoes and tosses his keys,
phone and wallet on the side table. It’s been a long week and he’s bone-tired, but he knows he
won’t be getting sleep for a while. He carefully hangs his sports jacket over the dining room chair,
goes to the drinks cabinet and pulls out a crystal-cut glass. He pours himself a neat bourbon and
slides open the door to the balcony.

It’s too quiet for Blaine’s liking, both inside and out. When he goes to the sound system to select
some music, Blaine notices the playlist Kurt downloaded the evening he massaged Blaine’s aching
feet. A small smile forms on his face, because that music is perfect. Soon, the piano notes of
Debussy’s ‘Clair de Lune’ waft through the air and Blaine relaxes on a chair in the balcony to enjoy
the warm May night.

Blaine’s still processing the evening in his head, slowly feeling fuzzier with each new sip of
bourbon he takes. When Kurt sang ‘Blackbird’, it took Blaine’s breath away. Kurt’s voice was
simply the most stunning sound he has ever heard. Kurt’s range was amazing, hitting both the high
and low notes of the song. His voice was so pure and angelic; it had moved him in a way that no
other song has done before. When Kurt’s eyes found his at the end of the song, Blaine knew that he
was deeply, irrevocably in love with Kurt Hummel. The type of love that is found only once in a
lifetime, and can never be found again elsewhere.

Blaine’s heart sinks when he remembers the heartfelt speech Kurt gave him when he returned to the
table - how he really, really cared about Blaine, but didn’t know what he was doing. It served as a
reminder that Kurt is a teenager and still has a lot in life to experience… And that there are younger,
more desirable men than Blaine, lining up for the opportunity to experience it all with Kurt.

Blaine had desperately wanted their first kiss to be on this special birthday night. To finally take
Kurt in his arms, gaze into his eyes, and press their lips together. But it wasn’t meant to be.

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Kurt closes his eyes and slowly brushes a finger along his lips, imagining his first kiss with Blaine’s plump pink lips claiming his. He can almost feel it, taste it, but his eyes flutter open. Well, it might have happened, except he made that stupid speech to Blaine about how he really, really cared about him, but didn’t know what he was doing. He mentally slaps himself. What was he thinking? Not only were they celebrating his 19th birthday, but he had to remind Blaine even more about how young and inexperienced he was.

It’s dark and quiet in his Bushwick loft. Rachel is spending the night at a cast member’s place to dissect the *Funny Girl* reviews. He opens the fridge idly, but he’s not really hungry, so he settles for one of Rachel’s wine coolers. Kurt figures she owes him – she didn’t even leave a birthday card for him before she left early that morning.

Kurt sits on the window seat and looks out at the other apartment blocks – most lights are off but he can see the flicker of a television screen in a few dimly-lit windows. No matter how many times he tries to fight the feeling, there’s no getting around it. Kurt’s in love with Blaine, and it’s love with a capital L. Nobody takes better care of him or makes him feel so special like Blaine does. He quietly laughs, thinking of the butterfly brooch Blaine gave him. Little does Blaine know that Kurt’s stomach flutters, like it’s full of butterflies, every time he’s around Blaine.

Kurt thinks about how Blaine looked so damn good tonight, all polished and sophisticated. But Kurt likes him best when he’s more casual and relaxed. Kurt smiles when he remembers Mr. McHipster at the coffee shop, batting his eyelashes, winking, and waggling his eyebrows in that silly way. Kurt’s cock hardens as he thinks about Blaine wearing the board shorts, revealing his muscular tanned legs and showing off his perfectly-formed ass. Blaine’s hair was a mop of wild raven curls shimmering in the afternoon sun. Ugh - what wouldn’t he give to see Blaine in his Nightbird outfit! Kurt feels awkward that his body has such a strong reaction to Blaine, but he can’t help it when he’s thinking of how gorgeous and sexy he is. Kurt palms his cock over his trousers to get a little relief, but it doesn’t really help. So he decides to take a hot shower to cleanse his thoughts.

Blaine feels his muscles loosen as the showerhead pounds water over his back and the six side jets pulsate streams along his body. He pumps a few squirts of his Molton Brown body wash into his palm, but it doesn’t smell right. It doesn’t smell like beautiful Kurt with underlying notes of vanilla, rose and maybe sandalwood? And Blaine imagines beautiful Kurt, wearing the most sinfully tight-fitting trousers he’s ever seen, with his endless legs. Beautiful Kurt with his tousled hair, looking incredibly sexy. Beautiful Kurt with his hand on his hip, giving him come-hither eyes. And those eyes.

Blaine moans at the vision and his cock starts to throb. It’s been so long since he’s had a man in his bed, months before he’d met Kurt, and he hasn’t wanted anyone else since that fateful day in February. Blaine feels like a creepy old man to have such a strong physical reaction, but he can’t help it when he’s thinking of how gorgeous and sexy Kurt is. He’s a man after all. And maybe it’s the bourbon thinking, but Blaine knows he has to take care of his needs tonight.

When the hot water runs out, Kurt leaves the shower and towels himself dry. Even in the steamy bathroom he can see that his boner hasn’t gone away. His long cock is jutting out proudly, waiting … wanting attention. So shoot him, he’s a horny teenager and has needs. There’s only one way he’s
going to get any relief. And because it’s his birthday, and only because it’s his birthday, Kurt decides to give himself a special treat.

Kurt closes the curtain around his partitioned-off bedroom - Rachel is away, but who knows, just in case, and he spreads out on top of his 300-thread-count Egyptian cotton sheets. There’s only a nightlight on, but somehow the mood doesn’t feel right - it’s too quiet. Kurt scrolls through the music on his phone, looking for the right tunes to play. He spots the playlist he created for giving Blaine a foot massage after the flea market. A small smile forms on his face, because it’s perfect. Soon, the piano notes of Debussy’s ‘Clair de Lune’ waft through the small speakers on his dresser and he returns to bed.

Kurt lets his fingers brush along his chest and he feels the small ripples of his newly acquired abs. He imagines that it’s Blaine’s hands roaming his body and his lips kissing every inch of his chest, discovering the secret places that make him buck in pleasure. Kurt can feel Blaine’s butterfly kisses as his long eyelashes brush Kurt’s abdomen, exploring his body. Kurt’s fingers start at his waist and slowly move up and circle his right nipple to give it a tweak.

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Blaine groans at the sensation of rubbing his right nipple between his fingers, imagining it’s Kurt’s tongue laving, sucking, lightly nipping, and blowing air to soothe the sting. Both his body and mind are naked for Kurt to discover… the man behind the façade, the man he really is.

His cock is thick and red as blood pulsates through its length. Little drops of pre-cum appear at the tip and slowly drip onto his sheets. He needs some relief… but he wants to take things slowly - to indulge in his fantasy of Kurt. Of Kurt’s mouth exploring from his chest down to his torso and Kurt’s long slender fingers caressing the inside of his thigh - close but not close enough to where Blaine wants attention. He takes his right hand and curls his fingers around his cock and slowly starts to stroke it.

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Kurt’s hand is moving along his cock, in long twisting strokes, just the way he likes it. When his right hand gets tired, he switches to the left. It feels strange at first, the rhythm is slightly off. It’s enough, but at the same time it’s not nearly enough. He fantasizes that Blaine is like a musician, his fingers playing his instrument with finesse, begging Kurt to fuck him, to take him, to make him feel good.

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Blaine’s hand strokes his cock in rhythm with the crescendos and decrescendos of Debussy’s ‘Clair de Lune’ – an intoxicating blend of both fast and slow movements. The classical music envelops him as he imagines Kurt wrapping his body around his. Fingers move to his balls and start caressing, pulling them slightly downwards to further his pleasure. Kurt’s begging to fuck him, to take him, to make him feel good. Beads of sweat form on Blaine’s face as he spreads his legs.

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Kurt flips over so that his chest is on top of his bed. He firmly holds his cock and starts thrusting
into his hand. He soon finds a rhythm in time with the classical music and sweat trickles down his neck. His hips start moving as the thrusts speed up. In his mind, Blaine’s underneath him, writhing, begging him for more, faster, harder. Pleasure courses through his body as streaks of cum spurt out over his fist and he screams, Don’t stop… Blaine…. Fuck…. I love you.

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Blaine’s throwing his head from side to side and his legs are trembling. It feels so good, it feels so right. He can feel the sensation building up, knotting inside his stomach. With his left hand, he slowly moves his fingers from his balls down lower, and when they press gently on his perineum, his leg muscles tighten as cum shoots across his chest in thick bursts. Blaine’s mind is blank, but he starts rambling, Don’t stop… Kurt…. Feels so damn good …. I love you.

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As his heartbeat and breathing slow down, he opens his eyes. He feels sated, and every muscle in his body is relaxed. He grabs a tissue from the bedside table and cleans up. He quickly slips under the sheets to find warmth from his lover. But the sheets are cold, and he has never felt so lonely in his life.

Chapter End Notes

Song Kurt sings at the restaurant – ‘Blackbird’ written by Paul McCartney and originally performed by the Beatles. And if you didn’t know that, why are you reading this story?

The butterfly broach that I used as a visual can be found here.

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. Here is the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics.

I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr.

Reviews will be read behind the couch and with breath held. Now that this chapter is posted, I’m no longer a virgin smut writer.

Next up: The Tony Awards Ceremony
“How do you define success?
Success is doing what you love and loving people while you do it.”
Hamilton, the Broadway play

Blaine and Wes are at the Bin No. 220 Wine Bar after work on Friday night. The crowd has dwindled now that happy hour is over, and the bar’s comfortable and quiet, which allows them to catch up with each other.

“Thanks for appointing me to Vogue’s Fashion’s Night Out committee. Even as an advisor, I can tell you that Isabelle Wright is the perfect person to chair the committee.”

“I think Isabelle’s probably the best management hire I’ve made. She certainly proved herself when she brought Kurt to me as the fresh face for May’s issue. I appointed her chairperson for Fashion’s Night Out to see how she copes with it. I think Isabelle might be destined for more than running the website.”

“Fashion’s Night Out has been very successful over the past five years. It’s hard to believe that it’s now a week-long event in over a dozen cities around the world. But we’ve decided it’s going to be a little bit different this year. Isabelle definitely has fresh ideas.”

“Oh, really?” Blaine asks as he scoops up some hummus with a pita bread wedge and pops it into his mouth.

“Isabelle thinks the week should have a theme, and we have tentatively agreed on diva. It’s pretty open-ended, so the fashion houses have a lot freedom in what they choose to sell. On Monday, Isabelle is going to see you and pitch the idea of having a diva-inspired theme in Vogue’s September issue.

“That’s an incredible idea, Wes. People who can’t go to Fashion’s Night Out will still experience the diva theme. This sort of tie-in would have companies knocking on Vogue’s door to get expensive ad space for the September issue.”

“It gets even better. The event started as a means of promoting fashion and getting people to buy stuff during the economic recession. Five years later, people are now buying again and the designers make a lot of money during the week. So we’ve decided that the event should also raise money for charity and the designers will need to donate a small portion of the sales.”

“Fantastic! I could kiss Isabelle right now! Maybe I should talk to the board about Vogue donating a
percentage of the September issue sales to charity as well.”

“In order to promote this new charity angle, we’ve decided to hold a diva-off on the catwalk during the Fashion’s Night Out. We’re going to simultaneously broadcast it live at every Fashion’s Night Out around the world. We’re asking the top female supermodels to donate their time for the event. God knows, there are plenty of divas to choose from. I should know, I represent quite a few.”

“Why just women, Wes? Men can be divas too.”

“I’m glad you said that. Because we do want a male model for the diva-off, and only one. And that model is you.”

“What! Are you crazy, Wes!?”

“Think about it, Blaine. By having you on the catwalk as a diva, it’s going to attract a lot of publicity. And that publicity is going to raise money for charity and have Vogue trending big time.”

Blaine takes his time, finishing off his glass of chardonnay. He feels as if Wes has set him up so that he has no choice but to agree. Of course he wants to raise money for charity and have Vogue trending. How could he not? He’s never modeled before, but the committee is giving him plenty of time to get into shape and learn some moves for the catwalk.

“Okay, Wes. I’ll do it. But on one condition.”

“You’re already sounding like a diva with those conditions of yours. So, what is it that you want?”

“I want 25% of the funds raised going to LGBT charities. I’m not talking about the big non-profits that already pull in large donations. It’s the small ones that I want to help. Those charities that struggle to make ends meet but positively impact people in their local communities. That ranges from organizations helping troubled teens to those providing home care services to the elderly that can’t find a nursing home that allows same-sex couples.”

“I think the committee can work with that.”

Wes takes a look around the bar, with a huge grin on his face. Blaine knows that smug look on Wes’ face is because he has agreed to be in the diva-off.

“Don’t look now, but there’s a guy at 11 o’clock and he’s been checking you out since we arrived,” Wes points out.

Blaine can’t help but glance over at the guy. He looks like he’s in his early thirties, and judging from his suit, he’s a successful businessman. He’s good-looking, with sandy blond hair and soft brown eyes. Blaine knows he’s been caught staring when the guy tips his wine glass at him. He blushes and quickly turns back to Wes.

“Wow, Blaine. You must have given him some look, because he’s slowly making his way over. I’ll just leave and get out of your way.”

Blaine tugs at Wes’ arm and whispers, “Don’t you dare. I don’t want to hook up with him!”

“Do you mind if I join you? I’m all alone tonight,” the gentleman asks when he nears the table.
“Actually, I do mind. I’m catching up with my friend here and it’s going to take all night.” Blaine gives him a polite smile and returns his attention to Wes.

“Maybe another time,” the stranger replies as he drops his card on the table, before leaving the wine bar.

When Blaine rips up the card, Wes shakes his head. “Blaine, why did you do that? You need to make yourself more available, open to new people, if you want that epic romance that you’re always going on about.”

“I’m not interested in him.”

“Because of Kurt?”

“Ww…What!? Why would you mention Kurt?”

“Maybe because I saw how you looked at him when I stopped by the Hamilton photo shoot. Maybe because I saw Kurt on his birthday, and he was gushing about flowers and spa treatments and a special dinner with you. But you want to know what really tipped me off, Blaine?”

Blaine slowly nods, fidgeting with the pieces of the torn-up card.

“You serenaded Kurt on his first day of work! Just remember - I was there during your infamous ‘Gap Attack’ when we were still at Dalton.”

Blaine flushes beet-red when he thinks of the ‘Gap Attack’. Was that really what it looked like on the first day of the photo shoot last February? Blaine doesn’t want to get into a discussion about his insecurities where Kurt is concerned. He slowly exhales and replies, “It’s complicated.”

“You bet your damn ass it’s complicated. Kurt’s a model under an exclusive contract for Vogue, the media empire that you run. You know how the rumor mill works in this city. He’s using you for an extended contract, you’re abusing your position of power, and everything else in between.”

“I hadn’t thought about that. Kurt’s my friend.”

“Blaine, for such a smart guy, you can be a real idiot at times. Sure, keep Kurt as your friend, but just your friend until the Vogue contract is renegotiated in September. After then, you can make all the grand romantic gestures your little heart desires.”

“I guess that makes sense. But what happens if Kurt finds another guy before September? I mean, look at him. He’s so gorgeous and smart and sexy and….”

“Stop there!” Wes interrupts. “If it’s meant to be, it doesn’t matter whether it’s now or in September. You need to do what’s right for Kurt.”

Blaine signals the server for the bill and once it’s paid, they walk out of the wine bar into the warm June night. As they say their goodbyes, Wes adds, “Think about what I said… about Kurt. You know it’s the right thing to do. And before you know it, September will be here.”

Blaine slips in the back of the Mercedes-Benz, and he thinks about Wes’ parting words. Wes is right, but that doesn’t mean he has to like it. He has to think of Kurt first, and the best thing for Kurt would be to wait until his modeling contract is renewed. He just hopes that Kurt will still be single when
September comes around.

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Do you represent Blaine Anderson as well, Hayley?"

“No, I don’t. Blaine’s PR is handled by a senior partner in the agency. We’ve agreed that it’s best to have Chinese walls between your accounts, so that’s why I’m representing you.”

“What are Chinese walls?”

“In business, it’s an ethical barrier between accounts where there might be a conflict of interest. Basically, it means that different staff work with clients who are in the same industry. I don’t find out what’s going on with Blaine from his rep and visa versa. That allows me to focus on what’s good for you, not for Vogue.”

Kurt stares at Hayley as he thinks about what she just said. It’s along the same lines as what Wes has already told him. He needs to take care of himself and not just Vogue. Hayley is professionally dressed, but she looks pretty young. Maybe he should find out more about her.

“Who else do you personally represent, Hayley?”

“I’ve assisted senior staff with a range of high-profile people in the fashion industry, but you’re my first account acting as the lead. I might be 25 years old, but I know what I’m doing. I think having a younger agent will work to your advantage. My preliminary research has indicated that your fan base is quite young. And if you play it right, they’re going to be with you until you reach a ripe old age, and I’ll be with you every step of the way.”

Kurt’s impressed with her answer. Hayley has been honest with him about her experience and he appreciates that. She feels like someone he can work with.

“So how does this work? What do we do?”

“First, I’m going to give you some homework. Delve into your background and see if there’s anything you don’t want people to know about. Next, you’re to write down six adjectives that describe your best traits and then six that describe your worst. Then I want you to describe how you envision your life to be like in five year’s time. Once I’ve taken a look at that, I’m going to shadow you for a few days. Find out what Kurt Hummel’s like, both at work and at home. Then we’ll come up with a plan, together.”

“You’re not going to tell me who I can hang out with in my private time, are you? I should let you know up front that Blaine Anderson and I are friends.”

Hayley takes a sip of water, collecting her thoughts. “No, I’m not going to tell you who your friends should be, Kurt. However, I will tell you what the potential media impact will be as a result of your friends and your behavior. So for example, by all means, keep your friendship with Mr. Anderson. But it’s a different thing altogether if you’re caught on camera making out in some nightclub’s dark and dingy back corner. It’s just something to think about when you’re out and about.”

“I get it. Hanging out with friends is okay. Having a boyfriend… Not okay.”

“Of course you can have a boyfriend, Kurt! I want you to be happy and have everything you
deserve. Teenage fans will eat up the romance of it all. But public sordid affairs with lots of guys? That’s going to send another message altogether. The media can spin the story however they want – Mr. Anderson’s abusing his position of power, or you’re using him to further your career.”

“That’s not true!”

“I’m sure it’s not, Kurt. I’ve heard Mr. Anderson’s a wonderful person and I’m sure that you’re friends because you’re wonderful too. You just need to think about what message you might be sending out through your public behavior.”

Kurt nods his head in agreement. Life has just gotten a bit more complicated. God knows he wants Blaine, so badly, but he doesn’t want to come across as a slut using Blaine to further his career. He would never want that.

Kurt’s thoughts are interrupted as Hayley starts to speak. “Now, about the Tony Awards Ceremony, here are some situations you might find yourself in….”

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Kurt’s at the Vogue offices whilst Unique and Liam are putting the finishing touches to his hair and outfit for the Tony Awards Ceremony. Blaine has insisted on Kurt getting help dressing for the big night. He knows that Blaine invited him to attend because it’s great publicity for Vogue. However, Kurt can’t help wishing Blaine had invited him, well, for him.

He takes a look at himself in the full-length mirror and is pleased with the results. Instead of a vintage suit from Vogue’s vaults, Kurt’s wearing a black Dsquared2 jacquard camouflage blazer with a simple white shirt and black tie. It’s trendy and edgy and certain to create a buzz in the fashion industry. Kurt takes the butterfly brooch out of his duffle bag and carefully pins it onto his lapel jacket.

“Are you sure you want to wear that brooch, Kurt? Mr. Anderson personally selected these three choices.” Liam nervously holds a tray with brooches out to Kurt for his inspection.

“I don’t care what Mr. Anderson wants. It’s me going to the Tony’s and I’m wearing this one.”

“What’s going on?” Blaine asks as he walks into the room. Kurt stares at Blaine, taking in his outfit. Blaine’s wearing a classic Brooks Brother tuxedo jacket, and under it a white shirt with onyx and silver studs along the shirt’s front and cuffs. But what gets Kurt gawping is Blaine’s gelled back hair and the bow tie. He looks like Montgomery Clift, before his accident.

“The brooch… You’re wearing the brooch,” Blaine whispers.

“I… I did show him the other… other brooches you selected, Mr. Anderson,” Liam stutters.

“No, this brooch is perfect.”

“The bow tie, the gelled hair. They’re perfect as well,” Kurt sputters.

“Umm… I wanted a more polished look for the Tony’s tonight.”

“Honey, just remember that the polished look is for special occasions. Your hair belongs to me anytime else,” Unique declares, after a careful inspection.
“Of course, Unique. So Liam, do you have the Marc Jacobs outfit from the photo shoot?”

“Yes, sir. I’m going to be on hand at the after-party to help Kurt change.”

“Humph. Me too, ‘cause Kurt’s hair belongs to me. Just remember, boys, your hair is mine,” Unique interjects.

Blaine laughs at Unique’s half-joking, half-serious statement. He wouldn’t dream of doing anything with his hair without her written permission.

“Since you two are going to be at the after-party, why don’t you join in the celebration? I’d love for you to be there.”

“I was hoping you’d ask, because I’ve already got an outfit with me that is going to knock your bright star out of the limelight. Now get out of here!” Unique huffs.

*****

“You handled yourself brilliantly on the red carpet. I’m so proud to be with you,” Blaine whispers as they move into the foyer of the Beacon Theatre to attend the Tony Awards Ceremony.

“Thanks, Blaine. You know, I think it was a good idea for me to get a PR agent. I really lucked out with Hayley. She’s good at her job. She prepped me on questions I might get asked and that helped so much. Although I didn’t know what to say when they asked about Sam.”

“You did the right thing by letting me do the talking about Sam. I’ll take care of any questions about Sam and myself from now on.”

“Thanks for mentioning that I’m also a musical theater actor. But that felt a little weird when we were surrounded by such famous actors.”

“Nonsense, Kurt. Remember, I’ve seen you on the set and I’ve heard you sing. You deserve all the praise for your talents. Now I’m going to get us drinks. Try to avoid Anna Wintour if you can. She really does bite.”

“Fine, but I just want a club soda with a twist of lemon. I’m working at the after-party, so need to keep on top of my game.”

When Blaine disappears to the bar, Kurt looks around and practically squeals out loud when he sees Jonathan Groff. Rachel is going to be so jealous. She has such a major crush on him.

Before he can walk over and take a closer look at Jonathan, a tall man swaggers in Kurt’s direction. "You look delicious tonight, killer. Good enough to bite… all over. Not the usual look Vogue confines you to.”

“Sorry, do I know you? I’m Kurt Hummel.”

“Oh, I know who you are,” the man simpers. He holds out his hand for Kurt to shake. “Smythe – Sebastian Smythe – from Elle magazine.”

“Pleased to meet you, I think?”
“If you want to show me how pleased you are to meet me, blow off the party after the ceremony and come with me. I promise you won’t be disappointed.”

“Sorry, but I’m working at Vogue’s after-party. Maybe another time.” Kurt’s feeling uncomfortable with the whole conversation and looks around for Blaine.

“I’ll hold you to that,” Sebastian replies, smirking. Kurt stares at Sebastian as he leaves for the main theater. *Is this guy for real? Could there possibly be someone worse than Chandler for pick-up lines?*

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Sebastian glances over his shoulder before entering the main theatre, and sees Kurt staring at him. *Yep, got his attention all right!*

He sits down in his seat and fires off a series of texts. Operation Gay Face is a go.

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“… and the winner for best musical is…. Hamilton!” When Lin-Manuel Miranda goes up to the stage to accept the coveted statue, Kurt is already on his feet, clapping so hard that his hands hurt. Being at the ceremony, seeing so many distinguished actors he admires – it’s like a dream come true. James Corden is the perfect host for the ceremony and the clip of his carpool karaoke with Lin-Manuel is brilliant. Who knew that James could make up rap lyrics on the fly?

Kurt wishes he could mingle with the crowd, but he has work to do. He rushes to the exit, where Bentley is waiting to take him to the Carlyle Hotel.

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Kurt quickly changes in the restrooms, with Liam and Unique’s assistance. When they deem him ready, he shyly enters the ballroom of the Carlyle Hotel. The room is filled with the who’s who in the fashion and Broadway industries, and he feels out of place in his 18th century outfit. His eyes soon find Blaine on the temporary stage, speaking into the microphone.

“We’ve got a special treat for you tonight. The *Hamilton* cast has agreed to sing their opening number. Let’s all give a big round of applause to Lin-Manuel Miranda and the cast for sweeping up most of the awards tonight.”

When the cast start singing ‘Hamilton’, Kurt leans against the back wall and takes deep breaths. Blaine is nowhere in sight and he’s so nervous. Before he can get himself totally worked up, he hears Marc Jacobs shouting to him over the crowd.

“Kurt, darling. Come join us.”

He looks up and sees Marc Jacobs in the center of the ballroom, looking like royalty, with a flock of followers all around him. Marc Jacobs is also wearing a jacket from his *Hamilton*-inspired line, and it makes Kurt feel better, like he really belongs here. He takes a deep breath and decides he’s going to own it, to be the model that everyone’s expecting. So he smiles and confidently walks to join the group.
After air kisses have been exchanged, Marc Jacobs introduces him. “This is Kurt Hummel, Vogue’s newest revelation, and the face for my Hamilton line.”

With his new-found confidence, Kurt does a slow twirl, showing off the outfit. “It’s an honor to work with Vogue and Marc Jacobs. It’s even more special to wear an outfit like this on a night when Hamilton is the toast of the Tony’s.”

Bloomingdales’ head buyer comes over and starts chatting with Marc Jacobs, and they drift away to a quiet place for business discussions. Kurt is left behind with Marc Jacob’s followers… mainly the male followers.

“You’re even more stunning in real life.”

“Ooh la la! I love what they’ve done with your hair. The tousled look suits you. I bet all the boys want to run their fingers through it.”

“Can I get you a drink? Something to eat?”

“Are you with somebody tonight?”

Kurt smiles shyly, basking in all the attention he’s receiving. The flirty attention from attractive young men, who are going out of their way to make sure they catch Kurt’s eye. Kurt flirts back with witty comments and coy smiles. Kurt has never been in this situation before and it makes him feel good, and he wishes that his former bullies could see him right now.

The evening continues with a crowd around Kurt – as soon as one admirer leaves, another hopeful takes his place. At times, Marc Jacobs beckons him over to introduce him to an important buyer, but most times he’s left to fend for himself. Kurt can’t help but look for Blaine throughout the party. Once, he sees Blaine being interviewed for E! Online live. Then, another time, he sees Blaine talking to Kent Gash, the director of NYU Tisch School of the Arts. The last time Kurt chances a look around, he spots Blaine quietly talking to Sam. When Sam puts his arm around Blaine’s shoulders, Kurt quickly looks away. Hayley is right in pointing out that his behavior in public has consequences. The last thing Kurt wants to be seen as is a man-stealing slut, so he leaves Blaine be.

*****

When the party winds down and the hotel staff are collecting the wine glasses and stacking chairs in the corner, Blaine finds Kurt eyeing the dessert buffet. “Go ahead, have a mini cheesecake. You deserve a treat. You were marvelous tonight.”

“Thank you, kind sir. It’s all part of the service. MJ looked pleased when he left.”

“Of course MJ did. He now has more orders than he knows how to fill. Enough about work now. Did you have fun tonight?”

Kurt smiles and nods. “Yes, I did. I met so many theater people whose work I admire, and a whole lot of others who are really interesting.”

“I know what you mean. I had an interesting chat with Kent Gash from NYU. I told him about your acting and singing skills and he really wants to meet you.”

“You did what?! You spoke to Kent Gash about me? You had no right to do that! No right to
Blaine’s smile falters. “I’m sorry, Kurt. I didn’t mean any harm. It just spilt out of my mouth when we were discussing new talent. I mean, come on, you’re an amazing singer.”

Kurt counts to ten in his head to cool himself down, before he says something he regrets. Kent Gash must think he’s such an opportunist, having Blaine speak on his behalf. And doesn’t Vogue want him to renew his contract in September? It’s the wee hours of the morning and Kurt can’t think straight.

“Look, Blaine. I appreciate what you were trying to do, but maybe I don’t want your help. Is it okay if I leave? I’m really exhausted. It’s been a long night.”

“Of course you can, Kurt. Thanks for everything you did tonight to make the after-party a success. And I really didn’t mean to overstep any boundaries when I spoke to Kent Gash. Forgive me, please?”

Kurt steps forward and gives Blaine a quick hug. “I’m tired and probably overreacting. I’ll talk to you soon.”

“Okay, but I insist that Bentley takes you home. I’m going to be here for a while longer, so he’ll have plenty of time. I want to make sure you get home safely.”

Kurt nods in agreement, because he doesn’t know if he has the energy to find a cab this late at night.

*****

“You did what?!” Rachel shrieks, dropping her spoon into her bowl of breakfast cereal. “You yelled at Blaine for talking to Kent Gash about you?”

“I don’t want Blaine to feel that he has to put in a good word for me.”

“If it was me, I would have marched right over as soon as I saw Anderson talking to Kent Gash. These are the sort of introductions that you need.”

“I’m not you, Rach! Besides, I was working at the party. I don’t want to hear another word about this. You’ve made your views perfectly clear.”

Rachel huffs as she resumes eating her cereal, muttering under her breath, “And you didn’t even ask Jonathan Groff the autograph the photo I gave you.”

There’s a knock on the door, and Kurt jumps up to answer it. He doesn’t know who it is, but it’s got to be better than staring at Rachel’s sour face.

“Delivery for Mr. Hummel.”

Kurt opens the door and sees a bouquet of a dozen long-stemmed red roses. The corner of an envelope is peeking out of the packaging. He takes the bouquet from the delivery man. “Thanks, can you give me a minute? I have something for you.”

Kurt plops the flowers onto the kitchen countertop and opens the envelope while walking to his bedroom to fetch his wallet for the tip. *Dinner at my place tonight at 8? I promise more will be
cooking than in the kitchen. - Sebastian Smythe.

After getting a fiver out of his wallet, Kurt returns to the kitchen and quickly scribbles No thank you on the card. He stuffs it back into the envelope and takes it to the door with the flowers.

“Return the flowers or give them to your partner, I don’t care. But please make sure that the sender gets this card.”

*****

Kurt settles into an armchair at the Little Skips Coffee Shop and takes a sip of his grande non-fat mocha. He pulls the June issue of Vogue he’s just purchased from the nearby Dekalb Newsstand out of his messenger bag. He immediately flips it over to see himself in the Marc Jacobs back cover ad. He looks different than he did in the May issue – more in control and confident. So many things have changed in his life since that first photo shoot, and he does feel more in control and confident. He decides to read the issue from cover to cover and reads slowly when he gets to Blaine’s editorial.

Last month, Kurt Hummel graced the cover of Vogue, and I hinted that there was more to him than meets the eye. It was Kurt’s idea to create a Broadway-inspired issue and I hope we did it justice. Kurt has written a behind-the-scenes article about the process of designing and creating the costumes for Hamilton. Be sure to check it out on Vogue.com!

Kurt is truly amazed that Blaine has given him credit for the Broadway-inspired issue. There are very few leaders in the fashion industry that would do this for a newcomer. He whips out his tablet and opens Vogue’s website. He immediately sees the lead photo for his article and taps to see the linking page. Kurt cannot believe how professional-looking his article is, with photos interspersed with his words. He immediately sends the web page link to his dad, knowing that he’ll be proud to see Kurt’s writing on-line.

*****

Although it’s a Monday morning, Blaine’s not expected in the office until lunchtime. He only got home at 4am from the Tony’s after-party. He throws on a T-shirt over his boxer shorts and sees Sam sitting at the kitchen’s breakfast bar, absorbed in something on his phone.

“Morning, Sam. What’s up?”

“Dude, you look like shit.”

“Thanks a lot! I didn’t get much sleep because I kept thinking of Kurt and all those guys buzzing around him last night like a swarm of bees looking for honey. I’ve got no chance in hell.”

“We’ve already talked about it at the party last night. He did look great, and tons of guys were hitting on him, yeah. But remember, he went home alone.”

“But Kurt only went home after he got snippy at me. Ugh. Let’s just drop it.”

“Okay, dude. But you know I’m right.” Sam returns to his phone and smiles broadly.

“Did you know that KrianFeels posted a new chapter last night when we were at the party? You’re not gonna want to miss reading this one. After their kiss – by the way, do dudes’ tongues really battle for dominance? - Brian says, ‘We should practice.’ And then Kevin replies, ‘I thought we were.’”
Then stuff goes down, like smutty, smutty stuff. Kevin is such a horn-dog! Did you ever fuck someone over the table in your school’s library?"

Blaine chuckles while pouring his coffee. “No, I can’t say I ever did. Sure, Dalton was full of horny teenage boys, but we were gentlemen first and wouldn’t do that sort of thing at school. Well, maybe Sebastian Smythe would. There were rumors about what he got up to in every dark corner on campus.”

“Maybe KrianFeels is Sebastian, ‘cause it definitely sounds like he knows what he’s writing about.”

“Maybe he is. Sebastian always did like to brag about his conquests afterwards.”

Sam continues to look at his phone, fingers quickly swiping this way and that. “So dude, you’ve been holding out on me!”

“What!? I never did it with Sebastian!”

“I’m not talking about that. I’m talking about how you are going to be a model in the diva-off during Fashion’s Night Out. It’s all over Twitter.”

“Oh, yeah. Wes talked me into that. Now I’m trying to figure a way out of it.”

“Why, Blaine? It’s totally awesome. You’ll be the biggest diva of them all!”

“I know I can be a diva. I just don’t know if I can look like a diva. I don’t want to make a fool of myself.”

“Are you kidding? You’ll kill it!”

“I’ll be the laughing stock in town when everyone sees me strutting my stuff along the catwalk.”

“Dude, after you’ve completed my top secret body-building regime, everyone will be drooling watching you strut your stuff. Especially Kurt.”

“You think so?”

“I know so. Come on, man. Say you’ll do it and I’ll help you. I’ll be like your own personal trainer.”

Blaine knows he can’t resist that look in Sam’s eyes, the one where he’s excited about them doing something together.

“Okay, but Sam, you’ve got to promise not to ditch me, no matter how badly I’m doing.”

“Awesome! And I’d never ditch you, bro. Ever.”

Chapter End Notes

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. Here is the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics.
I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr.

I’m also an avid reader of Klaine fic. A few of us who consistently leave reviews have set up a collection called Klaine Fiction: Reviewer’s Choice. There is also a community set up at Fanfiction.net which you can access here. Lastly, I have some fic rec lists by trope on my HKVoyage Tumblr page. If I get enough likes/reblogs, I’ll expand the tropes.

I’m traveling next Saturday so I’ll post the next chapter one day early.

Next up: Blaine starts training for the diva-off and Vogue has a staff party.
Blaine looks up from his tablet and stares out of the window from the backseat of his Mercedes-Benz. He knows he should be happy with the initial circulation numbers for the June issue. The head of the IT department has e-mailed him for more money for extra bandwidth for the unprecedented traffic on the website. Everything is going so perfectly at work, but his private life is a disaster.

“Why the long face, Blaine? I thought everything went well last night.”

“It did, Bentley. Everything went brilliantly, but… Kurt and I had our first fight.”

Bentley remembers the sniffles coming from the back seat when he took Kurt home last night. How he curled into the corner like a hurt soul. Bentley silently waits for Blaine to continue.

“Kent Gash, the director of NYU Tisch School of the Arts, was at the after-party and we were talking. When Kent glanced over at Kurt, I told him about Kurt’s amazing acting and singing talents. How he was destined for the Broadway stage. Kent seemed interested in Kurt, in, you know, a professional way.”

“I see,” Bentley replies neutrally, encouraging Blaine to speak on.

“When I mentioned it to Kurt later, he flipped out. Told me that I had no right talking to Gash without discussing it with him first. I thought he’d be pleased that I put in a good word for him. But I was obviously wrong, and I’m not sure why. What did I do wrong, Bentley?”

“My impression of Kurt is that he’s a very proud young man, and he wants to impress people all by himself. So maybe he was upset because you didn’t give him the chance to discuss his talents with this NYU guy? Kurt might doubt that the director would even consider him without you putting in a good word on his behalf.”

“I’m a real idiot. I never thought about it like that. I really wanted to help him, not make Kurt think he couldn’t do it on his own.”

“And that’s why you and Kurt get along so well. You are both very giving of yourselves, but neither of you are very good at receiving kindness in return.”

“How do I fix this?”

“Don’t make a big deal about it. Kurt’s probably worried as well this morning. Let him tell you why it bothered him and really listen to what he says. We all make mistakes, but any relationship gets stronger when you can work things out by talking.”
Blaine nods his head and wonders how Bentley became so wise. He then sends Kurt a text message,

*Hope you’ve recovered from last night. You were wonderful btw. Sorry for messing things up. You’re right, I should have talked to you first. Forgive me? B x*

****

“Have you seen Twitter?” Tina cries out as soon as Blaine steps into the office.

“Morning, Tina. I had a quick look at Twitter when I woke up. The usual red carpet and after-party stuff. The photos were great.”

“No! I’m talking about what’s been trending for the past hour. Come and take a look!”

Blaine stands behind Tina looking at her computer screen. His jaw drops open when he reads:

#HamiltonBroadway
#TheTonyAwards
#Vogue
#MBL
#Lin-ManuelMiranda
#OneDirection
#Trubama
#KurtHummel
#GetAMovieIntoShape
#Kri

“Wow. Half the items are about last night… and Kurt’s trending!”

“Yeah, he hit the list about 30 minutes ago and is slowly making his way up.”

“What are they saying about Kurt?”

“*Interesting* that you want to know about Kurt first and not Vogue. Most tweets are about his appearance on last night’s red carpet. There’s also the usual stuff about his looks and what color his eyes are. There’s the odd one or two tweets that are nasty, but they come from people in Lima, Ohio. Sounds like Kurt has a few enemies there?”

“No, just some losers that are envious of his success. I’ve got to call Kurt and let him know.”

Tina hands him a cup of coffee and gives him a smirk. “Well, after you do, you need to take a look at the latest circulation numbers, because I have a feeling my day is going to be spent at the printers.”

Tina has peaked Blaine’s interest, so when he enters his office, he signs onto Vogue’s network and looks at the latest sales figures. They’re even better than he had expected. He had authorized 1,900,000 copies, which is about 50% more than the usual sales. Then he notices his inbox filled with new e-mails from the major distributors, clamoring for more copies.

“Tina, can you come in here for a minute?”

Tina enters as she pulls on her jacket. “Just tell me how many, Blaine.”
“Five hundred thousand.”

“Really?”

“Yep, really. And when you are done at the printers, I want you to organize a Vogue staff party. We are going to celebrate hitting over two million issues sold!”

“That’s a brilliant idea, Blaine. I’ll get right on it, once I’ve sorted out the print run. What sort of party are you thinking about?”

“I’m thinking about a fun party, where people don’t have to get dressed up. So no media allowed. A place where they can relax and let their hair down. Music and dancing and fun stuff to do. That kind of party.”

As Tina leaves the room, Blaine adds, “One more thing, Tina. Let’s have the party as soon as possible. We have some serious celebrating to do after doubling our circulation in only two months.”

*****

“I know! Rachel woke me up to show me. I can’t believe it’s happening! I never thought I would trend on Twitter! Just a sec, I’m going to turn off my notifications so I can give you my undivided attention.”

Blaine quietly chuckles at Kurt’s exuberance whilst he fiddles with his phone. He doesn’t want to ruin the moment, but he also knows that he has to raise the delicate subject of last night’s fight.

“You deserve it, Kurt. You deserve everything wonderful that happens to you. In between reading the tweets, did you have a chance to look at my text?”

“Blaine, of course I did. Your texts matter so much more to me than random tweets from people I don’t know. I haven’t replied yet because I was thinking about the best way to respond.”

“Oh? Are you that mad at me?” Blaine replies with a shaky quiet voice.

“No, I’m not mad at you, Blaine. I’m mad at myself. I didn’t control my temper and explain why I was upset.”

“I’m listening now, Kurt.”

“It’s… It’s hard to explain. I want to be on the Broadway stage more than anything else. But I want to get there on pure talent. Not because someone feels they have to give me a chance because you told them to.”

“I understand what you’re saying, and I’m very sorry I overstepped with Kent Gush. I promise not to talk about you to people working in the entertainment business. However, I will have to keep talking you up at Vogue and to those in the fashion world. That’s part of my job.”

“That’s okay.”

“So… Are we all right now?”

“Yes, Blaine. Of course we’re all right.”
“Duuude! I’m glad your home! I’ve got something to tell you!”

“There’s another update from KrianFeels? What is it this time? Blow jobs in the senior common room before glee rehearsal?”

“Nope, it’s even better than that!”

Blaine raises his eyebrows at Sam as he toes off his shoes and hangs his suit jacket over a dining table. He walks to the living room and joins Sam on the couch.

“I’m all ears, Sam.”

“Mercedes and I were skyping today and she’s finally agreed to marry me!”

“You proposed to Mercedes on Skype?”

“Naw, I’m not that stupid. I proposed to her during my last trip to LA, on a moon-lit beach, on one bended knee. Give me some credit! She just didn’t give me an answer until today.”

Blaine jumps up and gives Sam a great big hug. “I’m really happy for you two.”

“Yeah, me too. I never thought she would say ‘yes’ to me.”

“So have you worked out any of the details?”

“We’ve decided it’s going to be sometime in September, after Mercedes finishes her national tour. We don’t have all the stuff worked out yet, but we know we want to keep it small. We’re thinking that we might elope.”

“What? I don’t get to be your best man?”

“Umm… Like I said, nothing’s worked out.”

“I’m kidding, Sam. You need to do what’s best for you two. Don’t worry about family or your best man.”

“Thanks, bro. I knew you would understand. There’s one more thing. It’s, like, all hush-hush. Mercedes is starting negotiations with Sony on a record deal next month. We don’t want them knowing about us getting married in case it changes how they think about her.”

“Got it. My lips are sealed.”

“I’m serious, man. I don’t want to mess up Mercedes’ big break, so I don’t want anyone to know about this. Well, I’ve told you, and I’ll tell Amy and Bentley, but nobody else. So don’t tell Kurt. He lives with that Rachel Berry, and she’s such a blabbermouth, talking to the press any chance she gets.”

“I haven’t told Kurt about our ‘arrangement’ and I won’t tell him about this. But we’ll have to talk about this again at the end of September if the news isn’t out. I’m really hoping Kurt and I will get
together once Vogue has renegotiated Kurt’s modeling contract.”

Sam fist-bumps Blaine to seal the deal.

*****

“Kurt! What are you doing?” Rachel asks in an exasperated tone.

“Placing the Aladdin musical ticket inside an envelope so that I can send it back to Sebastian Smythe.”

“But those are the best seats in the house!”

“I don’t care, Rach. Sure, I want to see Aladdin, but certainly not with Sebastian Smythe. God knows what he would expect from me after the show. Besides, I can now afford to buy my own tickets and take Blaine with me. He really loves Disney movies.”

“You know, Kurt, there are more guys out there than Blaine Anderson. Blaine spoke to Kent Gash about you and where did it get you? Absolutely nowhere! No meeting, no audition, nada! Maybe Sebastian Smythe will be better to further your career.”

Kurt places a finger inside each of his ears and sings *la-la-la-la-la* as he goes to his bedroom. He’s never been so angry at Rachel in his entire life. How dare she insinuate that he should only go out with somebody if they can further his career. And he’d already told Rachel to stop nagging him about Blaine! He slowly calms down as he can hear Rachel leave the loft. *Thank god for small mercies*. His phone pings to notify him of an incoming text.

*Do you have time to stop by the Vogue offices before the party tonight? There’s something I want to ask you. B xx*

The message peaks Kurt’s interest, as they met for a coffee only last week, discussing the plans for tonight’s Vogue staff party.

*Sure. I’ll stop by after my hair appointment. K xxx*

*****

Kurt enters Blaine’s office suite and greets Tina at her desk. “Hi, Tina. Blaine asked me to stop by. Is he available?”

Tina stares at Kurt for a moment before she grabs a fluffy towel and hands it to him with a smirk.

“Sure. Blaine’s at the Vogue gym, on the second floor. Would you mind taking the towel down to Blaine? He forgot it. But I’m not sure who’s going to need it more – you or him.”

Kurt raises one eyebrow and gives Tina a questioning look.

“Uh-uh, not going to tell you, but you’ll know why soon.”

Kurt can hear Tina’s laughter as he walks to the elevator lobby.

*****
Kurt enters the gym and looks around for Blaine. He’s not on the machines, but he can hear grunts coming from a small room just beyond. Kurt quietly moves towards the back room, because he’s not sure what he’s going to see. When he gets to the doorway, he bites into the towel to stifle the moan pouring out of his mouth. The image provides enough fodder for his wank bank to last for a month, probably more. His face heats up thinking about Tina’s comment and her laughter.

In the corner of the room hangs a punching bag that Blaine is pounding – jabs, hook punches, knee strikes and other moves Kurt can’t identify. Kurt’s impressed with the moves, but he’s even more impressed with the body. Blaine’s wearing loose boxing shorts with a thick elastic band that accentuates his tiny waist. Kurt can see the bulging muscles of his powerful thighs as he moves this way and that. Blaine is topless, and his upper-back muscles ripple as he jabs the punching bag. Sweat drips off his curls as he works out, leaving little beads trickling down his neck and back. Kurt bites into the towel again to stop himself from going over and licking it off his body.

When Kurt feels like he has his urges under control, he knocks on the doorframe and loudly clears his throat. Blaine quickly stops and turns around, and it takes every bit of Kurt’s self-control not to look at his abs.

“Oh, hey, Kurt. Thanks for stopping by. Oh, is that towel for me?”

Kurt hands the towel to Blaine, who rubs it all over his body and hair.

“You box.”

“Yeah, it’s something I picked up in high school after the Sadie Hawkins dance thing. It made me feel more in control of what haters might do. That fear is long gone, but I find it’s a really great way to stay in shape, and a great way to channel any aggressive energy.”

“Chrstyal’s told me all the advantages of boxing, but I didn’t realize how great the umm… benefits would be. You wanted to talk to me?”

Blaine takes a water bottle and drinks it slowly. Kurt can see his Adam’s apple bobbing in his throat, and knows he can’t go there with his thoughts. Blaine puts the bottle on the bench and sits down, with his head held low. Kurt knows Blaine well enough to realize that he’s nervous.

“So, what gives?”

“You know that in September, there’s the Fashion’s Night Out. This year, the theme is diva and the main event will be a diva-off along the catwalk.”

“Oh, I know all about it. Unique mentioned it when I got my hair cut. I took her along, ‘cause there’s no way anybody’s touching my hair without her in tow.”

Blaine laughs loudly. “I’m glad it’s not just me. Unique has total control of my hair as well. Anyways, I’ve agreed to be the only male model for the diva-off. It will raise lots of money for charity and help Vogue get into the limelight. But I’m having doubts, lots of doubts, about it. I’ve really been pushing myself training to get into shape for the event. There are lots of people encouraging me, cheering me on for the diva-off. But Kurt, do you think I’m… umm …. too old to do something like this?”

Right at this moment, Kurt remembers why he has fallen in love with Blaine. Blaine, who is so
gorgeous and sexy and doesn’t really know it. Blaine, who can distinguish between people who tell him what they think he wants to hear, and people whose opinion matters. Kurt feels honored that he falls into the latter category.

“No, Blaine. You’re not too old for the diva-off catwalk. I mean, come on, look at you. You’re New York’s most eligible gay bachelor. When they see that body strutting along the catwalk, every warm-blooded man, gay or otherwise, is going to want you. But you already know that. Do you want to know what I really think?”

Blaine lifts his head and nods slowly.

“I think that maybe you’ve lost your inner diva. That you need a boost to your confidence. And do you know who can help you with that?”

“You?”

“Hell no. I might live with Rachel Berry, but I haven’t picked up her ways. At least I hope not. I’m thinking about Unique. She’s the biggest diva of them all.”

“You’re right, Kurt. Maybe I should focus on my inner diva as well as what I physically look like. And yeah, Unique would be perfect for the job. I knew that you could help me out with this. Your opinion is really important to me. It means so...”

“Looking good, bro! Those abs are coming along nicely,” Sam exclaims as he enters the gym, rushing over and running his hands along Blaine’s abdomen and scooching down to inspect even further.

“Now let’s work on your glutes, because everyone will be looking at your ass…. Oh, hey, Kurt. I didn’t see you there. Am I interrupting anything?”

“No, I was just about to leave. See you guys tonight.”

Kurt gives a closed-lip smile and waggles his fingers as he leaves. He doesn’t dare look at Blaine’s face – Kurt can’t bear to see Blaine’s expression as he’s looking into his lover’s eyes. Kurt’s never been as jealous as he is right now of Sam.

*****

Kurt enters The Ace Bar in the East Village, which has been booked out the entire night for Vogue’s private staff party. There are buckets of tokens everywhere for the skee-ball, pool table, arcade games and such. A large projection screen shows the band playing the song pumping out of the jukebox. However, Kurt notices Tina in the corner setting up what looks like karaoke next to a raised platform. The tables have been cleared to one side, allowing people to freely mingle and dance later in the night. The tables are loaded with sliders, Buffalo wings, peel-n-eat shrimp, mozzarella sticks and the like. For the more health-conscious staff, there is hummus, popcorn and a raw vegetable platter.

The bartenders are working hard to make sure everyone has a beer. However, Kurt decides to drink a non-alcoholic version. He doesn’t want to get too sloppy around Blaine.

“Kurt, there you are! I’ve been looking all over for you! You look delicious. Let me take a photo so that I can show Santa what I want for Christmas.”
Kurt can’t help but giggle at Chandler’s ridiculous lines. He agrees to the photo – only one – before Chandler has a chance to monopolize him further. Kurt hasn’t seen him since that first photo shoot back in February. At the time the flirting and flattery felt good, but now it feels uncomfortable and awkward. His eyes dart around the bar looking for someone he knows, and then wanders to the entrance to plan his escape. But instead, he sees Blaine and Sam enter the bar.

Blaine is wearing the same ripped jeans and white T-shirt that he wore when they went to the Brooklyn Flea Market. But now they fit more snugly on Blaine, with all the working out he’s been doing. Kurt can see his biceps bulging underneath the short sleeves. Blaine’s hair is a mop of tight curls and - OMG! - he’s wearing guyliner. The black kohl eyeliner is perfectly smudged and makes his hazel eyes pop. Kurt puts his bottle of beer against his forehead to cool down. Kurt’s heart sinks when he sees the diamond-studded ring on Blaine’s finger. It’s not his left ring finger, but who knows what it means.

“Let’s get this party started!” Blaine shouts as he grabs a bottle of beer. He then goes to the cleared-out space in the bar with Sam and they start dancing. Soon others are joining in and letting loose.

Kurt zones out Chandler’s incessant talking and leans back against the bar, quietly taking in the celebrations all around him. After a few songs, he sees Blaine walking towards him, swaying as if slightly tipsy. Kurt can’t decipher his expression but he notices that Blaine’s eyes have darkened and his lips are tightly drawn together.

“Hey, Kurt. I was looking for youuuuu…”

Blaine stands with his back towards Chandler and gives Kurt a hug. When they part, Blaine wraps his arm around Kurt’s waist and gives Chandler a pointed look.

“Stop bugging Kurt all the time. He’s mine. Now go away!”

“Oh, my bad, I-I-I didn’t realize that you two were together,” Chandler stutters.

“We’re not, but he’s really, really, really special to me. So back off! Kurt doesn’t need you harassing him.”

Kurt’s astonished at Blaine’s behavior. Could Blaine be jealous? Or is Blaine worried that Kurt can’t take care of himself with Chandler? Kurt decides to diffuse the situation before Blaine does something stupid.

“Chandler was just about to ask Tina when the karaoke will start. Weren’t you?”

Chandler nods and scurries to the corner of the bar where the karaoke machine is set up.

“What was that all about, Blaine?”

Blaine hangs his head in shame. “I don’t know. There’s something about Chandler hitting on you that I don’t like one little bit.”

“You don’t need to worry about Chandler. I can handle him. I guess I do appreciate you being my knight in shining armor trying to save me.”

Blaine grins happily, and Kurt can’t help but tease him a little. “So I’m yours, huh?”
“Well… I… not really… umm…”

“Blaine, look at me, please.”

Blaine looks up, and Kurt can see the sincere warmth in his eyes. He can also see the nervousness thrumming through Blaine’s body.

“It’s okay to look out for a friend, and I do appreciate it. Perhaps a little bit of finesse next time? Less of the caveman claiming his mate?”

Blaine giggles. “I guess I was a little over the top. Sorrrrrry.”

“By the way, I like the guyliner, Blaine. It’s a good look on you.”

Blaine perks up with the praise. “Do you like it? After the gym, I spoke to Unique and she’s agreed to help me out. She came straight to the office and said that if I wanna be a diva, I have to look like one too. And so she fixed me up for tonight. What do you think of the ring? Unique said I could borrow it.”

Kurt can’t help but clasp his hands together and jump a little with the news that the ring was Unique’s and not Sam’s.

“It looks great, Blaine. It could be your signature piece.”

“Ha, ha, Kurt. Very funny. Hush now, Unique is going to start off the karaoke.”

At first I was afraid I was petrified
Thinking I couldn't live without you by my side
And I've been spending nights
Thinking how you did me wrong
And I grew strong
And I learned how to get along

“Wow, Unique can really sing,” Kurt observes.

“She really can. But look at her on that stage. She owns it. And the way she struts, she’s the biggest diva of them all. She should be in the diva-off instead of me.”

No, not I, I will survive
Long as I know how to love
I know I'll stay alive
I've got all my life to live
And all my love to give and I'll survive
I, I, I will survive

“Come dance with me, Kurttttt.”

“Dancing when we are alone together, sure. Dancing at the Vogue staff party? No. Too many tongues will wag.”
Kurt’s glad that Unique’s song is over, because he really doesn’t want to dance with Blaine tonight. Kurt’s not sure what to do, because Blaine’s getting a bit sloppy. Kurt whips his head around when he hears the next performer.

If you want my body and you think I'm sexy  
come on honey tell me so  
If you really need me just reach out and touch me  
come on sugar let me know

Chandler is singing, well actually screeching, his song. Kurt takes this as his cue and excuses himself to the restroom.

****

“I know it’s late, but I’ve saved the best act for last.” Tina pauses as the excitement builds up at the bar and synchronized clapping starts up.

“Let’s hear it for Blaine Anderson, our fearless leader and friend.”

The noise in the bar reaches new decibels as Blaine smiles broadly and jumps on the stage.

“And let’s also welcome Vogue newcomer… Kurt Hummel,” Tina adds.

Kurt is shocked that Tina has announced his name and shakes his head.

“I’m not having any of this, honey. You are going to get up on that stage and give the people what they want!” Unique pulls Kurt through the crowd, who are quietly whispering to themselves.

Kurt’s on stage and gives Blaine a quizzical look. At least Blaine has sobered up since he last saw him.

“Honest, I didn’t know anything about this. What do you want to sing?” Blaine whispers.

“Don’t worry about that. I already picked something out,” Tina laughs as she leaves the stage.

Can't keep my hands to myself  
No matter how hard I'm trying to  
I want you all to myself  
You're metaphorical gin and juice  
So come on, give me a taste  
Of what it's like to be next to you

Kurt knows the lyrics to the song. Who doesn’t? It’s been playing several times an hour on every top forty radio station. His and Blaine’s voices sound great together. But Tina is an evil woman for picking this song. The staff are clapping along to the beat and Blaine starts moving his hips, waggling his eyebrows and coquettishly moving to the side of the platform. Well, two can play that game. I’m a performer, after all.

Kurt turns his back to Blaine and starts swaying his hips. He throws his head back and gives Blaine a wink.
Blaine runs to Kurt and turns him around, placing his hands on Kurt’s hips so they are swaying together to the beat. Kurt tugs him closer as they continue singing.

As the song fades from the speakers, there is clapping, whistling, hooting, and hollering throughout the bar. But time stands still for Kurt, and Blaine’s face is close to his. The only thing he can hear is Blaine breathing little puffs of warm air that he feels on his neck. The only thing that he sees is Blaine’s lust-blown eyes. And the moment feels too intense, like he could lose control of himself any second, and so he closes his eyes and shivers.

Kurt opens his eyes again when he can’t feel Blaine’s hands on his hips any longer. And he sees Blaine smiling and waving as he makes his way over to Sam. Blaine walks into Sam’s arms and they whisper for a few minutes. Soon after, Blaine says his goodbyes before he and Sam leave The Ace Bar.

Kurt thinks it’s probably a good thing that Blaine went to Sam after their duet. It was pretty intense. And Blaine was right to hold Sam and whisper reassurances that Kurt was just his friend. But that doesn’t mean that Kurt didn’t want the evening to end a different way – his way.

*****

“Shhhh… It’s all right, sweetie,” Amy whispers, rubbing Blaine’s back in slow soft circles. She tries not to cry for this wonderful but vulnerable man she holds in her arms.

“Nooo, it isn’t. He knooows.”

When the sobbing dies down, Amy hands Blaine a mug of warm milk. “Is that such a bad thing? Now drink this, it’s going to make you feel better.”

After a few sips of warm milk, Blaine gains control of his sniffles. “You can’t imagine what Kurt looked like on stage. If you think I wear tightly-fitting trousers – Kurt’s are practically painted on his long, long legs. He just had his hair cut and it was styled in that sexy tousled look I love so much. And he was swaying his hips and winking at me like… like… like a siren.”

“Well, you probably looked good to him too, particularly with that eyeliner on. Never thought a man could pull it off, but you do.”

“When the song ended, we were so close. All I could think about was drowning him in kisses. But then Kurt closed his eyes, and I knew the moment was over. It felt so overwhelming, and it was all I
could do to walk over to Sam and ask him to bring me home.”

“Maybe Kurt closed his eyes because he felt overwhelmed too. It might feel hopeless now, but time will work everything out. Now let’s get you to bed, and I’ll tuck you in as snug as a bug on a rug.”

*****

“Feeling better this morning?” Amy asks as she hands Blaine a cup of coffee.

“Yeah, I guess I do. In spite of everything, I managed to get a solid eight hours of sleep. Thanks for everything last night. I know it was late and it was way beyond your duties.”

“It certainly didn’t feel like a duty, Blaine. It felt more like being there for someone who’s special to you.”

Blaine sits down on the couch and swipes his finger over his tablet to check Twitter. Under his hashtag, he discovers photos from last night’s Vogue staff party. He’s angry that photos were posted, as all the staff know about the privacy policy. He makes a mental note for Tina to find out who’s responsible. Most of the tweets are compliments about his new look with the manliner, but he feels uncomfortable when they start commenting on his duet with Kurt, even if the remarks are innocent. His phone vibrates with a new text. He laughs out loud when he reads Unique’s message, *Guyliner is a go!*

He then receives an e-mail informing him that KrianFeels has updated their Breakout fic earlier that morning. He curls up on the sofa, ready for an hour of escapism. The story left off when Brian was selected for the cheerleading squad and Kevin insisted that he wear the outfit for that evening’s Skype call. It promises to be a delicious chapter.

Chapter End Notes

**Songs used at the Vogue staff party**

Unique sings ‘I Will Survive’ by Gloria Gayner
Chandler sings ‘Da Ya Think I'm Sexy?’ by Rod Stewart
Kurt and Blaine sing ‘Hands to Myself’ by Selena Gomez

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. [Here](CC-Graphics) is the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at [CC-Graphics].

I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at [Tumblr](Tumblr).

I’m changing time zones this weekend, so upcoming chapters will be posted roughly 12 hours later (but still on Saturday). Since it will be eight days until I next post, you might want to check out Lilyvandersteen’s stories which you can find [here](here). Not only is she a great beta, but she’s also a fantastic storyteller.

Next up: Kurt and Blaine spend a rainy weekend at the penthouse.

July

I'm a-a diva (hey), I'm a, I'm a-a diva (hey)
I'm a, I'm a-a diva (hey), I'm a, I'm a-a diva

“One, two, three, four… Move that body, move that body! Shoulders, hips, shoulders hips! Flip the head back! STOP!”

Unique turns off the music in the Brooklyn warehouse and gives Blaine a pointed look. “Blaine, you’ve got to loosen up. I want sensitive and sultry. You’re looking as sexy as a baby penguin.”

“I don’t feel sexy… I feel uncomfortable. This is pointless, Unique. I’m going to look like a fool during the diva-off.”

“I don’t feel sexy… I feel uncomfortable. This is pointless, Unique. I’m going to look like a fool during the diva-off.”

“Honey, I think you’re giving up too quickly. I know what your problem is. You’re so worried about hitting your marks on the catwalk at the right part of the song, that you’re forgetting the most important thing.”

“What’s that?”

“That you’re a diva! Divas don’t care if they get down the catwalk in time. Divas will get there in their own time and in their own way. You need to feel like a diva in order to be a diva. That outfit you’re wearing isn’t helping matters.”

“But it’s comfy,” Blaine grumbles.

“Divas don’t care about comfort. They care about how they look, and those sweatpants and T-shirt are not giving out diva vibes. Come with me. There must be something in the models’ area that will help us.”

Unique drags Blaine to the models’ fitting room and starts flicking through the portable racks of clothes, picking out things for them to wear. “Put these on. I’m going to change over there.”

Blaine barely manages to squeeze himself into the black leather trousers and the gold sequin top. He does see Unique’s point. Wearing these clothes does make him feel different, maybe not diva-like, but different. When he leaves the dressing room, his jaw drops wide open. There is Unique in a little black dress and silver high platform shoes.

“Wow, Unique. You look great!”
“Thanks, but we’re not finished yet. Not by a long shot.”

“These trousers are way too tight and long for me.”

“Of course they are. This is what Kurt wore for the August fashion shoot. I’ll get Liam to find you the perfect outfit, but in the meantime, we’ll just roll up these trousers.”

Blaine feels a flash of heat rush through his body. There is something very sexy about wearing the same clothes that Kurt wore just last week.

“I think red is a much better color on you than gold. It suits your coloring and makes your eyes pop. Now, let’s go to accessories and get some bling.”

Unique immediately finds a diamond tiara and places it on her head. “You like?”

“It’s a great look on you, but I don’t think I can pull that one off.”

“Not with those curls, which I want to feature on the night. For now, we’ll just go for a chunky belt and some bangles on your wrists. I know you won’t want to wear the Jimmy Choo’s, but you’ll need something with a heel.”

Unique studies Blaine carefully and then goes off to fetch more. She returns with a red feather boa and wraps it around his neck. “Perfect. I’ll let Liam know that red feathers need to be part of your outfit.”

They return to the main area, and Unique walks to the sound system. She scrolls through her phone and smiles. “Let’s forget about Beyoncé today, because she’s only going to remind you of what you think you need to do. Sam will help you out for the moves to ‘Diva’. For goodness sake, don’t do those ridiculous body rolls he’s so fond of. We’re going to focus on finding your inner diva. And I have the perfect song and you’ll like it because it’s like a time machine back to the ‘70s.”

“Roxy Music?”

“Hell, no. You definitely need help if you think Bryan Ferry is a diva. I’m talking about Donna Summer. You’ll see what I mean. Now follow me.

Lookin’ for a lover who needs another
Don’t want another night on my own
Wanna share my love with a warm blooded lover
Wanna bring a wild man back home

Blaine initially follows Unique’s moves, swaying his hips, and strutting along to the music. He has only read about Donna Summer’s recent death, but he hadn’t realized that she was a diva during the ‘70s disco era. The clothing, the boa and the music make Blaine feel bold.

“Now do your own thing. Show me what you got, hot stuff! Imagine that the audience is full of men wanting you, lusting after you. It’s time to show them your inner diva.”

Blaine mind fills with the image that Unique has described. In the sea of men, there’s only one person he looks for and finds. Kurt’s looking at him like he’s the sexiest man alive. He sways, struts
and poses with everything he’s got. He loves the feel of the boa across his neck and he’s moving this way and that.

*Lookin' for some hot stuff, baby this evenin'*
*I need some hot stuff, baby tonight*
*I want some hot stuff, baby this evenin'*
*Gotta have some hot stuff*
*Gotta have some love tonight*

When the song ends, Blaine collapses onto the floor in a fit of giggles.

“You’ve got your groove, Blaine. You owned it out there. Now remember that feeling and build on it, make it better.”

“These shoes are killing me. How do you pull off wearing them?”

“Don’t worry, we’ll find the perfect shoes for you before the diva-off. Just wait until you see what I have planned for your make-up. Think glitter and red lipstick.”

Blaine gulps at the prospect of make-up, but trusts Unique. Trusts that she’ll make sure that he’s a success at the diva-off.

*****

Blaine plonks down his gym bag and yoga mat as soon as he’s inside his apartment.

“Is that you, Blaine?”

“Yeah, it’s me, Amy. I’m back from my two-hour hot yoga class. I don’t think I can move another muscle.”

“I’ve got your juice right here. Why don’t you go soak those muscles in the tub? Oh, and your tablet has been pinging since you left.” Amy hands Blaine his power juice and tablet, before retrieving the gym bag and heading towards the laundry room.

Yoga had seemed a good idea when he signed up for the classes – in addition to his boxing practice to get in shape for the diva-off. But he had sweated buckets in the warmed-up studio, and his muscles are aching. The only good thing was that he had managed to dodge the dogs and their owners who were getting ready for the doga class.

Blaine looks out the window and he sees dark clouds forming in the sky. The wind has picked up, and he can hear it whistle against the penthouse windows. There’s a big summer storm brewing, and it’s just a matter of when, not if, it will hit the Big Apple. He and Kurt had planned to go out tonight to catch dinner and a movie, but now he doesn’t want to leave the penthouse – preferring to chill out at home. Reluctantly, he picks up his phone to call Kurt.

“Hey, Blaine. What’s up? Is it raining in your part of the city yet? I felt a few big fat drops fall when I returned from grocery shopping five minutes ago.”

“Not yet, but Accuweather has a major thunderstorm warning in effect from this afternoon through tomorrow morning. Do you mind if we change our plans and watch a movie and eat here instead?”
“Will Sam be there?”

“Nope, Sam is out of town and doesn’t get back until tomorrow morning. Why are you always asking about Sam? If you want to spend time with him, just say so. I’ll leave you two alone.”

“It’s not that. I really want to spend time with you. Sam lives with you, so of course I’m going to ask. So let’s get back to today and how we’re going to spend it. Any plans right now?”

“Nope.”

How about I come over now and we have a big movie marathon and be couch potatoes.”

“Sounds good. I’ve got quite a few movies that I haven’t seen yet. Why don’t you come over whenever you’re ready. I’ll get Bentley to pick you up so you won’t have to brave the storm.”

“Thanks, Blaine. I really appreciate that.”

Blaine’s grateful that Kurt’s coming over and he won’t have to venture outside. He checks his tablet quickly and sees that KrianFeels has updated their Breakaway fic this morning.

*****

“You must be Kurt. Come in! I’m Amy.”

“Hi, umm… Amy. Is Blaine around?”

“You don’t know who I am, do you?” Amy chuckles.

“No, ma’am.”

“I’m Mr. A’s housekeeper. And ma’am makes me feel ancient. Amy will do.”

“Housekeeper?”

“Surely, you didn’t think that Blaine and Sam keep the penthouse this clean by themselves? Now, what do you have here?”

“Just some snacks. Popcorn, my homemade trail mix and those little wasabi peas Blaine likes so much.”

“How thoughtful. I’m sure he’ll love them. Mr. A is still soaking in the tub. I’ll let him know you’re here and tell him to get his wrinkled tush out of the bath. I’m making gazpacho for your dinner and when I’m done, I’m going home. Mr. A has given me the rest of the weekend off. If you make your own trail mix, then you can help me in the kitchen while Mr. A gets ready.”

Amy hollers down the hallway and then joins Kurt in the kitchen. She soon has Kurt chopping green peppers, cucumbers, tomatoes, and onions for the gazpacho toppings. Amy is peeling jumbo shrimps to eat with the soup.

“You’re very good with a knife, Kurt. When did you learn to cook?”
“My mother died when I was young, and my father was hopeless in the kitchen. I had to learn to quick pretty quickly if I wanted more than Kraft mac & cheese every night. And then, when he had a heart attack, I had to learn how to prepare healthier food. So, cooking has been part of my life ever since I can remember.”

“I like a man who can cook and take care of his partner. So do you go to nightclubs every night now that you’re new to the City?”

“N-no. My life’s actually quite boring. I prefer meeting up with friends in coffee shops, staying in and listening to music, watching movies, reading, that sort of thing.”

“What a coincidence. So does Mr. A. No wonder you get along so famously. I know quite a bit about modeling from Sam, but tell me what’s it been like for you since you joined Vogue.”

As Kurt tells amusing anecdotes of what’s happened both on and off set, Amy smiles to herself. This Kurt is a catch.

*****

Blaine quickly finishes reading KrianFeels’ update as he dresses. He can’t stop when Kevin is mid-orgasm, his hands tied up together, in a dewy meadow of lilac. After checking himself in the mirror, Blaine bounds to the living area.

“Sorry to keep you waiting, Kurt. I lost track of time while I was in the tub. This morning’s yoga class was tough and I ache all over.”

“Is this your way of asking me to put my magic hands to good use and give you a massage?”

Blaine ducks his head and blushes, thinking of where his mind wandered to when those magic hands were massaging his feet. “As good as that sounds, I think I would fall asleep if you gave me a massage. And I want to stay awake for our movie marathon.”

Blaine takes a closer look at Kurt. His hair looks more casual than it normally does, but every hair is still perfectly in place. His yoga pants look like they have been painted on and his shirt is playful, with straps and buckles. *Wait, what?*

“Uhm, Kurt, is that a Burberry Prorsum bondage top?”

Kurt giggles and replies, “Yes, it is. I truly believe that fashion has no gender or boundaries. I’m not going to ask how you know this particular top, specifically. It sounds like you might have first-hand experience with it.”

“I’m the editor-in-chief of Vogue. Of course I’m intimate with the Burberry lines.” Blaine hopes he gave back as good as he got.

“Is Amy still here?”

“She’s cleaning up in the kitchen, getting ready to leave. Say, you didn’t tell me you had a housekeeper.”

“Umm…”
“She’s great. So funny. But I have to tell you, I felt I was being interrogated on a first date by your mother. She’s very protective of you.”

“Yeah, she is. I kinda like it. It’s like having someone looking out for you, even when they’re not there.”

“I know what you mean. My dad’s like that too. I would never admit it to him, but I like how he looks out for me, even when I’m here in New York City. Speaking of which, my dad is coming to New York next weekend. We’re going to see Rachel in *Funny Girl* on Friday night, but I was wondering if you would spend some time with us on Saturday? I would love for you to meet him.”

“Really?”

“Yep. I might have told him about you and he really wants to meet you.”

Blaine gets a warm feeling inside at the thought that Kurt has discussed him with his father, but it soon turns cold when he thinks about the meeting. How he will need to impress Kurt’s father and get into his good books. And what happens if Kurt’s father doesn’t like him?

“I can see your mind going a thousand miles a minute. Relax. My dad’s a great guy and he isn’t going to put you through the wringer. He wants to learn more about my new life in New York and meet people I hang out with.”

Blaine thinks he can cope with that. They’re just friends, after all. However, he still wants to impress Kurt’s dad and thinks about ways to do that. A small smile forms on his face when he gets an idea.

“Sure, I’d love to meet your dad. By the way, does he like sports?”

“He *lives* for sports. All kinds – football, basketball, hockey, baseball…”

“Okay, I get it. He likes sports. How about I take care of the day and we go watch a game?”

“Oh, he would like that a lot - tons better than going to a Broadway show, shopping or a fancy dinner.”

“Got it. Leave it to me.”

“Okay. Oh, before I forget, did you ever get behind who posted the Vogue staff party photos on Twitter?”

“Nope. Tina tracked it down, and it was uploaded with a prepaid cell phone somewhere in Manhattan. There’s been nothing else posted, so hopefully it was a one-off thing. Now, take a look at my movie selection. I’m sure there’s something that you want to see.”

Kurt scrolls through the memory stick connected to the sophisticated home theater system, pausing every so often.

“Unbelievable, Blaine! You have movies that haven’t opened in the cinema yet. How do you get them?”

“Tony Scott and I are friends, and he looks for my feedback on the movies’ costumes before he writes his review.”
“You mean A.O Scott as in the film critic from the New York Times?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay. Let’s watch Bond 24. There are always scenes with a Bond girl in a bikini and a glamorous ball gown. Then there’s James himself with his black mock turtle-neck sweaters as he fights the bad guys, and his signature black tie outfit.”

*****

“It’s definitely ‘Casino Royale’. Daniel Craig brought Bond back to his roots, showed us what he was like before he became cold and heartless, and gave the character real emotional depth.”

“I’m going to have to disagree with you, Kurt. The best Bond movie was ‘Goldfinger’. It made Bond the pop culture icon he is today. No-one can touch Sean Connery as Bond - his playfulness, his ruthlessness, and his ability to look good in a suit.”

“Want to watch them and see?”

“Sure. We’ll see whose James Bond is the best.”

They clear away the dishes from their dinner and Kurt replenishes the snack bowls before returning to the living room. Blaine sits down on the couch next to Kurt, but he can’t get comfortable. Between Sam’s workouts and the yoga classes, his glutes are killing him.

“C’mon, old man, why don’t you lie down. You look like you’re auditioning for The Wiggles. There’s plenty of room if you put your head on my lap.”

Kurt doesn’t need to tell him twice. Blaine quickly lies down on his side and puts his head on Kurt’s lap. He can feel Kurt’s muscles as he adjusts himself to get comfortable, and he quietly inhales to breathe in Kurt, a mixture of his freshly laundered yoga pants and something that is indescribably Kurt.

He doesn’t like being called an old man by Kurt. He never really thinks about their ten-year age difference. After all, they’re both from Ohio and had similar experiences growing up. In spite of all that, it makes him feel insecure when Kurt jokes about it. However, he’s not going to dwell on it when he’s so close to Kurt.

If you take a life do you know what you'll give?
Odds are you won't like what it is

Kurt starts gently singing to the ‘Casino Royale’ theme song. When the opening credits have finished and the movie starts in earnest, Kurt starts stroking Blaine’s hair. Blaine can’t concentrate on the movie because Kurt’s fingers feel so good. They alternate between lightly scratching his scalp and wrapping around a curl and giving it a gentle tug. Blaine’s breathing soon finds a rhythm in time with the rain beating against the penthouse windows. His eyes feel droopy and they close as he falls into a long deep sleep.

*****
Kurt blinks when the closing credits scroll down the screen. He’s hardly taken in the movie as he concentrated on Blaine’s hair. His theory had been right – if you straighten one of Blaine’s curls and let go, it snaps back into place. So what if he did it hundreds of times? It was research, right? Kurt knows he should probably go because Blaine isn’t going to wake up anytime soon, but he can’t get up with Blaine on his lap… or at least that’s his excuse. So he points the remote to ‘Goldfinger’ and starts the movie playing. As the opening song plays, Kurt rests his hand on Blaine’s shoulder and his eyes close as he drifts off to sleep.

*****

Kurt can hear a noise but it’s dull and muffled in his head. He feels a warm and soft pressure from behind. He’s lying down on the couch with arms wrapped around him and his feet tangled up with someone else’s… Blaine’s. There’s a semi-erect cock gently pressing against his buttocks, and he can feel little puffs of warm air on his neck.

“Don’t mind me, I’m just home to collect a few things.”

Kurt’s eyes snap wide open as he hears Sam’s voice from the entrance way. Kurt is absolutely mortified that Sam has caught them sleeping on the couch together. He can hear a yawn indicating that Blaine is slowly waking up. What surprises him most is that Blaine is keeping his arms wrapped around his body.

“I thought you weren’t getting home until lunchtime.”

“Dude, it’s eleven o’clock. That is almost lunchtime. I’ll just grab some food and clothes, and go somewhere. I’ll be back way later. Told ya, Blaine, that we shoulda used a tie-on-the-door system.”

Kurt jumps up, horrified about an arrangement Blaine and Sam may or may not have.

“It’s not what you think. Blaine and I were watching movies last night and somehow we both fell asleep.”

“I’m pretty sure it’s exactly what I think. Don’t worry about it, bro. It’s cool. I’ll talk to you later, Blaine.”

With a wave, Sam walks to the back bedrooms.

“Blaine, I’m going to go now before I freak out. Thanks for the movies, dinner, umm… everything. See you soon.” Before he can hear Blaine’s reply, he’s out the door and into the private elevator.

*****

“Were you with Anderson or Smythe last night?” Rachel asks as soon as Kurt walks into the Bushwick loft. He sighs deeply because he doesn’t want to deal with Rachel right now. Not when his emotions are in such turmoil.

“I was at Blaine’s, so I’m not going to talk about it.”

“I thought as much, because this came for you yesterday afternoon,” Rachel replies as she hands over a large envelope.

“Thanks, Rach. I’ll just grab a coffee and open it in my room.”
He’s grateful that Rachel got the hint and didn’t pry into last night more. After he sits on his bed and takes his first sip of coffee, he carefully opens the envelope. Inside is a first-class return ticket to Paris for next weekend, with a brochure for the Hotel Saint James Albany. There’s a simple handwritten note. *Join me for Bastille Day? – Sebastian Smythe.*

Visiting Paris has always been in the top three of Kurt’s bucket list since he started learning French in high school. He is sorely tempted by the luxurious five-star hotel and wants to join in the Bastille Day celebrations. But Kurt knows that any invitation from Sebastian Smythe comes at a price - with strings attached. He’s not willing to compromise his first time, his values, his reputation for Paris … And certainly not for Sebastian Smythe. He quickly scrawls, *Not interested now, not interested ever. No more invites. – Kurt Hummel.*

He addresses an envelope and licks a first-class stamp in the right hand corner. Then, he quickly shoots out to drop it into the mailbox at the corner.

When he returns, Kurt is happy that he’s done the right thing. However, is he doing the right thing with Blaine? His phone vibrates with a new message.

*You shouldn’t have left so quickly. I wanted to make you blueberry pancakes :) B xx*

Kurt is appalled that Blaine had wanted him to stick around in spite of Sam catching them asleep on the couch. What was going on between him and Sam? He fires a text back.

*Isn’t Sam upset with you? K*

Ten minutes go by and Blaine hasn’t yet responded. Kurt takes a shower, gets dressed and gets on with his day. After grocery shopping and running errands, Kurt relaxes watching ‘Couples Therapy’ on Netflix. His phone vibrates with Blaine’s message at last.

*I think we need to talk about Sam. Maybe after your father’s visit? B xx*

Kurt doesn’t think twice about it, because he needs to find out once and for all what is going on.

*Sure. Good night. K*

He doesn’t understand the relationship Blaine has with Sam, and he’s not sure he wants - or can - listen to any explanation. It’s too much. Are they in an open relationship where it’s okay to see other people? That would be so surprising, given Blaine’s personality. Blaine seems like the type of guy who prefers steady long-term relationships. Even with their new friendship, he can’t think of anyone more loyal than Blaine, so giving of himself and his time. And he’s living with Sam, for goodness’ sake!

But maybe it’s Sam who is pushing Blaine into this kind of thing. Sam, who is gone an awful lot of weekends. Sam who spends downtime on the photo set closely guarding his phone, texting someone with a goofy smile on his face. Kurt had always thought that these sessions were with Blaine, but what if they were not? What if Sam is cheating on Blaine?

Kurt decides that Blaine is worth it, worth finding out about what kind of relationship he has with Sam. He’s been such a good friend, and Kurt owes him that much at least. He knows that it would be awkward to discuss it before his dad is in town. So he mentally makes a point to meet up with Blaine as soon as possible afterwards and get this sorted out once and for all.
Chapter End Notes

Songs played during Unique and Blaine’s diva-off rehearsal
‘Diva’ by Beyoncé
‘Hot Stuff’ by Donna Summer

Song playing when the James Bond movie starts – ‘You Know My Name’ by Chris Cornell. Casino Royale’s theme song.

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. Here is the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics.

I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr.

I’m now in the US East Coast and will be here for a while. This will be my update time (roughly) until further notice.

Next up: Burt’s weekend in New York
Be careful to leave your sons well instructed rather than rich, for the hopes of the instructed are better than the wealth of the ignorant. - Epictetus

July

Kurt dunks his body into the crystal clear blue water in a faraway place – like an exotic, outlying Caribbean island. His feet can still touch the fine white sand, but his body moves with the tide flowing into the shore. It’s the most magical feeling – almost like floating – and he lets his body move with each new wave. He looks up at the blue sky and squints at the bright sun above. He can feel each new wave building up stronger and pushing him in towards the white sandy beach - and towards Blaine. There’s no-one on the private beach but them, and he feels his heart pounding.

Blaine holds him tight around the waist as if he will never let go. Blaine cups Kurt’s cheek with his right hand and murmurs, “You’re so beautiful… Everything about you is so beautiful.”

In that moment, Kurt has never felt so loved, so cherished, by another man before. Blaine gazes into his eyes, looking for the go-ahead, and when Kurt’s eyes sparkle back at him, he gently presses his lips against Kurt’s. The sensation of Blaine’s lips against his is more than Kurt had ever dreamed of. They’re so soft and warm and feel as if they were made for him.

“I could kiss you forever.”

“I won’t stop you.”

Kurt wakes up suddenly and looks at his phone for the time – 5am. He flops his head back on the pillow and closes his eyes, willing for the dream to continue. However, no matter how hard he tries to recapture the dream, it’s elusive and drifts away like the tide flowing out. He’s had the same dream three nights in a row, and he always wakes up after the first kiss - just when the dream is starting to get good. The dream is so vivid that it almost seems real.

Kurt thinks it’s ridiculous to have this sort of dream about Blaine, particularly before having ‘the talk’ with Blaine about Sam. Perhaps it’s just his way of getting Blaine out of his system before being friend-zoned. But Kurt can’t help wanting Blaine to be his first kiss, even if they only kiss once.

*****

Sebastian Smythe reads Kurt’s message with the returned flight ticket to go to Paris during the upcoming Bastille Day celebrations. It’s obvious that wooing isn’t the way to go to lure Kurt away from Vogue. That Blanderson has gotten under his skin. Sebastian thinks to himself that there’s no way he’s going to stoop down to Anderson’s level with his romantic dorky ways. He shudders to think that Blaine managed to get his foot inside Vogue’s doors with his suspenders and bowties. No, Sebastian is far too sophisticated for that. He’s not particularly fussed that Kurt hadn’t responded to his wooing - after all, princesses aren’t his type. However, it would have been very satisfying to fuck Kurt’s brains out, just to boast about it later to Anderson.
Sebastian considers this a minor setback in the total scheme of things and isn’t giving up yet. He still has a few tricks up his sleeve. He has meticulously planned for all eventualities with regards to Kurt. Phase B of Operation Gay Face is now in effect.

Sebastian buzzes his assistant. “Get Morris in Legal here pronto. There’s some urgent work that needs doing.”

*****

“So how are you supposed to behave when you meet the father of your friend, whom you are in love with, but he doesn’t even know it? Should I casually mention it to Kurt’s dad? Should I tell him that I have honorable intentions? Or should I pretend that Kurt is just a friend?”

Amy slides into the chair opposite Blaine and places her arms on the dining table, holding Blaine’s hands. “Oh, Blaine. Don’t you think you need to tell Kurt about your feelings? I don’t think Kurt would like it if you discuss it with his dad first.”

“But how do I make a good first impression?”

“Blaine, you meet new people all the time. Just be yourself.”

“I know I often meet new people… but this is different. Kurt loves his dad, and his dad’s opinion really matters to him. From what Kurt has told me, his dad’s always been there to protect and guide him through important things in his life. I’m definitely out of the picture if his dad doesn’t like me.”

“I think you’re putting too much pressure on yourself. Of course his dad is going to like you, if you treat Kurt with respect and make him happy. Maybe you’ll feel more comfortable if there are other friends at the baseball game as well.”

“You think so?”

“I can’t see you totally comfortable in any situation with Kurt’s dad, but inviting others will take the pressure off you. Besides, I’m sure that his dad would love to meet Kurt’s other friends. It’d show him that Kurt is surrounded by people who care about him as well.”

“Okay, that makes sense. Do you think Kurt would mind other people being there?”

“I wouldn’t have suggested it if I thought he would mind.”

“So when did you get so wise Amy?”

“I might have been in the exact same situation once or twice – sometimes I’ve been in your shoes. Other times I’ve been in Kurt’s or his dad’s place. Trust me - it’s all going to work out if you’re just yourself.”

*****

Kurt places his dad’s suitcase in the Mercedes-Benz sedan’s trunk while Burt inspects the car.

“You didn’t have to go to the expense of hiring a fancy car. I wudda been just as happy in a plain yellow cab.”
“I didn’t hire the car. It’s Blaine’s - he insisted. He wanted to make sure we got from the airport to Bushwick smoothly. There can be terrible traffic jams on Fridays. Dad, I’d like you to meet Bentley.”

Bentley turns around and tips his cap. “Welcome to New York, sir. Let me know if there’s anything I can do to make the trip more comfortable for you.”

“It would make me a lot more comfortable if you called me Burt - just Burt.”

“Got it, Burt. So tell me, what’s going on in Ohio these days?”

Kurt leans back and quietly listens to his dad and Bentley talking about football, the price of gas, and their views about the presidential election. They’re roughly the same age, and he should have known that they would get along famously.

“We’re one man short tonight at our weekly poker game, if you’re interested?” Bentley asks tentatively.

“You can’t do that, Dad! We’ve got tickets to see *Funny Girl* tonight. Rachel’s expecting us and has arranged for us to go backstage after the performance. I’d never hear the end of it if we didn’t go.”

“Okay, kiddo. No poker game tonight. But maybe next trip? Say, Bentley, how’s the boss? Does he treat ya right?”

Kurt rolls his eyes and looks out the window. He knows that his dad is pumping Bentley for information about Blaine.

“He sure does, Burt. Blaine’s a very generous man. Take tomorrow, for example. I’m driving you to the Yankee Stadium. Blaine bought me a ticket as well, so I don’t have to wait in the car while the game’s going on. That’s simple stuff, though. When Marge had her cancer scare last year, Blaine took care of everything - upgraded her to a private room, dealt with all the insurance co-pays, gave me time off from work, and even drove us back from the hospital. Marge and I don’t have children, but if we did, we sure would want a son like Blaine. He’s like part of the family.”

“And Marge’s okay?”

“Yes, fortunately, the cancer was caught in time.”

Kurt can see his father nod his head in approval as Bentley continues his stories about Blaine. He isn’t really surprised to find out that Blaine took care of Bentley’s wife when she was going through chemo. That totally sounds like something Blaine would do. He wishes Blaine had been around when Burt found out he had prostate cancer. Kurt could have used a friend like Blaine at that time.

*****

“You were great last night, Rachel. Your dads must be proud.”

“Oh, they are, Burt. They’re even canvassing the producers to see if they will allow them to video it… For their own personal collection, of course.”

“So have you met this Blaine Anderson that Kurt’s always going on about?”
“Yes, I’ve met him a few times - picking up Kurt for a night out, and also at Funny Girl’s opening night.”

“And?”

“Blaine is a good-looking and charming guy. He and Kurt spend a lot of time together on the weekends. Blaine’s totally smitten with Kurt. What I don’t get is why Blaine doesn’t help Kurt’s musical theater career. He knows people.”

“You’re right. You don’t get it, but it’s one of the many reasons you’re the star of Funny Girl.”

“Rach, don’t you have a matinee performance to get to?” Kurt asks as he enters the living room.

“Oh! I hadn’t noticed the time. I should go.”

When Rachel has left the loft, Kurt gives his father one of his patented bitch-faces. “Anyone else you want to discuss Blaine with? I could arrange for you to meet Blaine’s hairdresser, his PA, his doctor - so that you can drill them about him.”

“Come on, kiddo. I’m only here for a couple of days, and I want to find out all I can about this Blaine guy.”

“Well, Rachel is not the best source for that. She can’t see past his job title and fame.”

“I’ve known Rachel since she was knee-high to a grasshopper. She didn’t say anything bad about Blaine, and that says something in itself.”

“When we meet up with Blaine later, please don’t interrogate him or say anything weird.”

“Like what?”

“Like ‘treat my son right’ or ‘break his heart and I’ll break you’. He’s really important to me, and I don’t want you scaring him away. He’s a friend… A new friend, and I want to keep it that way.”

“Give me some credit, son. I’m not going to say or do anything to embarrass you. But I am going to talk to Blaine so I can get to know him better.”

“Well, stick to things that aren’t about his feelings about me, or even worse, my feelings about him.”

“You’re a real piece of work sometimes, buddy. Scout’s honor, I won’t talk about feelings.”

*****

As the three men walk up to the Yankee Stadium, Blaine leads Burt and Kurt to the executive suite entrance. Soon they arrive at a private box in the outdoor Field MVP Club section. Burt looks around disbelievingly.

“Wow. We’re sitting right behind the middle of the Yankees’ dugout and directly across from the mound. These are the best seats in the house!”

“Blaine, you shouldn’t have gone to all that trouble,” Kurt chides softly. He can see Blaine’s cheeks
redden, and Kurt gives his shoulder a squeeze.

“So when’s Bentley joining us?” Burt asks, trying to ignore the heart-eyes both boys are showing.

“He’s collecting his nephew and then he has to park the car, so I guess in half an hour.”

“Eric’s coming as well?” Kurt asks.

“The box has ten seats and I couldn’t let them go to waste, particularly when the Yankees are playing the Red Sox. I’ve invited some others to join us – Unique, Liam, Wes, Isabelle and her husband. People whom you work with. I thought your dad might want to meet them.”

“You bet I do. So, Blaine, do you like sports?” Burt asks.

“I do, but football’s more my thing. When I was growing up, I used to watch the Buckeyes play with my dad.”

“Oh, way to break the stereotype!” Unique exclaims as she enters the box. She’s wearing a Yankees T-shirt that she custom-bedazzled the night before. She sits down next to Burt and introduces herself.

“I’m Unique, Kurt’s hair and make-up artist extraordinaire. I can tell that Kurt didn’t get his hair genes from you.”

Burt chuckles. “No, he’s got Lizzie’s hair.”

Soon the box fills up as the others arrive and Burt makes his rounds, meeting people and taking his time to get to know them. Then the game starts, and all eyes are on the field.

*****

The seventh-inning stretch comes too quickly, and the Red Sox are ahead by two runs. There are grumblings in the stadium as fans get up for the break.

Blaine informs everyone, “If you want some more food or drinks, you can go to the Club Lounge. The buffet is still set up.”

Burt decides that this is the right moment for his talk with Blaine. He’d chatted to their friends and is satisfied that Kurt has surrounded himself with good people, who care about him. He’s never seen Kurt so happy, and that’s saying something, since he hates baseball. All Burt’s ever wanted is for Kurt to be happy, and it seems like New York and this modeling career have been the best thing for Kurt. One thing he knows for sure is that this Blaine guy is key to his happiness.

Blaine treats Kurt like a prince. It’s simple things, like making sure he has a good seat, keeping his drink topped up, making sure Kurt’s always sitting in the shade, discussing scarves with him when Kurt grows bored of the baseball talk. Kurt certainly laps it all up. He’s seen how the boys behave around each other, like two school kids that have a crush but don’t want the other to know.

“Hey, Bentley. Blaine and I are going to stay here for the song. Can you grab us a couple of hotdogs and beers?”

Kurt turns around and raises an eyebrow, looking scared about leaving his dad alone with Blaine. Burt laughs when he sees Kurt place a hand across his heart and shake his head, reminding him that
he can’t talk about feelings with Blaine. Burt links his pinkies together as a sign back that he promises.

When the others in the box have left, Blaine comments, “I’ve noticed that you’re wearing a rainbow pin, Burt.”

“Gay rights are an important issue to me. I’ve seen first-hand how bigotry affected Kurt growing up. Everyone deserves their own brand of happiness. If people don’t like it, screw ‘em.”

Blaine gives an affable smile, but Burt can tell he’s nervous by the way he’s twisting his hands over his lap.

“I’m not sure what Kurt has told ya, but I don’t own a shotgun. I’m not going to threaten you about what happens if you break his heart. And yeah, you do have the ability to break his heart. But I will say this - you’ve given Kurt the opportunity to shine and he’s glowing all over. Don’t take it away from him.”

“I’m not planning to. He’s a hit as a model.”

“I’m not talking about the modeling crap. I’m talking about Kurt, who’s grown up since he moved to New York. He’s making new friends and experiencing things that would never happen to him in Lima.”

“Burt, I really really care about Kurt. He’s special to me. I would do anything to keep him happy.”

Burt nods his head in approval. Blaine looks at him so earnestly that he believes that Blaine’s intentions are in the right place.

“You treat my son with respect, and that’s important to me.”

Burt can see Blaine visibly relax and beam because of his comment. So he continues the conversation.

“You’re the big dog at Vogue. I’ve watched The Devil Wears Prada with Kurt at least a half-a-dozen times back in Lima. It must be some crazy life.”

Blaine laughs. “Everyone thinks that, including my mother, but my life is a lot different than Anna Wintour’s, the previous editor. Let’s just say that I don’t have the hedonistic lifestyle that you probably imagine I do.”

“So where do you see yourself in ten years’ time?”

“I’m not sure. I’m pretty young to head up Vogue and I’m not sure how long I’ll keep the job.”

“I’m not talking about your career, Blaine. I’m talking about where you will be… as a man.”

Blaine closes his eyes. “I don’t see myself in the same high-profile job I have now, but I’m not sure what I’ll be doing. What I do see is a husband - someone whom I love and cherish passionately - someone who loves and cherishes me back. I see two children, whom we are raising to be tolerant of others’ beliefs. Basically, I see a family, whom I really love and am committed to. And of course, I see a dog… Maybe a white picket fence? That’s what’s important to me.”
“With this Sam guy?”

“No, not with Sam. I really don’t want to talk about him, but sometimes relationships aren’t what they seem on the Internet. Let’s just say that Sam and I have very different ideas of what our futures hold.”

“So are you going to do something about that?”

“Yes, we plan to soon. We just need to get the timing right.”

Their conversation is interrupted as the kiss-cam zooms in on them and the nearby crowd cheers. Blaine shrugs and gives Burt a kiss on the cheek. Burt laughs at Blaine’s gesture and thinks, *I hope Blaine likes cats as well.*

*****

The next morning, Kurt takes his father to the Spotlight Diner for brunch, before their trip to the airport. Although he doesn’t work at the diner anymore, he wants his dad to see where he had his first job in New York. After the egg-white omelets and turkey sausages have been ordered, and the coffee has been served, Kurt gets right down to business.

“I’m dying to know what you and Blaine talked about during the seventh-inning stretch at the baseball game yesterday. Blaine wouldn’t tell me, but he did say I was lucky to have you as a dad.”

“I didn’t say anything that would embarrass you, buddy. We didn’t talk about ‘feelings’. Just stuff.”

“What kind of stuff? You’ve got to give me more than that!”

“I don’t know. Stuff like Vogue and future plans.”

“You discussed Vogue’s future plans? You’re kidding, right?”

“Not Vogue’s future plans – his future plans. The more we talked, the more I realized that even people in high positions have dreams like the rest of us.”

“So, you liked Blaine?”

“What’s not to like? He’s charming and kind, and made sure everyone in the box was taken care of, especially you.”

“I don’t think I was singled out, Dad.”

“He talked about scarves at a baseball game! Do you need any more proof?”

Kurt sighs. “I guess not. I’ve thought long and hard about things over the past week, and I’ve decided to keep Blaine as my friend… and friend only.”

“I think that’s a wise decision – at least for now. One thing that struck me yesterday is how loyal Blaine is to people he cares about. If he’s having troubles in a relationship, he’s not going to give up easily. He’s the type that’s going to try and work it things out until it’s resolved, one way or another.”
“Are you talking about me or Sam?”

“Maybe both.”

*****

Bentley collects them from the Starlight Diner to go to the airport. Kurt has mixed feelings about his dad leaving. On the one hand, Kurt’s going to miss him even more than usual and can’t wait until Christmas, when he plans to go back home. However, his dad doesn’t really belong in New York and is much happier in Lima.

“Don’t come into the terminal, Kurt. I can handle the check-in by myself.”

“Okay. Promise you’ll call me as soon as you get home?”

“Yep. Take care of yourself, Kurt. You’ve made an amazing life for yourself here. I’m so proud of you. Just remember that you…”

“Matter. Got it, Dad.”

After teary goodbyes, Kurt gets into the backseat of the sedan.

“Your father is one of a kind,” Bentley remarks.

“Yes. Yes, he is.”

*****

“Good weekend with the in-law?” Sam asks as he enters the penthouse’s living room late on Sunday night.

“Kurt’s father isn’t my in-law - not by a long shot.”

“Well, I think he will be some day. So how did it go?”

“I think it went all right. The baseball game was a good idea - Kurt’s dad seemed comfortable there. I think it helped that I’d invited people that Kurt knows through work, so that he could get comfortable with Kurt’s new life as well.”

“So did he get out the shotgun and grill you? I’m sure that Kurt’s father is on the protective side.”

“Sam, you’ve been reading too many Krian fanfics,” Blaine chuckles. “There was no shotgun in sight. We did have a little one-on-one talk, though. Actually, Burt is a very kind man, and I’m glad that Kurt has him for a father. He was asking me about my future and things like that. It was a friendly conversation, with no difficult or awkward questions.”

“You’re damn lucky then. I’ve got to visit Mercedes’ parents next weekend and convince them that a secret wedding is a good idea.”

“Oh, really? Have you firmed up your wedding plans?” Blaine asks.

“You’re not going to like it… But we decided to have a small private ceremony in Vegas. It’s easy
for Mercedes to get to and we plan to spend the following week there doing typical Vegas things.”

Blaine gives Sam a pointed look. “I know you hate gambling, so that’s not the real reason you picked Vegas - is it, Sam? It doesn’t have anything to do with a certain person you like to impersonate, does it?”

“Dude! I knew you’d catch me out. Okay, I wanted to get married in Vegas because of Elvis. I’ve already contacted the Graceland Wedding Chapel and they’ve agreed that I can be Elvis during the ceremony. They said that they’d supply me with any Elvis outfit I want. I’m thinking that the white jumpsuit with studded rhinestones is the way to go. What do you think?”

“I think it’s a brilliant idea. But what about Mercedes? She’s really religious and traditional in a lot of ways, so I would’ve thought that she’d prefer getting married in her church.”

“Yeah, I know, but we’ve talked a lot about this. Mercedes insists that if she’s marrying the world’s biggest goofball, we should have a crazy wedding. Besides, Mercedes has found an Elvis outfit that is perfect for her - it’s all black with a mini skirt and knee high black leather boots. It’s got fringe on the sleeves and rhinestones on the front. It even has a cape! She’s going to look sexy as hell in it.”

“Sounds like your dream wedding come true. Make sure you take lots of photos because I definitely want to see you both in the Elvis outfits.”

“I need your help. I’ve downloaded like every single Elvis song because I want to sing to Mercedes during the wedding ceremony. ‘Love Me Tender’ is the obvious one, but I’d really love to sing ‘Hound Dog’ or ‘Jailhouse Rock’. And of course I’ll need to practice the pelvis moves. It’s not really like my patented body roll.”

“I’ll help you pick out the song. You’re on your own for the ‘Elvis pelvis’. So when is the wedding going to take place?” Blaine asks.

“That’s the other thing you’re not going to like. We wanna get married as soon as Mercedes’ national tour is over. It’s been too many years with on-line porn and only my right hand for company.”

“TMI - just tell me the date!”

“As I said, you’re not going to like it. The thing is… The first chance we’ve got to get married at the Graceland Wedding Chapel happens in the middle of Vogue’s Fashion Night Out.”

“And what date might that be?” Blaine asks with a shaky voice.

“It’s the day of the diva-off. I’ve already told Mercedes that if you’re not cool with that, we’ll pick another date. But I really, really want to marry that girl as soon as we can – before she can change her mind.”

“And so you should. I’m not going to lie. I’m disappointed. But it’s your special day and you two should get married when you want to. Besides, you’ll be able to laugh at my performance. No doubt it’ll be posted on YouTube.”

Sam pulls Blaine in for a long hug.

“There’s no way I would laugh at you, Blaine. You’ve been working so hard to get ready for it and you’re totally awesome. Unique will have your back that night. Are you sure you’re all right with me
not being there? Just say the word and we’ll work out something else.”

“I’m totally fine with it, Sam. I’ve been rooting for you and Mercedes to get married for years.”

Thanks, bro. I knew you’d understand. Now, just one more special favor. Please, please, please don’t mention this to anyone. I don’t want to jinx it.”

“Sure,” Blaine replies instantly.

Sam crooks his little finger and holds it out to Blaine. “Pinky promise?”

Blaine hooks his little finger around Sam’s and gives it a pull.

“Pinky promise. Now, speaking of weddings, did you read this weekend’s update of KrianFeels’ story? Kevin and Brian are broken up, but they still hook up at the wedding that doesn’t go through. From the moment that Kevin pulls Brian into his hotel room by his tie, you know that he’s feeling feisty and so dominant. And the smut? Well, Kevin just takes and takes. A pretty inventive way to use their ties. Honestly, it’s the hottest thing KrianFeels has written so far. And the next morning? Brian is so subby it’s not even funny. I told you there was power play between the two.”

“I did read it, and it’s probably the smuttiest thing I’ve ever read. If I wasn’t into Mercedes so badly, I would seriously doubt if I’m 100% straight. Because what those two boys did was totally hot!”

Chapter End Notes

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. Here is the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics.

I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr.

Next up: Sebastian Smythe has a proposal for Kurt.
The Elle Contract

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“I think we dream so we don’t have to be apart for so long. If we’re in each other’s dreams, we can be together all the time.” - A.A Milne, Winnie-the-Pooh

August

The burning red sun starts to set low on the horizon, and each wave in the ocean pushes his body against Blaine’s. Blaine begins nuzzling his neck and peppering it with delicate kisses - so faint, they are like whispers. Warmth radiates through Kurt from the spot where lips touch his neck to the tips of his toes.

Kurt’s hands begin to slide up slowly along Blaine’s chest and encircle his neck. Kurt moves Blaine’s head so that his lips capture Blaine’s, and his heart flutters as the kisses grow more passionate. Blaine’s tongue flits over Kurt’s lips as if asking permission to enter, the quickening of Blaine’s breath matching his own. When Kurt parts his lips to allow access, Blaine’s tongue feels so warm and explores the inside of his mouth. The kisses grow deeper, soft caresses become firmer, and Kurt feels as if he is drowning and never wants to come up for air.

Kurt’s upper body springs up from his mattress as he gasps for breath. The kisses had felt so real to him that he’s momentarily confused about where he is. He flops back onto the pillows, bitterly disappointed, when he realizes that he is alone, in his own bed, in his own room, in Bushwick. The dream was like a perfect fantasy come true – the water lapping against his back, Blaine pressed against his chest, the kisses, the passion… everything. While the recurring dream went further this time than the usual chaste kiss on the lips, it wasn’t enough. His morning boner is certainly telling him he’s woken up too soon. It feels too creepy to masturbate thinking of Blaine and his dream, so Kurt decides that a cold shower is exactly what he needs.

The water sprays over his face as Kurt tries to decide what to do. He wants Blaine to be part of his life, but isn’t sure if he can keep him in the ‘friend zone’. His dreams are certainly telling him that. Can he continue to have such passionate thoughts about Blaine when they can’t become reality? Will he slip up some day and tell or show Blaine how much Blaine means to him?

Kurt feels like Blaine’s partially to blame for all this confusion. Kurt’s not at all experienced when it comes to relationships, but he can tell when a man is interested in him, and Blaine sends those signals all the time… The dates, the romantic gestures, the flirty texts, his warm honey-colored eyes sparkling when he looks at Kurt. That Blaine is very interested in him.

But there’s also the Blaine who is living with Sam. Kurt might not understand how their relationship works, but he’s smart enough to realize that Blaine is loyal and committed to Sam. However, Blaine gives out mixed signals about his relationship with Sam. It’s clear that they enjoy each other’s company and love to goof off together. There’s a familiarity between them that only comes with years of knowing and being with each other. It’s as if Blaine and Sam can communicate with a simple glance. In Kurt’s opinion, it’s obvious that Blaine needs Sam to support him, whether it’s at a red carpet event, preparing for the diva-off, or at a photo shoot.

However, Blaine has proven time and time again that Sam’s feelings don’t factor into his relationship
with Kurt. Blaine always changes the subject when Kurt mentions Sam, as if there are separate compartments in his mind for the two men. Sure, Kurt has seen Blaine and Sam together, but it’s been work-related. Kurt has never spent time with the two men in a more private setting, so he can’t even begin to understand what their relationship is like. Does Blaine dote on Sam like he does on Kurt? Does Blaine inundate Sam with flowers and presents… just because? Does Blaine whisper sweet nothings into Sam’s ear? Does Blaine make Sam feel like the most precious gem in the world? Because that’s exactly how Blaine makes him feel.

Kurt’s puzzled by Sam’s behavior in their relationship as well. Sam’s a one-of-a-kind man – not the sharpest knife in the drawer but his heart seems to be in the right place. He’s also a big goofball, joking around at work and making those ridiculous impersonations. Sure, Sam is a laid-back guy, but he’s almost too laid-back when it comes to Blaine. Not once has Sam mentioned anything to Kurt about his friendship with Blaine. Not once has Sam commented on how much time Kurt spends with Blaine. Not once has Sam questioned Kurt about his behavior around Blaine, whether it’s flirty duets or sleeping on the couch with their limbs entangled. It’s as if Sam doesn’t have a jealous bone in his body.

Where is Sam when Kurt spends time with Blaine? He seems to travel to the West Coast any chance he can get. Is Sam committed to Blaine? Kurt can’t imagine that Sam would use Blaine to get ahead in his career or for the trappings of his wealth and fame. However, Kurt doesn’t see burning desire in Sam’s eyes when he looks at Blaine – the look that Kurt has for Blaine.

Kurt turns off the water and reaches for his towel. He looks like a withered prune after spending so much time in the shower. He’s disappointed knowing that he still hasn’t any more of a clue what to do about Blaine now than he did when he woke up. He takes a good look at himself in the mirror and sees a man hopelessly in love - but in turmoil. Kurt decides this isn’t a good look for him. He needs to do something to resolve matters - one way or another.

As Kurt gets dressed for the day, he looks over texts sent between Blaine and himself over the past few weeks. Blaine loves to take photos and send them to Kurt. For example, last week, Blaine sent him photos of the sun rising in Central Park during his morning run, a stray cat that had the same color fur as Kurt’s hair, the contents of his fridge, asking for a suggestion for dinner, and a Broadway billboard for The Color Purple, asking if Kurt wants to see it with him.

He then scrolls through earlier texts when his dad was in New York and then to the morning after they fell asleep on the couch in Blaine’s penthouse. His eyes zoom in on one message in particular.

I think we need to talk about Sam. Maybe after your father’s visit? B xx

Kurt smiles because it’s obvious what he needs to do next – speak to Blaine about Sam. Find out from Blaine about his relationship with Sam…. How serious they are, what their future plans are. Only when he understands Blaine and Sam’s relationship and commitment to each other will Kurt be able to figure out how he fits into Blaine’s life. To make sure that he doesn’t back down, Kurt fires off a few texts to Blaine.

Doing anything this weekend? You promised me a convo about Sam. K x

Minutes later, Kurt’s phone vibrates with an incoming text.

Unique’s taking me to Lips NYC on Saturday night to see the drag queen show. She says I can learn a lot of diva ways from them. Wanna come? B xx
Kurt chuckles at the thought of Blaine going out incognito to see drag queens perform. Unique is definitely the right mentor for Blaine for the diva-off. As much fun as it sounds, it isn’t quite the meet-up Kurt envisions, though. He wants a proper discussion with Blaine about Sam, and that’s not going to happen at Lips NYC with Unique. Kurt sends a reply to Blaine.

_Umm… No. I really want to spend time with only you, and have that promised convo about Sam. Plans for Sunday? K x_

After waiting a few minutes without getting a reply, Kurt goes to the kitchen to make a cup of herbal tea. When he takes his first sip, his phone vibrates.

_Sunday morning, I’m at yoga and then doing a run in Central Park. Join me or meet me at noon for lunch? B xx_

Kurt is impressed with how committed Blaine is to getting into shape for the diva-off. It’s not like Blaine doesn’t have an impressive body already. He decides that two hours of hot yoga is too much to bear in the August heat, but he wants to show his support for Blaine’s fitness regime.

_I’ll meet you for the run in Central Park and then lunch. Text me a time and place. K x_

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Kurt signs for the package delivered by FedEx and is intrigued to know what the thick letter-sized envelope might hold. He sits down at the dining table and carefully opens the package, taking out its contents. The first item is a one-inch-thick document entitled ‘Contract between Elle Magazine and Kurt Elizabeth Hummel’. Kurt instantly dismisses it and is astonished that Sebastian Smythe would even try to poach him from Vogue. However, he can’t help but glance at the first page and the amount of $100,000 pops out from the sea of words. Kurt’s curiosity is peaked, so he reads through that first page and almost chokes when he finds out that the $100,000 is his proposed salary, _per month_.

Sebastian Smythe and Elle Magazine now have Kurt’s attention. He quickly scans the rest of the contract, which sets out the terms for working exclusively for Elle Magazine for one year. He does a quick mental calculation, and he would earn $1,200,000 during the contract period. He whistles as he slowly exhales, thinking about what he would do with all that money. Kurt has never even considered the possibility that he could make over a million dollars while still a teenager. His dad’s mortgage would definitely be paid off. He briefly scans the rest of the document, but focuses on the benefits section. In addition to the usual things like health care, sick pay, and what-nots, there’s a driver available to him for Elle-related work and the use of a condo in Gramercy Park.

Kurt looks at the key ring that came inside the package. The metal tag reads ‘#2J, 8 Gramercy Park South’. The key ring holds a few keys and also a memory stick. Kurt dashes to his bedroom to grab his computer, and his whole body is thrumming in anticipation whilst it boots up. When the computer is ready to go, Kurt inserts the memory stick into the port. The stick contains one file, which is a slide show of the apartment 2J. The floor plan reveals that it is a one-bedroom, 750 square foot apartment, but it is cleverly laid out to maximize the space. The photos show the rooms, furnished with simple modern furniture. There are honey-colored wooden floors, except for the bathroom and kitchen, which are tiled. The windows are on the smaller side, but let in the bright sunlight, making the apartment look warm and inviting. The galley kitchen has new stainless steel appliances and marble countertops. The bathroom is basic, with white tiles, but most importantly, it has a bathtub. He’s missed having a good long soak with the ‘shower only’ at the Bushwick loft. The view from the windows is superb, seeing as the apartment overlooks Gramercy Park, which is leafy and green. It’s
close to the subway and there’s a live-in superintendent, which gives the building additional security.

When Rachel returns home from a morning of *Funny Girl* rehearsals, Kurt is on the Internet researching the Gramercy Park neighborhood. When Rachel sees what Kurt is doing on his computer, she lets out a big huff.

“I know our lease on this place is up next month, but don’t you think we should talk about what we should do? Are you really looking to move to Gramercy Park without me?”

“Oh, it’s nothing like that, Rach. Elle Magazine has made me a rather unique contract offer and it includes an apartment in Gramercy Park.”

“What?! When did this happen? Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I only received the proposed contract an hour ago. It’s not like I’m going to accept it, because I would have to work for Sebastian Smythe. However, it did get me wondering about whether we should move… now that we’re both making more money.”

“What do you mean, you’re not going to accept? Let me see it!” Rachel cries out, as she snatches the paper document from the table.

“You plan to say no to $100,000 per month? Are you crazy?”

“No, I’m not crazy. I like working for Vogue and the people there are nice.”

“You mean Blaine Anderson is nice. But *nice* isn’t going to get you on Broadway. If you work for Elle Magazine for a few years, you could afford to invest in a Broadway production that would land you the starring role.”

“Maybe that’s not what I want any more. Maybe there are other things in life more important than being rich and famous.”

“Are you the same Kurt Hummel that arrived here almost a year ago? Where are your dreams? Your ambition?”

“Dreams can change, Rach. You know that. At the moment, I’m happy being a model - but I want to do it on my own terms and in my own way.”

Rachel is quiet for a few minutes as she thinks about what to say. She moves her chair closer to Kurt and gives his shoulder a reassuring squeeze.

“You’re right. I *do* know that dreams can change. It’s just that I want to see you reach your potential in whatever you decide to do. Can I suggest something?”

Kurt meekly nods his head.

“Don’t rip up this contract just yet. You still have six weeks until the Vogue contract is finished. You should tell Sebastian Smythe that you need time to think it over and then see what Vogue is going to offer you. Talk to Wes - see if there are any other opportunities out there for you. Keep your options open until the very end. You always look for the good side of things, and you’ll want a back-up plan if things don’t work out with Vogue and Anderson.”
“Well, that does make sense, Rach. What are you planning to do when our lease runs out in six weeks?”

“I think we should move. As you said, we’re both making a lot more money now and I’d love to live closer to Broadway. The late-night commute is killing me in taxi fares alone. Why don’t we leave it for a few weeks and decide in early September? By then you should know where you are going to work and if a condo is included in the package. I’ve got a few things I have to work out myself.”

“Yeah, that sounds like a good idea. I know that come September, my work will be sorted out, one way or the other. I can’t help but think that in addition to work, I should concentrate on my nonexistent love life. I’m surrounded by gay men - yet I can’t find one that wants the type of loving relationship I long for.”

“You mean that Blaine Anderson doesn’t want you as a boyfriend. Maybe a break from Vogue is exactly what you need. He’s distracting you from other possibilities.”

Kurt sighs and doesn’t reply. She’s right – even though there are plenty of gay men in New York and certainly one of them could give him what he needs, there is only one man that he really wants.

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“Hi, Kurt. It’s Sebastian Smythe here. Thoughts?”

“Thank you for the proposed contract with Elle, Mr. Smythe. It’s quite generous and has given me a lot to think about,” Kurt replies on his phone.

“So, you accept the contract?”

“I didn’t say that exactly. I obviously have a big decision to make over the next month, and I want to consider all my options carefully before making it.”

“So what don’t you like about the contract? Any terms that you want changing?”

“I don’t feel comfortable talking to you directly about it. Mr. Montgomery at Fusion NYC is my agent, and I suggest we discuss the contract through him.”

“Montgomery!? I went to high school with Wes. He’s a good guy, but you should know that he’s chummy with Blaine Anderson. He’ll want to persuade you to stay with Vogue because that suits his friendship with Anderson.”

“I’m fully confident that Wes will represent my interests and not Vogue’s in any contract negotiations. Besides, it’s none of your business which agent I choose.” Kurt can hardly contain the hiss in his voice.

“Hey, don’t shoot the messenger. I wanted to make sure you know that Wes might have other people’s interests at heart. I’ll send the draft contract to Wes at his offices.”

“If you don’t mind, I’d like to be the one who informs Wes. Can you send the additional contract copy to me?”

“Sure thing, Kurt. I’d love to be a fly on the wall during that meeting with Wes. Anything else you want, just ask.”
After Kurt presses the ‘end call’ button on his phone, he thinks about how Wes will handle the contract negotiations with this new opportunity on the table. Wes has already proven to him that he represents Kurt’s own interests and not Blaine’s. However, things are about to become a whole lot more complicated.

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Later that week, Wes greets Kurt in his office. “I’m glad you arranged this meeting, Kurt. I’ve received the new contract from Vogue two days ago, and I think you will like the terms.”

“Oh, really? Do tell.”

“I should first tell you that Vogue has only a handful of models under an exclusive contract. It only happens when they see a long-term potential to use the model in a lot of upcoming issues. Usually, they hire models to do a specific photo shoot. Having said that, Blaine wants to keep you under the Vogue umbrella for an additional year. To that end, Vogue is prepared to pay you $50,000 per month.”

“That seems quite generous. Before we discuss things further, I want to make sure that what we talk about is in total confidentiality – that you’ll advise me on what is best for me. There are certain things that I don’t want Vogue to know about… just yet.”

“Of course, Kurt. Nothing you say to me will get back to Vogue, or for that matter, Blaine. I wouldn’t survive very long in this business if I didn’t have my clients’ interests at heart. Now you have me intrigued. What’s up?”

“I received something very interesting in the mail earlier this week. Elle Magazine has offered me a one-year exclusive modeling contract as well, but at double the pay.”

Kurt hands the draft contract over to Wes and gives him some time to review the terms.

“Wow, Kurt. This is a surprise. It’s totally unheard of for a model new to the scene to command this type of income from a magazine. Are you considering accepting it?”

“I’m not sure, Wes. What are my other options?”

“As I said before, most models don’t have this sort of exclusive contract. They’re on our books and we hire them out for specific assignments. The daily rates are quite high, but you’re only paid for the days you work. The contracts on offer by Vogue and Elle provide you with a steady, guaranteed income. My advice to you is to go under contract for another year and establish your reputation, while at the same time, saving some of your earnings. In a year’s time, it might be more lucrative if you go your own way and pick and choose the projects you wish to be involved in.”

“I’m not sure whether I should work for Vogue or Elle. Any thoughts on the matter?”

“I should tell you that Sebastian Smythe, who heads up Elle, went to high school with Blaine and myself. We’ve known each other for about fifteen years. There’s no love lost between Sebastian and Blaine. They’ve been rivals for as long as I can remember. I suspect that this is what motivating Elle Magazine to offer you a contract.”

“Does it matter why Elle Magazine is offering me the contract?”
“No, from a business point of view, it doesn’t matter at all. However, if you do decide to go to Elle Magazine, it could destroy your friendship with Blaine.”

“Why can’t Vogue offer me a contract under the same terms?”

“You don’t understand how hard it was for Blaine to get the Board to agree to the terms of this contract in the first place. Blaine had really put himself on the line with his vision of you in Vogue issues over the next twelve months. I’ll definitely try to improve Vogue’s contract terms, but I suspect that they won’t be able to match those in the Elle contract.”

“So the choice is to make loads of money and make a clean break from Blaine… Or make less money, although certainly generous, and keep my friendship with Blaine.”

“Yes, I guess it does boil down to that. It’s only for you to decide. By when does Elle Magazine want an answer?”

“Smythe called me the day it was delivered and wants it wrapped up as soon as possible. I told him that I don’t want to be rushed into a decision and that he had to deal with you. So basically, I don’t know. There is one term in the contract that I have a problem with.”

“What’s that?” Wes asks.

“The contract allows Elle Magazine to cancel the agreement with two weeks’ notice, whereas I have no option but to honor it for its one-year duration. Given what you just told me, what’s to stop Smythe from canceling the contract as soon as it starts, leaving me with no job? He would have made his point to Blaine and I’d be left with nothing.”

“You’re right. In that circumstance, it would be very difficult to get your modeling career off the ground again. Opportunities like this don’t come around every day. I’ll start talks with Elle Magazine regarding this condition. I will insist that the terms include the full $1,200,000 payment to you, regardless of whether they cancel the contract or not. Even though the Hearst Empire gives Sebastian a free rein with Elle - as long as it brings in profits - they would be very upset with the precedent set on paying a huge sum without requiring you to work. This would more or less guarantee that the cancelation clause would not be evoked.”

“Will Elle agree to that?”

“I know Sebastian Smythe very well, and if this is the only term that stops you from moving from Vogue to Elle, he’ll agree. He’s very motivated in taking something away from Blaine. Elle hasn’t been doing very well since Blaine headed up Vogue.”

Wes pauses for a few minutes before adding, “Can I also suggest that you have a cancelation clause yourself? You should be able to cancel the contract with two weeks’ notice. I’ll give the proposed contract the attention it deserves and get back to you with other items. I’ll let Elle know that you do not plan to make a decision until the end of September.”

Kurt sighs deeply and flops his head against the back of the sofa.

“I’m not sure how I’m going to decide who to work for. I know what I want to do - work for Vogue for another year. I enjoy it there and I’ve made lots of new friends. However, I’m not sure if it’s best for me emotionally. I need to work out a few things in my mind.”
“I’m sure you don’t want to hear this, but can I suggest that you discuss it with Blaine? He’s really a
good guy and will appreciate that you told him yourself. Of course he won’t like that Elle has offered
you a contract and will do everything he can to persuade you to stay at Vogue. However, you may
even find that some of those things you’re thinking about will work out in the end.”

“I’m sure you’re right. I really need to have another type of conversation with Blaine before I tell him
about the Elle contract, though. You won’t mention things to Blaine?”

“No, of course not. Let me know if there’s anything I can do to help you make your decision.”

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On Sunday, Kurt meets Blaine at the entrance to his building. After giving Amy his sports bag,
which contains a clean set of clothes, they are ready for their run. As they walk to the Central Park
entrance, Kurt tries very hard not to stare at Blaine, who is wearing a black sleeveless tank top and
tiny green shorts. In Kurt’s mind, he looks absolutely delicious.

“I’m bushed after the two-hour hot yoga class this morning. Do you mind if we take it easy and just
do the Reservoir circuit? I was a fool suggesting a run mid-day in August. How could I forget how
hot it would be?”

“I don’t mind at all, Blaine. Why don’t we do a gentle jog instead and sprint for the last couple
hundred meters.”

When they get to the Central Park running track, they spend some time stretching. Kurt can’t help
but notice Blaine’s powerful thighs as he lunges this way and that. Kurt decides that two can play
that game and smirks to himself when he catches Blaine staring as he bends to touch his toes and
stretch his hamstrings. They start at a gentle pace and in spite of the heat, they enjoy the circuit
around the reservoir. The running track was renovated a year or so ago and the views of the water,
with the city skyscrapers in the background, are unbeatable. As they get towards the end of the 1½
mile circuit, Kurt gently brushes his shoulder against Blaine’s.

“Ready to step it up a notch, old man?”

Blaine laughs as he picks up his pace, “You’re on!”

Kurt is shocked to see Blaine race ahead of him, comfortably finishing first at the end of the circuit.
Kurt feels winded and drops down to the grass to catch his breath. Blaine slowly walks over to him
and places his hands on his hips while he also slows down his breathing.

“Serves you right for calling me an old man! You’re just not used to the heat – not when you are on
the walking machine in an exclusive air-conditioned gym. I’m out in the heat five days a week
running in Central Park. Now come on, I’ll buy us some water and we can go back to my place for a
shower.”

When they return to the penthouse, Blaine ushers Kurt to the guest bedroom to shower and changes
into comfortable clothes. Kurt smiles when he sees the blow-dryer and all sorts of hair products
available in the bathroom. There’s even factor 50 suntan lotion set out on the counter for Kurt to put
on. Blaine thinks of everything. After thirty minutes, Kurt leaves the guest bedroom, feeling
refreshed and ready for the afternoon with Blaine.
“So what are our plans for lunch?” Kurt asks when he sees Blaine in the kitchen. “I’m starving.”

“I thought we could have lunch in the park. Amy has made us a picnic, and we could eat it there and just chill for the rest of the day.”

“Sounds like a really good plan. Let me help carry things.” Kurt grabs the blanket and a canvass bag off the counter, leaving Blaine to carry the cooler.

Kurt lets Blaine lead them into the park, and after a fifteen-minute walk, they stop underneath an elm tree. The spot is reasonably private and the Belvedere Castle can be seen close by.

“You picked a perfect spot, with plenty of shade, Blaine. You must know how much my pasty skin is worth to certain companies.”

“I think of it more as porcelain, creamy skin. It’s really perfect... uhm... not just for work... I mean...”

Kurt thinks that Blaine’s rambling is simply adorable. He gives Blaine a large smile to silence him. He arranges the blanket on the grass as Blaine opens the canvas bag and takes out a platter. Soon, Blaine is taking small plastic containers from the cooler, opening the lids and systematically placing them on the tray. There are black olives, chunks of marinated feta cheese, cherry tomatoes, hummus, baba ghanoush made of eggplant, tabbouleh, little parcels wrapped in grape leaves, and other tasty morsels that Kurt can’t identify, but that he thinks look tasty. Blaine then pulls out a small basket and fills it with wedges of pita bread. Kurt can’t help but laugh when he sees the wonderful spread in front of him.

“What’s so funny, Kurt? Don’t you like Middle Eastern and Greek food? It’s all very healthy. I can always find you a hotdog or something else if you want?”

“No, it’s not that at all. The picnic looks wonderful and I’m so impressed that you went to all this effort.”

“Well, you can thank Amy. The lunch was all her idea,” Blaine mutters.

“I laughed because I was thinking that I wish high school Kurt could have had known about this day. I wouldn’t even be able to pronounce the names of half this food when I was in high school. The image of having a sophisticated picnic with a gorgeous guy on a glorious sunny summer’s day in Central Park would have helped me through the rougher times in Lima.”

Blaine blushes as he awkwardly hands Kurt a lemon-flavored mineral water. “Y-you think I’m gorgeous?”

Kurt stomach falls when he realizes that he said that bit out loud. He looks Blaine straight in the eye and says, “You know I do, and so does every gay man in New York. I’m just the lucky one who knows that your beauty goes beneath the surface.”

Kurt can see Blaine’s eyes soften and sparkle as they go slightly watery. He needs to get things back to the friend-zone and he needs to do it fast. “Now, let’s tuck in. I’m dying to find out what’s inside those grape leaves.”

Blaine starts talking about his past few weeks and Kurt laughs at a funny story about Tina and the printer. Apparently, Tina has a crush on the factory foreman and makes it a virtue of going to the
printer’s late in the afternoon on Fridays to inspect the quality of the magazines coming off the press. Kurt doesn’t say it out loud, but he secretly sympathizes with Tina. He knows what it’s like to crush on someone - waiting for some sort of sign that the feelings are reciprocated.

Soon the lunch mezze platter is demolished and they both feel happy and full. Blaine puts away the empty containers and takes out mini-speakers for his phone. Soon the piano notes of Debussy’s Clair de Lune gently drift through the air.

“Hey, that’s the music that was playing when I gave you a foot massage. Remember… After we went to the Brooklyn Flea Market.”

“Of course I remember. That was one memorable foot massage. Since that day, I’ve found that I really enjoy this piano piece, and I listen to it when I want to relax.”

Blaine lays down on top of the blanket and pulls Kurt down to his side. “I know you want to talk about Sam, but just for now, can we listen to the music?”

Kurt gulps slowly and nods his head. Blaine takes his hand, enveloping it with his, and closes his eyes. The moment feels so intimate – even though their bodies are not touching – but Kurt suspects that the conversation about Sam will not go how he wishes it would. Kurt decides in that moment that he’s going to treasure this feeling of being close to Blaine. Kurt hears Blaine’s breath even out as he starts to nap, and he can’t help but stare at Blaine’s long eyelashes spreading across his upper cheeks. Soon Kurt closes his eyes as well and dreams about the man beside him.

Chapter End Notes

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. Here is the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics.

I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr.

Next up: Blaine and Kurt discuss Sam
August

Kurt blinks slowly as a ray of sunlight hits his eyes. He can feel the soft warm blanket underneath him and a light gentle breeze. His hand feels warm, and he slowly realizes that Blaine is still clutching it close to his chest. When he opens his eyes, he sees two golden honey-colored orbs staring at him.

“Uhh… What time is it?”

“It’s 4pm. You’ve been asleep for an hour or so. Sweet dreams?”

The question startles Kurt. Has he dreamt about kissing Blaine? And if so, was it that obvious?

“I guess so. Why do you ask?”

“It’s just that you had such a sweet smile on your face.”

“Well, it’s hard to imagine a more perfect summer afternoon than having a picnic lunch and being so relaxed with somebody that I fall asleep in Central Park. Have you been awake long?”

“Nope, maybe five or ten minutes.”

Kurt sits up and rubs the sleep from his eyes. “Give me five minutes. I need to find a toilet.”

Kurt quickly finds a public restroom and does the necessaries. He dreads going back - knowing that they’ll have the discussion about Sam. Part of him wishes to skip the whole thing and let things continue as they are. Though, deep down inside, he knows that can’t happen. He needs to figure out how he fits into Blaine’s life and how Blaine fits into his. He needs to make big decisions about his career, his living arrangements, and his personal life. As Kurt dries his hands, he takes a deep breath, before returning to the elm tree. Kurt smiles when he notices that Blaine has moved the blanket so that it’s now fully in the shade again.

“Hey, Kurt. I’ve been meaning to ask you. Are you planning to come to the diva-off at Fashion Night Out?”

“You know I am. I wouldn’t miss it for the world. I can’t believe you felt the need to ask.”

“Umm… I was wondering if maybe you’d go with me? You’d be alone during the actual diva-off, but would you go to the after-parties with me?”

“Sure, I’d love to do that. But what about Sam? Won’t you want to be with Sam after the diva-off?”
“Sam won’t be at the diva-off or any part of Fashion Night Out. He has some… umm… personal business to attend to.”

“I just don’t get it, Blaine. He’s so supportive of you training for the catwalk, yet he ditches you on the night of! What personal business can possibly be more important than you?”

“Trust me, Kurt. Sam can’t be in New York that weekend. We’ve discussed it and I’m perfectly okay with Sam not being there.”

Kurt huffs and looks away, trying to control his anger and compose his thoughts. This is as good a time as any to discuss Sam.

“I don’t get any part of your relationship with Sam. What’s the deal?”

“I met Sam during my first year at college and we just clicked. We both liked the same sort of music and were Star Wars nerds. When I was finding my own feet with the ‘Bowties and Suspenders’ blog, Sam was encouraging me every step of the way. He even moved to New York to help me with Vogue’s Calvin Klein underwear article and ad campaign. So Sam is very special to me and he’ll always be an important part of my life.”

“Okay, I get that you two have a history together. But what about now? It seems that Sam really only features in your life when you are going to public events.”

“That’s not entirely fair. Sam and I’ve decided not to be seen in public outside high-profile events. Fame isn’t what it’s cracked up to be. There’s a lot of pressure being in the lime-light. There are too many people wanting a piece of me and it can get damn right creepy. You must know what I mean.”

“I do understand that, but I’d like to think that I would be proud of my partner and our relationship would be exactly what we want it to be. What I don’t understand is why Sam is gone so much. Where does he go on the weekends?”

Blaine looks nervous and he shifts his weight to another position. “Sam has other people in his life besides me. Sam moved around a lot growing up and so he has friends everywhere.”

Kurt can’t believe what he’s hearing. He’s just received confirmation that Sam has other men in his life. However, he wants to be sure that he didn’t get any wires crossed.

“So Sam has relationships with people other than you? Are you happy about that?”

“Yeah, he does. It would be pretty strange if we only had each other as friends. Look, Kurt, I’m not very comfortable talking about what Sam gets up to. There’s stuff that I can’t tell you… at least not yet. However, I can say that everything will become clear after the diva-off.”

Kurt can’t help but push the matter a little bit further. “So what about me? How do I fit into your life?”

Blaine covers his right hand and gently rubs across the top. It’s surprisingly comforting, given the topic of discussion.

“Kurt, you are so special to me. I’ve never met anybody quite like you. You’re like a breath of fresh air, and you’ve shown me that there can be a life outside of work and fame. In such a short time,
you’ve become one of my closest friends. I will take you any way you’ll have me.”

Kurt thinks about what Blaine has just said. He’s happy that Blaine values their friendship, but he’s not sure Blaine appreciates that Kurt wants to have him as a boyfriend… an exclusive one. However, it doesn’t seem like the right time to discuss it - he needs time to digest what Blaine has said and figure out what he is going to do.

“You’re special to me too, Blaine. Thanks for telling me about Sam. I might not like everything you told me, but I do appreciate your honesty.”

As they pack up their belongings, Kurt notices that Blaine has paled and looks terribly sad. Kurt can’t figure out whether it was because of something he had said or whether Blaine is lost in thoughts about Sam.

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Later that night, Kurt props his pillows up against the headboard of his bed and sets his tablet on his lap. He doesn’t feel comfortable with what he’s about to do, but thinks it’s necessary in order to figure out Blaine. He opens a browser window and types ‘open gay relationships’ into the Google search bar. Kurt is shocked that there are 72 million results. An item entitled ‘Nearly half of gay men have had an open relationship’ catches his eye. The article summarizes research that found that gay men tend to have a more liberal view of sex and that 30% don’t believe they can be monogamous.

Kurt didn’t realize that so many gay men thought like this. He could envision Sam enjoying the company of other men. His easy-going ways and joking around seem to suggest that he would be open to others. However, he can’t picture Blaine with more than one important man in his life. It doesn’t seem to suit Blaine’s nature. During his visit to New York last month, his father commented that Blaine seemed very loyal to the people he cared about. And that trait doesn’t match up with an open relationship. So maybe it’s Sam who’s fooling around and Blaine has resigned himself to it.

Besides, not once has Blaine been inappropriate with Kurt. Blaine has never come on to him or suggested anything besides friendship. Sure, Blaine has done loads of things that have made him feel special, like the texts, the flowers, and the dates. At times Kurt thinks that Blaine might like him more than a friend, but then again, maybe he’s making things up in his head. It’s not like it’s the first time that he’s interpreted friendly gestures in the wrong way. He cringes when he thinks of his crush on Finn back in high school.

Kurt frowns when he looks at the three men enjoying a bubble bath together on the Internet site. Open relationships are one thing, but threesomes are a big no-no for him. He can’t imagine in any lifetime that he would want to share physical intimacy with more than one man at the same time. If he did get Blaine, he would want him all to himself. Threesomes don’t fit into Kurt’s strong belief that he matters in a relationship. He reads a half-dozen more articles about open relationships and then throws his tablet aside in disgust.

If it wasn’t for Blaine, he wouldn’t even be looking at these sites. The whole exercise has only confirmed that he’s a one-man type of guy. As much as he loves Blaine, he just can’t see himself having an open relationship. However, Kurt isn’t sure exactly what Blaine wants from him. What did Blaine exactly mean when he said that he wanted Kurt in his life in any way he could have him? Did he mean that he wanted more? Did ‘any way’ mean that he would break things off with Sam in order to be with Kurt?

And what did Blaine exactly mean by everything becoming clear after the diva-off? What’s going to
happen that Kurt isn’t aware of? In spite of Blaine’s honesty, Kurt feels that Blaine is holding something back. Information that Kurt needs to be able to figure things out.

Kurt then considers how work fits into this big mess. It’s pretty hard not to be tempted by Elle’s contract proposal. However, it does mean that he could lose Blaine’s friendship and have to spend time with that creepy Sebastian Smythe. However, if he renews the contract with Vogue, it’s potentially one more year where he’s in this holding pattern with his love life. Would he be able to cope with another full year of unrequited love?

Kurt had thought that everything would be sorted once he had the conversation with Blaine about Sam. Kurt grimaces when he thinks what a joke that was. The conversation has left Kurt even more confused than before.

*****

“… I think Vogue is offering you a one-of-a-kind modeling contract for the next year. And as you can see from my presentation, we’ve given a lot of thought as to how we will showcase you in upcoming issues. We, here at Vogue, want to keep you in our family.”

Blaine takes a look at the people around the conference table at Vogue’s executive level. There’s Isabelle, Alicia from HR, and Jenni from Legal on the Vogue team. On the other side of the table is Kurt, with Wes and Hayley, his PR agent. Isabelle gives Blaine a friendly smile, indicating that his presentation at the contract negotiations went well. Kurt is slowly nodding his head, but for some reason, he can’t read Wes’ facial expression.

“Does anybody have any questions or concerns?” Blaine asks. The silence is stifling, and he wants the formal meeting to be over.

Kurt remarks politely, “I think I understand everything Vogue is offering, Blaine. Thanks for taking the time to go over the ideas for future photo shoots.”

“Kurt needs some time to think over what you’re proposing. There are also other options out there for him to consider,” Wes adds.

Blaine slowly pours more water into his glass and takes a few sips in order to have some time to collect himself. He feels a bit blind-sided by the ‘other options’ available to Kurt. Frankly, he’s a little upset that neither Kurt nor Wes mentioned them earlier. He had thought that Wes’ attempts at sweetening the offer was just a means of getting the best deal for his client. He had no idea that Vogue was competing with ‘other options’. Blaine looks at Kurt, who is giving him an apologetic look.

“I’ve spoken with Wes over the past few weeks, and this contract proposal is the best that Vogue can offer you. I would only expect that you have other options. I’m not sure what those are, but I can tell you that no-one will take care of you and your career quite like Vogue. You have my word on that.”

Before Kurt can say anything, Wes takes the lead. “Your word does mean something, Blaine, and the Vogue contract is very attractive. However, there are a few possibilities in the pipelines and I’ve already advised Kurt to think about them carefully. I’ll let you know Kurt’s decision in the second half of September.”

*****
“Blaine, what’s wrong? You don’t look very good,” Tina asks when he enters the reception area.

“I’ve totally messed up. I’ve messed up any chance I have with Kurt and I’ve messed up any chance of Kurt staying with Vogue. I’m one big fuck-up.”

Tina pulls Blaine into his office and closes the door. She gives him a long hug, and Blaine sniffs into her shoulder.

“It can’t be that bad, Blainey Days. Why don’t you tell me about it?”

“Last Sunday, Kurt and I spent the afternoon in Central Park. He wanted to know what exactly my relationship with Sam is. Only, I promised Sam I wouldn’t say anything until after the diva-off. So I told him a little bit, but kept the important information out. Now he’s disgusted with me and wants nothing more to do with me.”

“You don’t know that for sure.”

“Yeah, I kinda do. The contract renewal meeting that I thought would end in a celebration? Well, you can cancel the luncheon reservation. It went horribly wrong. Kurt didn’t sign.”

“You can’t mean that Kurt is not going to stay at Vogue, surely?”

“That’s exactly what I mean. He’s considering – and I quote - ‘other modeling options at the moment and will get back to us in late September. I feel like it’s because he doesn’t want me in his life anymore.”

Tina pulls Blaine away from her and gives his shoulder a hard slap.

“Yes, you are a total fuck-up for not telling Kurt how you feel about him. But this is fixable, Blaine! You’re going to sit down right now and do as I say!”

Blaine gulps when he sees the fierce look on Tina’s face - the look that she gets when she’s fired up about something. Blaine slowly walks over to the couch and sits, lowering his head.

“Oh no, you don’t get to look like a little boy being told off by his mother. Look at me, Blaine!”

Blaine looks up and notices that Tina’s expression is still fierce, but has softened a little.

“I’ve watched you pine after Kurt for months. It’s been cute to see your heart-eyes when you’re smiling at a text, or to see you walking like you’re floating on air after a Sunday spent with Kurt. And your whole face lights up when Kurt visits you in the office. And trust me, Kurt buzzes whenever you’re around as well.”

“You think Kurt likes me back? I personally think that Kurt is into Sam.”

“UGH! What are you? A teenager in middle school? I love you, Blaine, but you’re so freaking oblivious! Kurt gets plenty of offers from other gay men, but who does he spend time with? YOU! And who does Kurt want his father to meet when he comes to New York for a visit? YOU! Every time I see Kurt, who does he pump me for information about? YOU! When you’re out of town, Kurt calls me to confirm when you’re returning. Kurt thinks that you’re into Sam because you’ve never told him about your relationship.”
Blaine thinks about what Tina has said. Maybe she’s right, but he doesn’t want to get his hopes up. Tina gives him a pointed look and continues.

“It’s been downright painful to watch you dance around Kurt and do nothing about it. You don’t seem to be able to tell Kurt about your feelings and take the relationship to the next level. So do you still want him?”

“I want him so desperately. I really feel that he’s it for me – that one love in my lifetime. But I’ve made this a big mess and I don’t know how to fix it.”

“So this is what you’re going to do. First, I’m going to call Sam after we’re finished talking and get him here pronto. You’re going to tell Sam that as much as you value your friendship with him, you need to tell Kurt the truth now. Not after the diva-off, but NOW. Got it?”

“Got it loud and clear. You’re right. This whole secrecy about my relationship with Sam has gotten way out of hand. I can’t sleep at night wondering what Kurt must think and how I’m going to keep my promise to Sam.”

“You’re not asking Sam for his permission. You’re telling him what you need to do. Understand? And for god’s sake, get Sam to move out. It’s not helping matters that he lives in your penthouse.”

“Sam will be moving out next month. I just want to hide until the diva-off is over.”

“Oh no, there won’t be any hiding, mister. The next thing is to meet up with Kurt and tell him exactly how you and Sam have been covering for each other, that Sam is straight and that he’s moving out. You’re then going to tell Kurt how you feel about him. Tell him that you are in love with him and you want him as your boyfriend. I’m sure you can figure out that speech for yourself.”

Blaine nods his head, thinking about his daydreams of telling Kurt his true feelings. Blaine furrows his brow and asks, “But won’t Kurt find the timing suspicious? Won’t Kurt think I’m saying these things because I want him to stay at Vogue?”

“It depends on how you say it. Tell him that you’re laying out all your feelings now so that he knows that it makes no difference to you whether he stays at Vogue or not. Tell him it’s not an all-or-nothing proposition.”

“So where should I take Kurt? Any suggestions? A romantic and expensive restaurant maybe?”

Tina slowly shakes her head. “As wonderful as that sounds, leave special restaurants for anniversaries. I think Kurt would appreciate doing something that’s special to the two of you. What do you like doing together?”

“We like going out and having fun. Hanging out with each other and enjoying each other’s company. We’ve got this thing about crossing items off our bucket lists.”

“So there’s your answer, Blaine. Go through your bucket list and find something that you know Kurt will enjoy doing. Have some fun together and then you can talk about things.”

“But what if Kurt doesn’t want to see me? He probably wants some distance between us before he makes his decision.”

“Trust me, Blaine. Kurt will want to see you. I think he wants this situation fixed just as much as you...
do. And if he refuses to see you, we’ll just have to switch to Plan B.”

“Plan B?” Blaine asks.

“Yeah, the plan where I physically force Kurt into the same room as you and don’t leave until you start making out.”

Blaine giggles at the idea, knowing deep down inside that Tina would actually go through with Plan B. Tina’s given him hope that he might not be too late after all.

*****

“What’s up, dude? Are you going to fire me or something?” Sam asks as he walks into Blaine’s office.

“No, of course not. Why would you think that?”

“Because Tina came to my gym and physically dragged me into your office. Told me that you urgently had to talk to me at the office and that it couldn’t wait until later tonight at home.”

“Sorry about that. You know what Tina is like when she gets something in her head. I do want to talk to you, but it could have waited until after the gym.”

“Well, warn me next time you’re gonna sic Tina on me. She’s scary! So what the hell is going on?”

Blaine goes and closes the door to his office before joining Sam on the couch.

“I can’t go on without telling Kurt the truth. The truth about us and how I feel about him. Kurt and I had a discussion about you on Sunday, and I feel miserable that I haven’t told him everything about us. I can’t sleep at night thinking about the promise I made to you to keep things quiet and the things I should tell Kurt.”

“I get it, man. I thought we agreed that you’d tell him everything at the diva-off and that you were happy with that decision.”

“Well, since then, things have happened. Kurt is now considering his ‘other options’ instead of renewing his Vogue contract. It’s like he doesn’t want anything to do with me anymore. I feel like he’s slipping away through my fingers, and I can’t lose him. I’m in love with him, Sam.”

Blaine looks down as he tries to keep his tears from rolling down his cheeks. Sam scooches in closer and pulls Blaine against his chest.

“You shoulda told me sooner that this was cutting you up so much. I don’t want you to be unhappy. I want you and Kurt together and doing those things that Krian does – without the whips, of course. Go tell Kurt about our arrangement and the wedding and stuff. But can I ask one small favor?”

“What?”

“Don’t mention Mercedes’ name. I mean, if it comes down to that and he really needs to know my girlfriend’s name, then let me know, and I’ll have a word with Kurt.”

“I can agree to that. So you don’t mind me telling Kurt that we’re not really a couple and that you’re
getting married?”

“I don’t mind at all. I’m on your team. Well, not really on your team, because I’m into girls…. But you know what I mean.”

“Yeah. Thanks, Sam. That’s such a weight off my shoulders, you have no idea. Now, since you’re here, how about a session at the gym? I’m still having problems with that turn thingy that I’m supposed to do at the end of the catwalk.”

*****

Before returning from the gym to his office, Blaine rushes outside and buys a bouquet of flowers at the corner bodega. Blaine feels a whole lot better after talking with Sam. He now has a plan, and he might not have worked out every detail, and it might not work, but at least he’s taking steps in the right direction.

When Blaine returns to his office, he offers the flowers to Tina.

“Thanks, Tay Tay. I needed someone to give me that wake-up call. Sam is happy with me talking to Kurt. Can you hold all my calls for a while because I’m going to figure out that date and ask Kurt out?”

“Go get him, tiger!” Tina replies.

Blaine sits at his desk and scrolls through his bucket list on his phone. He needs to find something that is fun enough for Kurt to want to join him, but someplace where they will get a chance to talk. Blaine smiles when he sees ‘bike riding at Governors Island’ on his list. A quick look at its website reveals that the Governors Island’s annual art fair will happen over Labor Day weekend. That’s just ten days away, and the weekend before Fashion Night Out. He mentally prepares himself, whispering the word ‘courage’, and sends Kurt a text.

*Are you around Labor Day weekend? I have something perfect on my bucket list to do with you. B x*

Blaine knows he should get back to work, but he can’t focus on anything except Kurt’s response, so he calls Tina in to wait with him. Blaine squeezes her hand as his phone vibrates with an incoming text.

*Do you think that’s wise, B? I mean, shouldn’t we wait until after the Vogue contract is resolved? - K*

Blaine puts down his phone, bitterly disappointed. “I just knew it. He doesn’t want to hang out with me anymore. He didn’t even give me the usual kiss at the end.”

Tina gently rubs her hand over Blaine’s shoulder. “Stop it, Blaine. Kurt didn’t say ‘no’. He’s trying to figure out whether you want to meet up about work stuff. Tell him that this is nothing related to work. That you want to spend time with him as a friend. That you have something important to discuss with him.”

Blaine drafts a reply and only presses ‘send’ when Tina nods her head in approval.

*I think we can meet up as friends, don’t you? I like hanging out with you and I found a cool place to go with an Art Fair that Sunday. I promise not to talk about work. Besides, there’s something*
It doesn’t take long before Blaine’s phone vibrates again.

*Can I think about it, B? I’m curious what you need to tell me. Any hints? K xx*

“He sent me a kiss this time!”

“I told you he was interested in you, Blaine. Now give him a hint but don’t give your game away. You really want to tell him face to face.”

After drafting a text and changing the wording here and there, Tina and Blaine send a reply they’re happy with.

*Take all the time you need, K. It’s time I tell you honestly about my feelings about things... About you. B xx*

Chapter End Notes

I don’t know about you, but I love Tina in this chapter :)

Last week, I posted a new chapter on Saturday but A03 did not send out notifications until the following day, 30-hours later. If Saturday has passed and you’re wanting to read the next chapter, it's most likely there. Posting consistently is very important to me.

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, [Lilyvandersteen](#). [Here](#) is the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at [CC-Graphics](#).

I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at [Tumblr](#).

Next up: Kurt decides whether or not to meet up with Blaine.
The Bike Riding Date

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Timing is everything – Unknown

September

The sun has disappeared beyond the horizon of the ocean. In its place is the full moon, casting a diffused light on them, but not so bright as to dull the sky full of stars, glittering from above. The ocean’s waves have calmed to gentle ripples as hands explore each other north of the equator. Blaine takes the fleshy part of Kurt’s ear lobe between his teeth and gently nips it, causing a heady sensation to course through Kurt’s body. Kurt has never felt more wanting or needy in his entire life. Blaine’s hands wrap around Kurt and he whispers into his ear, “I’m never going to let you go.”

At that very moment, Blaine is yanked from Kurt’s arms by a force more powerful than him. The waves begin to swell as the tide goes out, and Kurt can feel himself being pulled away from the shore… and from Blaine. He looks for Blaine to tug him back into his arms, but he can only see two silhouetted men embracing. Kurt calls out to them, but they don’t seem to see him, caught up as they are in each other. They share a deep passionate kiss, and then, arm in arm, they float away.

The feeling that Kurt had only moments ago – in Blaine’s arms, with Blaine’s lips on him– is already fading in his memory. There’s a small voice in his head that whispers, “Do what’s right.”

Kurt opens his eyes and feels incredibly sad, as if he’s lost someone who really wasn’t his in the first place. The dream is now a nightly occurrence, and the ending always remains the same – about doing what’s right. Kurt doesn’t know what that means. Doing what’s right for himself? Blaine? Sam?

One thing he knows for sure is that he’s not going to figure things out on his own. And no matter how stupid it might be to meet up with Blaine, he does want to know how Blaine feels about him. After all, Wes did advise that he should talk things over with Blaine and that it might work out in the end. Before he changes his mind, Kurt fires out a text.

Let’s meet on the Sunday over Labor Day weekend. Send me the deets. K x

*****

Days after Kurt texts Blaine, he feels a new kind of inner calm. Kurt now knows that he and Blaine are going to have the talk that they really need to have. It might not turn out the way he would like it, but at least he’ll know where he stands. Then he can decide what he wants for himself in his life.

He notices a thick envelope on the kitchen counter and rolls his eyes when he sees it’s from Elle Magazine. According to Wes, Smythe has been calling him every day, anxious for a decision. Wes has told him to stop bothering them for a few weeks, but obviously Sebastian hasn’t got the hint. He rips open the envelope and dumps the contents on the counter. There are six black credit cards for top designer stores like Gucci, Armani, Burberry, and Hermes. The credit cards come with a handwritten note, Unlimited spending at your favorite stores, all for the taking, if you join Elle. –
Sebastian.

Visions of the new Hermes scarf collection flash through his head, but he quickly snaps himself out of it. He’s not pleased with the store credit cards. It feels wrong. It feels like Smythe is trying to buy him, which of course he is.

Kurt has a nagging feeling at the back of his mind that maybe he should tell Blaine about the Elle contract. In some respects, it doesn’t really matter which company has offered him a contract. But Wes had told him that there’s history between Blaine and Sebastian, and he doesn’t want to get caught up in all that. If he comes clean to Blaine ahead of time, maybe he could work for Elle and keep Blaine in his life. Maybe he should play it by ear and hear what Blaine has to say about his feelings first. But that doesn’t sound like much of a plan.

He’s not sure what to do, so he picks up the phone to call the one person who always has his best interests at heart.

“Hey, son. I wasn’t expecting a call from you today. What’s up?”

“I’m not sure what to do, Dad.” Kurt tells his father about the Vogue and Elle contracts that are on offer. He can hear his father’s low whistle as he takes in the details.

“That’s a lot of cash, Kurt. You’ve got that agent of yours, who I’m sure is advising you which offer is best for the modeling stuff. I take it there’s more to it than just the salary?”

Kurt is always amazed how his father can get to the heart of the matter. “Yeah. No matter how many experts I have advising me on which contract to take, they don’t really understand the other factors involved.”

“And is one of these factors Blaine?”

“Elle magazine is headed up by Sebastian Smythe. Blaine and Sebastian have known each other for a long time – they even went to high school together with Wes.”

“Wow, it’s a small world, even in New York City.”

“According to Wes, Sebastian and Blaine have been arch rivals since they met and that has only gotten worse with time. My offer from Elle is like Sebastian’s personal vendetta against Blaine. I’m afraid that if I sign on with Elle, I’ll lose all contact with Blaine.”

“What’s this Sebastian like?”

“In some ways, he’s like Blaine – smart, ambitious and good at his job. But that’s where the similarities stop. Blaine is sweet and caring; Sebastian is shrewd and devious. Blaine looks after people; Sebastian looks after number one. Blaine keeps his personal life private; Sebastian’s wild lifestyle is all over the tabloids.”

“Is he gay?”

“Yeah, Sebastian is gay.”

“Does Blaine’s history with Sebastian include, you know…”
“I don’t know. Blaine has never mentioned Sebastian before, and Wes just explained that they’re rivals.”

“So what does Blaine say about all this?”

“I haven’t told Blaine yet. He knows that I have another work offer, but he doesn’t know with whom. The last time we really spoke, I made him tell me about Sam. That conversation left me even more confused than before. I’ve agreed to meet him next Sunday so he can – and I quote – ‘tell me honestly about his feelings about things and me’. I’m not sure what that means at all.”

“I think you need to hear Blaine out – really listen to what he says. And if he’s going to be honest with you, maybe you should be honest with him.”

“About the Elle contract?”

“About what’s important to you.”

“You’re not going to tell me what to do, are you, Dad?” Kurt huffs.

“Nope. You’re a man now, and you have to do what you think is right.”

*****

“You’re what? You must be mad, Rach!”

“Look, Kurt, I’ve thought about it and I can’t do Funny Girl forever. It’s a lot of pressure to perform eight times a week, not to mention that it gets boring. Fox has offered to shoot a pilot for my very own TV show, and I would be crazy not to jump at the chance.”

“If you quit Funny Girl now, you won’t be able to work on Broadway ever again. Are you sure that’s what you want?”

“We’ve talked about exploring different options since we graduated McKinley, and this one has come up for me. My agent has already told me that I don’t have the face for a TV or film career. This is my chance to prove them all wrong. Don’t tell me you wouldn’t jump at the chance to have your own TV show.”

“Maybe I would,” Kurt grudgingly agrees. He thinks that it would give him an easy out of the work dilemma he’s facing. “So when do you leave for California?”

“The filming starts in October, but I want to move as soon as I’ve packed my things - so I’ll be moving out next week. The rent is paid through September, and you can keep or sell all the stuff here. You’ll be okay finding an apartment on your own. I know of a cute place in Gramercy Park that’s available to you for free.”

“Nothing’s for free, Rach. There’s always a catch. I still have to decide where I’m going to work come the end of September. I’m going to be making a lot of money, no matter which magazine I choose to work for, so I’ll have no problems finding a place at short notice.”

Kurt gets up and gives Rachel a hug. “As long as you’re happy, Rachel, I’m happy for you as well. I hope that you find what you’re looking for in L.A.”
Blaine takes Tina’s overnight bag from her when she exits the penthouse’s elevator. “You really didn’t need to come over tonight,” Blaine grumbles.

“Oh, I think I did, Blainey Days,” Tina retorts. “Did everything get delivered this week?”

“According to Amy, we’ve received everything. I’ll hate to see my credit card bill when it arrives at the end of the month.”

“It will all be worth it. Now pour me a glass of wine and we’ll go through the plans for tomorrow with Kurt. I want to make sure you know exactly what you’re doing.”

“Calm down, woman! Give me some credit.”

“Nuh-uh. Left to your own devices, you’ll completely screw things up.”

Blaine goes to the dining area cabinet and pours two glasses of Pinot Noir. He knows that Tina is here to boost his confidence, and it’s probably what he needs right now – the night before he’s going to put all his feelings on the line to Kurt. Blaine joins Tina in the living area and goes through the logistics for tomorrow with Kurt – timings, locations, transportation, and the all-important texts to keep Tina updated.

“And what music will you play?”

“I don’t know. What do you suggest?”

Tina rolls her eyes and pulls out a memory stick from her handbag. “Marley Rose and I have come up with this playlist.”

Blaine raises an eyebrow when he takes the stick from Tina. “You got Marley Rose involved in all this?”

“Look, Blaine. There are a lot of people who care about you and want you to be happy… with Kurt. You are meant to be, even if you silly boys won’t admit it to each other. Now, tell me what happens if it rains tomorrow.”

Blaine rolls his eyes. “We activate Plan B.” As Blaine goes through the logistics of Plan B, he finds comfort in knowing that there is a plan and it’s finally going to happen.

“You’re not going to chicken out, are you? Because if you are, I’m going to resort to Plan C – locking you and Kurt in a room and not letting you out until you’ve had your talk. And I. Will. Do. It!”

Blaine knows that fierce expression on Tina’s face – the one where she means business. He secretly thinks that Tina might be a bigger diva than Unique. “Nope, I’m not going to bottle out. It’s all or nothing with Kurt after tomorrow.”

“I’m sure it will be ‘all’ because Kurt is crazy for you. Now, let’s go to the bedroom and see what outfits you have planned for tomorrow.”

*****
“I never knew that Governors Island even existed before and it’s only minutes away,” Kurt says as they board the ferry from the Brooklyn Bridge Park Pier.

There are plenty of seats available on the Sunday’s first ferry, but they decide to stand near the rails on the outside deck to take in the views. Kurt gazes at the view of the island up ahead, while Blaine admires the view... next to him. Blaine can see Kurt’s well-defined muscles in his tight-fitting Paul Smith printed shirt. The sleeves are perfectly rolled up to his elbows to create a more casual look. The shirt’s first few buttons are open, and Blaine wants to tear off the cravat that is covering up the view of Kurt’s creamy white skin. The red trousers Kurt is wearing are so tight that they look as if they are painted on his long legs, and the Cesario High Top Sneakers are fashionable but comfortable enough for the day.

“It reopened last May, fully renovated. Let’s start with cycling around the island, while the weather is still cool. Then we can wander around the exhibits at the Arts Fair. Sounds good?” Blaine asks.

“Yeah, sounds like a plan,” Kurt replies.

Before they know it, the ferry is docking at the Governors Island Pier. Once they disembark, Blaine immediately hires bikes for two hours from one of the nearby rental shops. They leisurely cycle along the tree-lined trails, stopping to take in the views of Lower Manhattan and the New York Harbor. After finishing the cycling circuit around the island, they stop at an outdoor cafe for a late morning coffee. On impulse, Blaine buys chocolate almond biscotti to share.

“I can’t believe that there are two castles on such a small island.”

“It was used by the Coast Guard from the Revolutionary War to the mid-1960s, when the island was turned over to New York to set up a park. The old barracks are now being used to house the Art Fair. Let’s return the bikes and then check it out,” Blaine suggests.

It’s a short walk to Colonels’ Row, which houses the Art Fair. Each of the 100 artists has a room in the converted barracks to exhibit their works. The buildings are structurally sound but dilapidated, with lots of flaking paint and exposed wooden beams.

“It feels like we’re walking into a haunted house,” Kurt remarks as they wander from first-floor living rooms to second-story bedrooms to attics with slanting ceilings.

Most of the art on view isn’t very exciting in itself, as the artists are typically amateurs or students, so they quickly go through the exhibits. Blaine is relieved to see Kurt engage in discussion with some of the artists, as if he’s enjoying himself.

“There’s one more place I want to show you on the Island,” Blaine says as they exit the last building in Colonels’ Row.

They leisurely walk to Picnic Point at the southernmost part of the Island, and Kurt’s mouth drops when he sees the large red hammocks scattered in the enormous grassy field. They claim one of the hammocks and Kurt immediately lies down, taking in the view of the Statue of Liberty in the harbor. Blaine stands still, considering where he should position himself on the hammock. Would Kurt think it’s too forward if he lies next to him? It’s probably more gentlemanly if he lies on the opposite end, but then he would have to worry about getting his feet in Kurt’s face.

“Come on, Blaine. Lie down next to me. The view is awesome!”
Even though Blaine carefully sits down, when he lifts up his feet onto the hammock, his body slides into Kurt’s. He tries to shift his weight away, but gives up when Kurt starts gently swaying the hammock with his right foot on the ground. Blaine closes his eyes, reveling in the feeling of Kurt’s muscular body next to his. His heart sinks when he wonders if this is the last time they will be this physically close. What will Kurt’s reaction be when he declares his love? Will they still be friends?

Blaine’s thoughts are interrupted when he hears children hollering in the nearby playground. When he opens his eyes, he sees hundreds of picnickers staking their claim on a piece of the field. He sits up and sees even more people at the row of food trucks nearby, and when he glances at Kurt, he sees Kurt frowning.

“What’s wrong, Kurt? Hungry?”

“I’m glad we came here early, because it’s so crowded now. I’m not looking forward to waiting in those long lines at the food trucks. Besides, I really wanted to talk with you today, about, you know…”

“Well, it’s a good thing I made other plans for lunch, then.”

“You did?”

“I figured it would get busy on the Island, so I planned a lunch at my place. I hope you don’t mind.”

Kurt rolls his eyes and replies, “Sounds great. I guess Sam is away again this weekend, as usual?”

“Yeah, he’s away, but it wouldn’t matter one way or the other. Today is about you and me, and being honest with each other.”

*****

“I need to take a quick shower. You’re welcome to use the guest bedroom to freshen up, Kurt. I’ve left out a towel and a fresh change of clothes, if you want them.”

“Thanks. I’ll take you up on that offer.”

When Kurt disappears down the hall, Blaine quickly finds Amy, who’s in the kitchen. She’s got a large pot of water boiling and is making a dressing for the salad.

“Everything set?”

“Everything’s under control, Blaine. Tina helped me set everything up this morning and I’ll have lunch ready in half an hour. Now get out of here and get yourself spruced up!”

Blaine heads to his bedroom, where his outfit has been laid out on the bed, neatly pressed. He laughs when he sees that Amy has even polished his boat shoes. He enters the shower and closes his eyes as the warm water cascades over his head. His hands tremble as he pours out some body wash and works it into a lather along his body. He has never felt so vulnerable in his life. After lunch, he’s going to lay it all on the line and say to Kurt, ‘I’m in love with you’. He mentally goes over his speech that he’s practiced a hundred times over the past week. ‘There’s a moment… Looking for you forever… Watching you sing ‘Blackbird’… ‘You move me, Kurt… Work
Blaine had really wanted to sing to Kurt – he’s much better at conveying his feelings through song. However, Tina squashed that idea immediately and reminded him that serenading guys hadn’t worked out so well for him in the past. She only had to whisper the words ‘Gap Attack’ to convince Blaine to go with a speech.

After he dries off, he puts on the Tina-approved outfit - a white polo shirt, yellow cuffed-up chinos and his comfortable boat shoes. He carefully knots his favorite striped bowtie around his neck. Blaine finds that there’s something comforting about wearing it – he feels more polished and confident. He works in a dab of hair gel so that his curls are loose, but not crazy. One look in the mirror and he knows he looks like a dork, but hopefully he’ll be Kurt’s dork by the end of the day.

*****

“Wow, Blaine. You look like a buttercup!” Kurt exclaims when he enters the main living area.

Blaine’s smile disappears and his confidence evaporates at the words. “Give me a moment. I’ll go back and change.”

“I meant that in a nice way, silly. I haven’t seen you wear something like this since your ‘Bowtie and Suspenders’ days. It’s a good look on you. I like it. Amy won’t let me into the kitchen, but I can hear her cooking up a storm. Can I help set the table?”

“We’re not eating here. Follow me.”

Blaine leads Kurt out of the penthouse to the private elevator lobby. From here, he opens the door to the stairwell and guides Kurt up the stairs. He opens the door and smiles to himself when he can hear Kurt gasp.

Half of the rooftop is sectioned off by a row of potted trees. There are wicker chairs and a sectional with comfortable cushions under a wooden canopy. In the center hangs a Moroccan-style lantern, creating an interesting pattern of light. On one side, there is a bar area and a built-in barbeque for outdoor entertaining. A glass barrier surrounds the outer edge of the rooftop, affording views of Central Park and Manhattan. In the corner is a table, set for two, with candles burning. All around the rooftop area, there are twinkling white fairy lights in the trees and over the wooden canopy. The soft notes of jazz music fill the air.

“This is amazing, Blaine. I didn’t realize you had rooftop access.”

“A portion of the rooftop comes with the penthouse. To be honest, I don’t use it that much.”

“You really should have shown me this space sooner. Now I’m going to have to drag you out shopping again for some accessories and knick-knacks.”

“Sounds perfect. I could really use your help. It’s one of the last weekends of hot weather this year and I thought we could talk more freely here than any crowded fancy restaurant.”

A pitcher of virgin mojitos is on the side table near the sectional sofa. Blaine pours their drinks as they sit in a comfortable silence, listening to the music. Amy arrives with their first course of cold vichyssoise and warm crusty bread rolls. It’s followed by Maine lobster and a simple Caesar salad.
“Blaine, this is so delicious. Do you know it’s the first time I’ve eaten lobster? I’ve been seriously missing out on the finer things in life.”

“The lobster season in Maine is August, so this is the best time to have it. I’m still on a strict diet until the diva-off. Nobody wants to see a little tummy on me.”

“Well, I think your little tummy was adorable.”

Blaine wonders when Kurt saw his stomach. He then blushes, remembering that Kurt took off his trousers when he fell asleep during the foot massage. He cocks one eyebrow up and replies, “I don’t think divas should have adorable tummies.”

“So how do you feel about the diva-off? It’s only six days away.”

“I think I’m as ready as I’ll ever be. I’ve been working really hard with Sam and Unique to get physically and mentally ready. Honestly, I can’t wait until it’s over.”

“It’s a shame that Sam is going to be away that weekend.”

“It’s okay with me. My brother is even coming to New York for the event. He arrives on Wednesday and plans to give me some pointers. I could really do with those.”

“I remember that you told me that things will be clear after the diva-off. What did you mean by that?”

Blaine realizes that Kurt has given him the perfect segue into a discussion about Sam. But he doesn’t feel ready to start the conversation - just yet. He wants to hold on to the comfortable time with Kurt, and he needs to get himself geared up. He hears the first notes of a song playing and know that he wants just one last chance to hold Kurt in his arms.

“I love this song. Can we have just one dance before we talk?”

Kurt softly smiles and stands up, taking Blaine’s hand. Soon, they are slow dancing to the bluesy song.

_Someday he'll come along_  
The man I love  
And he'll be big and strong  
The man I love  
And when he comes my way  
I'll do my best to make him stay

Kurt’s hugs are pretty amazing, but dancing with him is another experience all together. Blaine feels right where he belongs - in Kurt’s arms, swaying gently. Kurt pulls him a little bit closer, so they are dancing chest to chest. Blaine can’t help but nuzzle Kurt’s neck.

_He'll look at me and smile_  
I'll understand  
Then in a little while  
He'll take my hand  
And though it seems absurd
Blaine feels butterflies churning in his stomach as he listens to the lyrics. He shouldn’t get his hopes up so much, but for once he can’t control it. He desperately wants to sing along, but quickly remembers Tina’s harsh words about no serenading. So instead, he lifts his head up to Kurt’s ear and whispers, “You’re really someone special.” He can hear Kurt’s breath hitch as if he’s about to say something, but the moment is lost as Miss Ella sings the next verse.

He'll build a little home  
That's meant for two  
From which I'll never roam  
Who would, would you  
And so all else above  
I'm dreaming of the man I love

When the song is over, the rooftop is silent. They stand holding each other tightly, as if their lives depended on it. Soon he can hear gentle sobbing and feel the wet tears going down Kurt’s face. Blaine pulls himself away and takes a good look at Kurt. His eyes are red and watery, and he looks positively distraught.

“What’s wrong, Kurt? I’m sorry if I did something...”

“Give me a minute.” Kurt pulls away from him and walks over to the glass guard, looking out at the horizon.

Blaine closes his eyes and tries to calm himself down. All of Tina’s and his detailed plans did not include Kurt crying before they even had the talk. Blaine is not sure whether he should go over and comfort Kurt or give him space. He feels like the situation is spiraling out of control and he doesn’t know how to fix it. He looks over at Kurt, who is still as a statue. The sun is starting to set and the deep warm rays shining on Kurt’s body make him look ethereal.

“I just can’t,” Kurt sobs as he turns around. He slowly walks to the sectional and signals Blaine to sit with him.

“I’m not sure what’s going on, Kurt, but I hate to see you so upset. You’ve got to tell me what you mean,” Blaine begs.

Kurt slowly nods and takes a deep breath. “Here we are, having a pretty perfect day together. And you are going to tell me about your feelings about things. I don’t feel like I’ve been honest with you, and it will ruin everything.”

“What haven’t you been honest about?” Blaine asks.

“I know we agreed not to talk about work, and we’ve been very good about it so far. But I have to tell you that Elle Magazine has offered me a contract with a seven-digit salary.”

Blaine feels blindsided by this bit of news. Blaine knows that Sebastian would do anything to bring him down, but to steal Kurt away from him so boldly? That’s a new all-time low. Sebastian knows him all too well and had correctly guessed how he feels about Kurt. And in one clever move, Sebastian has the potential to steal Kurt away from him. The fact that Sebastian is also hurting Vogue is icing on the cake.
“You know Sebastian Smythe?” Blaine asks with a shaky voice.

“Well, not really. I’ve bumped into him a couple of times and we’ve spoken on the phone. Of course, I’ve heard of his reputation, partying and hooking up with a new guy each night. Wes told me that the three of you went to high school together and you’re not on good terms with Sebastian.”

“You might say that’s an understatement. Wes doesn’t know everything that happened back in high school. Sebastian has always been competitive with me and is set on destroying me now. I hate to ask this, but what are you planning to do?”

“I don’t know. I get conflicting advice from everyone. I want to hear what you think.”

“Are you asking me as Vogue’s editor-in-chief or as your friend? The answers might be a little bit different.”

“I’m asking you as my friend, as someone very special to me,” Kurt confirms.

Blaine isn’t sure what to say. He can’t continue his plan to tell Kurt how he truly feels about him. It would only come off as a desperate measure to keep him at Vogue. However, he can’t just roll over and let Sebastian take Kurt away from him.

“In such a short time, you’ve made a real mark as a super model and therefore, it’s not surprising that Elle Magazine has offered you such a spectacular contract. I know Sebastian Smythe extremely well, and he has other motives for getting you to work for Elle.”

“Is it about you?”

“Yeah, it’s about me. Sebastian and I have a lot of back history that I don’t want to get into. But I will say this – he’s not going to stop at being your employer. He’s going to pursue you until you are his.”

“I can honestly say that I have no interest in a sleaze-bucket like Sebastian. He’s not my type – I like men that are…. Umm… Have different qualities all together. What worries me the most is that you won’t be my friend anymore if I join Elle Magazine.”

“It’s my turn to be honest, Kurt. I hate the thought of you joining Elle Magazine and spending time with Sebastian. Ultimately, I guess things would depend upon what motivates you to join Elle. This is really awkward to talk about because I can’t wave a magic wand and conjure up a better deal out of my Vogue hat. Maybe you’re right. We should wait and talk about feelings when the whole matter is settled.”

“I thought as much,” Kurt replies.

Blaine can’t bear to look at Kurt and see his expression. He feels like he’s said the honorable thing, but that doesn’t make him feel better. He was so optimistic about things at the start of the day, and now he feels like his whole world is crumbling down. His body starts to shake and he can’t seem to control it.

“I think we both need a hug right now.” Kurt tugs him up from the couch and embraces him. Blaine almost starts sobbing with how right it feels. He needs Kurt in his life and is so scared to lose him.
“You’ll still come to the diva-off? I don’t know if I can do it without you there.”

“Yeah, of course I will. I’m not giving up on you.”

*****

Amy pops out of the kitchen when she hears Blaine enter the penthouse. Her heart sinks when she sees that he’s alone. His eyes are teary and his sadness is vibrating from every inch of his body. She pours him a bourbon and takes it over to the couch where he’s sitting. Without a word, she returns to the kitchen and texts Tina.

*May Day! May Day! Get here ASAP! I’ve already got the ice-cream.*

Chapter End Notes

Song that Blaine and Kurt dance to on the rooftop - ‘The Man I Love’ by George and Ira Gershwin. This song has been performed by many artists, but the version I had in mind is performed by Louie Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald.

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. Here is the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics.

I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr. If you would like to send me a private message and you don't have Tumblr, my gmail account is included in my A03 profile.

Next up: The diva-off at Fashion Night Out. You will like this chapter ;) ;}

The Diva-off

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Never try to fit in because we were all born to stand out.” – Sandi Owusu

September

Kurt can sense the excitement in the audience as he walks down the aisle in the theater. ‘Bossy’ is playing on the speaker system and the song is helping to create the mood. There are dozens of people taking photos of him with their phones. He stops to talk to those who are calling out for his attention. Everywhere, fans are requesting selfies with him, and after they’ve been taken, Kurt mutters “Thank you”, “I’m sure we’re in for a treat tonight”, and “Have you made your donation yet?” Frankly, it’s exhausting, but at least it takes his mind off his nervousness for Blaine tonight. He pulls out his phone and takes a photo of the audience. He sends it to Blaine with a brief message:

*The place is already buzzing. I'll be sitting in the front row. I'll meet you backstage after. Break a leg!* K xxxxxxx

As Kurt moves along the front row, thanking people for letting him get through, he sees a tall gorgeous man. When Kurt approaches his seat, the man jumps up and hollers, “You must be Kurt. I knew you’d be a hottie!”

“And you are?”

“I’m Cooper, Blaine’s brother. That is, the more handsome and talented Anderson.”

“Yes, of course. I’ve seen photos of you in Blaine’s penthouse. I’ve even watched a few episodes of *The Young and the Restless* with Blaine. He told me you’d be here.”

“We might live on opposite coasts, but wild horses couldn’t have kept me away tonight. We support each other when it really matters. I even came earlier this week to give Blaine some pointers. Now, do you know what Blaine is wearing tonight? Because he wouldn’t show me - said it was top secret.”

“No, he wouldn’t show me either. I guess it’ll be a surprise for the both of us. Are your parents here as well?” Kurt asks as he looks around nervously.

“Father couldn’t take the time off work to come to New York City, but they’ve rented the ballroom at their country club in Westerville and are hosting a fundraising event. The diva-off will be livestreamed in.”

“Oh, wow. That’s great.”

Kurt is not sure what to say to this very attractive man. There’s still fifteen minutes to go before the diva-off takes place. He thinks about what Blaine has told him about his older brother and gets an idea. “So what’s it like being on *The Young and the Restless*? I bet you’ve got some juicy stories to tell.”
Cooper drones on and on about his role and the women on set and behind the scenes he’s slept with. Kurt thinks that even though Cooper might be the best-looking man in North America, he’s also the most self-absorbed man he’s ever met. Nope - he’ll take Blaine over Cooper any day of the week.

*****

Wake me up before you go go… Don’t leave me hanging on like a yo yo… Wake me up before you go go…

Blaine immediately snatches his phone and presses the ‘accept’ button.

“Congratulations, man. Those photos you sent me of you and Mercedes in the Elvis outfits are awesome! So why are you calling me? Isn’t Mrs. Evans planning to have her wicked way with you tonight?”

“There’ll be plenty of time for that later. We’re at the hotel bar waiting for the diva-off to start. They’ve already got the screens set to the livestreaming channel. The reporter just announced that five million dollars have been raised so far.”

“That’s great. Thinking of those charities is the only thing that’s getting me through this at the moment.”

“Did you do the warm-up routine I gave you?”

“Yes, Sam.”

“Did you eat the food that I had Amy prepare for you?”

Blaine rolls his eyes. “Yes, Sam. Everything is under control.”

“I’ll let you get back to getting ready. I just called to wish you good luck. Not only are you gonna kill it on the catwalk, but you’re going to get your man afterwards. Do me a favor and send me a photo of you and Kurt making out.”

“If Kurt agrees to be my boyfriend, I’ll send you a photo. Heck, I’d send it to the whole world to see.”

After pressing ‘end call’, Blaine looks at himself in the mirror. He’s not sure he can recognize himself with the make-up – the eyeliner, the rouge, the lipstick. It feels like a mask that brings out his inner-diva. He wonders how much of his chest to have on display, tugging the zipper tab on his shirt a little bit lower.

Kurt’s earlier text with the photo only confirmed that it’s a sold-out event, and Sam has reminded him that it’s being livestreamed throughout the world. Blaine’s stomach twists and turns, screaming at him to get up and run out of theater. He closes his eyes and tries to calm down his nerves. People are counting on him, those charities are counting on him, and he plans on giving them a truly unforgettable performance.

Unique sweeps into the private dressing room. “They’ve just announced the five-minute warning for the start of the show.” She fusses around Blaine, making the final touch-ups to his hair and make-up.

“Is it warm in here? I’m starting to feel uncomfortable.”

“Yeah, I’m nervous as hell. I’m about to go out there on stage and make a total fool of myself. What if I screw it up?”

“You won’t,” Unique immediately reassures him. She looks at Blaine’s image in the dressing table’s mirror. “I’m hearing dapper Blaine talking, but I’m looking at diva Blaine. A divalicious Blaine. So are you going to own it?”

“Yeah!”

“Are you going to give this everything you’ve got?”

“Yeah!”

“Are you going to show the world that men can be divas too?”

“Yeah!”

A knock on the door tells them that they’re ready for Blaine. Unique gives him a hug and leads him backstage. Blaine is glad that Unique is still holding his hand, squeezing every so often. He closes his eyes and slows down his breathing as he waits for the signal.

*****

The lights dim in the theater and Cooper finally shuts up. Anna Wintour comes on stage to give an opening speech for the event. There’s a quick video about the diva-off, which shows interviews with people involved in the event, interspersed with clips of the charities that it’s supporting. Anna mentions the panel who will be judging the event, “…. And the panel is headed by the one and only Queen Bey herself - Beyoncé.”

The spotlight quickly moves to Beyoncé, who stands up to a roar of applause. She quickly sits back down as the music starts playing.

\[ I love to love you baby \\ I love to love you baby. \\ I'm feelin' sexy \\ I wanna hear you say my name boy \\ If you can reach me \\ You can feel my burning flame \]

Heidi Mount steps out onto the stage to a round of applause. Once she struts to the front, and turns to walk back, Christie Brinkley enters from stage right.

\[ Tonight I'll be your naughty girl \\ I'm callin’ all my girls \\ We're gonna turn this party out \\ I know you want my body \]

Kurt sees Karlie Kloss, Joan Smalls, Kate Moss, and Miranda Kerr move on and off the stage. Panic
sets in Kurt because where the hell is Blaine? And would they really have him strutting to a song about naughty girls? With shaky fingers, he fires off a text to Unique.

*What’s going on? Is B okay? - K*

After a minute, Kurt calms down when he reads Unique’s reply.

*Blaine is fine. He’s up soon. Hold on tight! - U*

Kurt politely claps when the song is over and the stage lights go off. In spite of Unique’s text, he’s wondering if Blaine had stage fright so badly that he couldn’t make it on stage. He’s about to text Unique again, but stops when he sees a lone figure walk onto the stage and stand in the center up-stage. The music starts up and a single spotlight hits the model.

*I’m a, a diva, hey
I’m a, I’m a, a diva, hey
I’m a, I’m a, a diva, hey
I’m a, I’m a, a diva*

Kurt’s brain short-circuits and his mouth drops wide open when he sees Blaine on the stage. *Holy shit! Blaine is a sex god!*

Blaine is wearing sinfully tight-fitting black trousers – so clingy that they show off his perfectly formed ass. The trouser hems are tucked into black leather lace-up boots with a slight platform heel. The shirt is made of a red shiny material, clinging to his chest in all the right places. The shirt’s lapels are bedazzled with sparkling studs and the silver piping down each side of the front accentuate Blaine’s tiny waist. The pièce de résistance is a red feathered jacket.

Kurt snaps out of his trance when he hears Cooper holler, “Strut your stuff, baby bro!” He notices that the audience is standing up and clapping along to the song. With trembling knees, Kurt stands up as well.

*Stop the track, let me state facts
I told you give me a minute and I’ll be right back
Fifty million round the world
And they said that I couldn’t get it*

Blaine is working the catwalk with everything he’s got. His hips are swaying as he lip-synchs along to the song. When he arrives at the front of the stage, Blaine lets the feather jacket fall loosely from his shoulders, and shimmies, dropping back his head. *Where the hell has this Blaine been hiding?*

Then Blaine looks directly at Kurt and gives him a wink, before he flounces to the other side of the stage. Kurt grasps onto Cooper’s shoulder to keep himself steady. He can feel his body get excited as he watches Blaine roll his pelvis in circles and then thrust forward. Even though the female models are returning to the stage and forming a V-formation, Kurt can’t tear his eyes away from Blaine. By the end of the song, Blaine is front center stage, forming the tip of the V, and on the last note, he throws his arms up and juts one hip out, the opposite knee crossing his leg.

Camera flashes light up the theater, and the noise is deafening with the screaming and cheering. Kurt cowers and claps his hands over his ears when Cooper lets out a loud wolf whistle. Soon, the clapping becomes rhythmic as the crowd starts to chant, “Diva Blaine! Diva Blaine! Diva Blaine!”
Beyoncé slowly makes her way up to the stage with a trophy. “It didn’t take much time for the judges to deliberate. The winner of this year’s diva-off is Blaine Anderson.”

Blaine immediately turns and shakes the other models’ hands as they individually exit the stage. He then walks up to Beyoncé and accepts the trophy. He makes a short speech about supporting the charities.

“…. And now it’s official. Men can be divas too.”

He waves and smiles at the audience, and just before he leaves the stage, he blows Kurt a kiss.

*****

It seems to take an eternity before Kurt manages to make his way backstage. There are so many fans and paparazzi waiting for a glimpse of Blaine. Fortunately, Blaine provided him with a photo VIP pass, so he was able to get past security – eventually. He quietly enters the private dressing room and notices that Blaine is on the phone.

“He actually liked it? You said he was impressed? You could have knocked me over with a feather when I read his text.”

Blaine looks up and smiles, signaling Kurt to enter. He hands Kurt a glass of champagne.

“Look, Mom, I’ve gotta go. Kurt has just arrived and I need to get ready for the press and after-parties. Talk to you tomorrow?”

After a moment or two, Blaine ends the call and puts down his phone, turning his attention to Kurt.

“You’re never going to believe this. My dad saw the performance and texted me ‘Well done for being a bigger diva than Coop. Loved the performance. Dad.’ I just talked to my mom, who said that he’s been boasting about me to all his friends at the country club.”

Kurt knows that Blaine is saying something, but he’s more focused on Blaine’s mouth than the words. He can see traces of red lipstick and he wonders what those soft-looking plump lips taste like. His gaze moves up and his breath hitches when he sees Blaine’s eyes outlined with black kohl eyeliner. The look does things to him.


“Uhh, sorry, Blaine. You look amazing… Err… Eyeliner is a good look on you.”

Kurt bends down and pulls out a little stuffed puppy from a carrier bag and nervously offers it to Blaine. “Congratulations on your win. I figured that everyone would get you flowers, so I got you this little cutie instead. I wanted something for you to keep… So when you look at it, you’ll be reminded that you can achieve anything you want in life.”

Blaine positively beams and hugs the stuffed animal. “I love it! I think I’ll call it ‘Diva’. Thank you! You always keep surprising me and I-I just…. I love that about you.”

Kurt is pleased that Blaine likes the present, but he feels there’s more that he needs to say. He walks slowly towards Blaine, stops a few feet in front of him and places a hand on his shoulder.
“Tonight… On that stage. You were incredible. You took my breath away. I’m so proud of you.”

“I want you to be,” Blaine softly replies.

They gaze into each other’s eyes. A silent pause hangs between them, charged, like the split-second before falling glass hits the ground and shatters, with both men bracing for the impact. Kurt isn’t sure what to do with his hand on Blaine’s shoulder— he should probably let go— but he can’t bring himself to and lose the connection.

"Give me your hand and hold it to my heart," Blaine whispers.

Kurt can feel Blaine’s heart racing as his hand presses against Blaine’s chest.

“Kurt…”

Blaine says his name in that special way that always makes Kurt feel so wanted and special. Sincerity and longing sparkle in Blaine’s eyes. Kurt has never loved Blaine more than he does in this moment. Kurt can’t suppress his feelings any longer, and he crashes his lips against Blaine’s, as if this connection growing between them, new and somewhat alarming in its intensity, is the one he’s been searching for his entire life.

If you had asked Kurt a minute ago what his first kiss would be like, he would have mentioned a romantic setting, loving murmurs, and a fluttering feeling in his heart. But it isn’t like that at all. When Blaine cups Kurt’s face with his hands and eagerly kisses him back, inside Kurt, floodgates open. Passion courses through him, hot and intoxicating.

He cannot believe this is happening.

Kurt swipes his tongue over the seam of Blaine’s lips, which part instantly. Their tongues move in perfect sync, intertwining as breaths mingle. And the way Blaine tastes…Kurt can’t get enough. Months of suppressed feelings heighten every touch, every taste, every whimper. Kurt steps forward, pressing his chest flush against Blaine’s, until Blaine is backed against the wall.

Blaine pulls his lips away to catch his breath, and Kurt can’t imagine a more beautiful sight than the one before him. A man with flushed cheeks, a smile across kiss-swollen lips and eyes so bright Kurt feels as if he’s looking straight into Blaine’s soul. However, Kurt remembers something— or rather someone— important.

“Sam,” Kurt says in a trembling voice, stepping away a little. “I shouldn’t have done this. You’re with Sam.”

“We’re not together.”

“You’re not just saying that?”

“No! I swear it’s true. Kurt, you don’t know how long I’ve wanted to kiss you. I’m so in ….”

Kurt puts his finger to Blaine’s lips to stop him from speaking.

“Me too. Now, those lips belong to me. More kissing, less talking—”
Kurt moves in for round two, and their kisses become more heated and urgent. Enthusiastically exploring Blaine’s mouth, Kurt moves one hand into Blaine’s hair, feeling the silky curls run through his fingers. He pulls at the curls to get Blaine’s head exactly where he wants it. When he hears Blaine moan, Kurt feels fire coursing through his body and his cock fills until he’s so fucking hard.

The feather jacket tickles annoyingly at his neck, so he gently pushes Blaine away to pull off the offending garment and throw it behind him. With the jacket gone, he can see a smattering of chest hair peeking out beneath the top of Blaine’s shirt. Kurt starts marking Blaine’s neck with little kisses and nips.

Blaine settles his hands around Kurt’s shoulders and moans, “I’m yours… My lips… My everything….”

In spite of his lack of experience, he can reduce Blaine to this trembling, babbling state, and he’s proud of that. He wants to drag it out of Blaine even more, and this thought gives Kurt the courage to continue. Kurt pulls down the zipper of Blaine’s shirt, revealing an expanse of olive-toned skin and wants to explore all of it. Kurt lightly brushes one hand over Blaine’s chest. Blaine’s muscles quiver as Kurt’s fingers skim his abs. Kurt feels a heady rush of power from getting this reaction from a simple touch of the fingertips. Kurt didn’t think he’d be into chest hair, but Blaine has the perfect amount. It’s a reminder of how masculine Blaine is.

Kurt’s mouth returns to Blaine’s for a searing kiss. He feels Blaine’s warm breath against his lips and hears Blaine moaning. Kurt kisses back down Blaine’s neck and goes further than before, until his mouth meets Blaine’s left nipple, which is taut from Kurt’s attentions. Kurt’s tongue circles it, and he hears Blaine almost sob. Kurt gently sucks on the nub, and Blaine’s reaction is immediate. He cries out, “God! That feels good, Kurt”, his pelvis stuttering forward so that his cock hits Kurt’s thigh.

Blaine pulls back his hips and stills them, and Kurt knows that he has a decision to make. He loved the feeling of Blaine’s cock against his thigh, knowing that his touches and mouth have caused this reaction. He’s also so hard himself that it really, really hurts. Kurt had never thought that he would get into this situation with Blaine – and certainly not tonight. But he loves Blaine so freaking much; he wants Blaine to be his first. Even in a fit of passion, Blaine has let Kurt take control. It doesn’t feel scary when Kurt knows he can stop it at any time. Kurt thinks of all the talks they’ve had where they have skirted around how they really feel. So maybe he should let his body communicate his emotions instead.

“Kurt, I’m so sorry,” Blaine whispers in his ear.

Kurt feels Blaine’s body trembling, but not in a good way – not like he had just seconds before. He desperately wants Blaine to feel good, to let him know how special he is to Kurt. And in that moment, Kurt knows what he needs to do.

“Shhhh…” Kurt whispers back to Blaine.

Kurt places his hands on Blaine’s hips and tentatively thrusts forward, allowing his cock to meet Blaine. Kurt can’t help but moan at the small relief that gives him. Soon, Kurt is rocking his body against Blaine’s, and God, it feels incredible. Blaine adjusts their position so that their cocks rub against each other, and sparks shoot out throughout Kurt’s body. Their lips meet again, but their mouths are open and their tongues intertwine. They’re both gasping, and panting, and moaning. It feels so right, like there are no rules or roles. Just two men going head-to-head, heart-to-heart, and cock-to-cock - doing what comes naturally.
Kurt grabs Blaine’s ass. He’s never felt something so perfect. Blaine’s ass is round and firm, and Kurt can feel the muscles working under his fingers. He squeezes Blaine’s cheeks harder, pulling them towards him to pick up the pace. Kurt isn’t sure what he’s doing, but Blaine’s body is so responsive. Soon Blaine is rambling again, “So perfect… I need… I want…. Oh, Kurt… Kurt….”

Kurt feels Blaine tremble with every movement, the signs that Blaine is almost there obvious, even to Kurt. When Blaine stills his hips and lets out a long guttural moan, Kurt looks up and is met by the sexiest thing he’s ever seen in his life. Blaine’s head is thrown back, exposing his neck. His eyes are closed tightly, his mouth wide open, pleasure written all over his face. Blaine mumbles gibberish as his cock pulsates against Kurt’s.

Kurt lets out a choked sob as he clings onto Blaine. Kurt is so close, and he continues thrusting – he just needs a little push to tip him over the edge. With one broad swipe, Blaine licks down his neck and bites his shoulder. That’s all it takes for the most powerful orgasm Kurt has ever felt to rush through his body, and waves of pleasure wash over him.

They cling to each other as their breathing evens out. Kurt holds on to Blaine, thinking he might float away if he lets go. Kurt’s body feels sated. A bead of sweat runs down the side of his face. He looks down and notices a wet spot visible on Blaine’s trousers. Blaine’s lips chase for another kiss, sweet and soft. When their lips part, their foreheads touch – a way to stay connected that feels as intimate as what they’ve shared.

Blaine kisses Kurt’s eyelids, then his lips make their way towards Kurt’s right ear, nibbling on his lobe. Kurt’s cock twitches at the sensation, trying to get hard again. Kurt can’t help but throw his head back to allow Blaine further access to his neck. As Blaine eagerly explores, licking and sucking and biting, a low growl escapes Kurt’s mouth.

Without knocking, Unique strides into the dressing room. “Are you ready yet? Isabelle said that everyone is waiting at the back do-oh! Unique’s eyes... They are on fire! I’ll just wait outside.” Blaine gives Kurt one last peck on the lips, before separating but holding on to Kurt’s hand. “It’s fine, Unique. You’re right – it’s time for us to go.”

“Not like that, you won’t,” Unique replies as she looks the boys over. She pulls a pair of replacement trousers from the clothing rack. “I had a second pair made in case the first pair split or something. This definitely qualifies as ‘something’. Now go change!”

While Blaine goes to the dressing room’s bathroom to change, Unique signals for Kurt to sit down at the make-up table. She fixes Kurt’s hair and removes remnants of red lipstick from his face and neck. She looks at his reflection in the mirror and smiles.

“Thank god you boys finally got your acts together. It’s about time! I know it’s going to be hard, but control yourselves when you leave here. Blaine is the man of the hour, and he needs to look like a diva, not like some doe-eyed teenager who has just kissed his first boyfriend.”

“Oh, I understand. You’re not going to tell anyone or…”

“Unique is the soul of discretion. My lips are sealed.”

Blaine returns to the dressing room and meekly sits down for Unique to do the necessary touch-ups. Kurt smiles at Blaine to reassure him that everything is okay.
Finally, Blaine and Kurt are ready and leave the dressing room with linked arms. They are too busy whispering to each other that they don’t even notice other people in the hallway.

*****

Chandler sees Blaine and Kurt walk arm in arm along the corridor to the theater’s back door. They don’t even acknowledge his existence. Chandler then makes his decision. He takes out his phone and sends Sebastian Smythe a simple message with an attachment.

*I think you’re going to like this.*

*****

Once the backdoor is opened, there is a flurry of flashes as both fans and paparazzi take photos, and the screaming is deafening. Kurt stays behind when Blaine picks up a bucket labeled ‘Donations’ and struts over to the crowd behind the barricade. Blaine jokes with his fans as he collects donations and strikes a pose when the bucket is filled with money to predetermined levels outlined on the side.

Kurt looks on at the scene and at the man he’s so in love with. Blaine is like a sex god with his good looks and self-confidence. However, it’s far more than that. There’s also the generous man who is collecting donations for his favorite charities. The man who takes time to speak to fans individually. The man who looks over his shoulder from time to time and gives Kurt a shy smile. Kurt quietly makes his way over to where Bentley is waiting and slides into the Mercedes-Benz.

A half-hour later, Blaine joins him, and Bentley starts to drive off. Blaine holds Kurt’s hand as he talks on the phone with Isabelle. When he ends the phone call, he leans forward to talk with Bentley.

“It’s going to be a long night. All the major networks and entertainment websites are waiting at The Plaza Hotel for interviews. Then, there are two parties I must attend and another half-dozen where I need to make an appearance.”

“No worries. I had a long nap this afternoon. I’ll text Tina about the locations so I know where I should be going.”

Blaine moves back and turns his attention to Kurt. Blaine smiles as he brushes his hand along Kurt’s face and moves in for a lingering kiss. It lasts for a few seconds before Kurt pulls back.

“Blaine, I know I said I would join you for everything after the diva-off, but do you mind if I go home first to change?” Kurt leans in closer and whispers, “I’m feeling really sticky, and if people look…”

Blaine giggles and replies, “You’re adorable. I understand your… err… situation. Cooper is already at The Plaza Hotel, so I’ll drag him around with me until you return. He’ll love the exposure.”

When the car pulls up to the Plaza Hotel, Kurt is glad that the car has darkened windows so that no-one can see him when Blaine leaves the car. Once he sees Blaine under the bright lights of the first camera interview, Kurt faces forward. In the rearview mirror, he sees the reflection of Bentley’s smile – so wide that it almost looks like it hurts.

*****

“Come on up. I want to take a quick shower,” Kurt tells Bentley as the Mercedes-Benz pulls up
along the curb to the Bushwick apartment building. They quickly climb up the stairs to the loft, and once Bentley is comfortably seated in the living area, Kurt heads to the bathroom. Kurt adjusts the shower head so that the water doesn’t spray over his head. He doesn’t want to wash his hair – the styling alone would take too much time… Time he could be spending with Blaine.

As he suds up his loofah and brushes it along his body, Kurt wonders if he’ll be spending the night with Blaine at his penthouse. They hadn’t discussed arrangements after the parties. Does Blaine want him to? He knows that Sam isn’t in town this weekend, but that shouldn’t matter, right? Blaine told him that he and Sam aren’t a thing anymore and Blaine has never lied to Kurt. Maybe economical with the truth about Sam, but he’s never told out-and-out lies. Kurt closes his eyes and thinks about what the perfect night with Blaine might be.

Definitely snuggles… and if making out is involved, he’s not going to complain. But most importantly, Kurt wants to talk to Blaine about their feelings for one another. What they mean to each other. Butterflies flutter in his stomach at the thought that they might be boyfriends by the end of the night.

Kurt turns off the shower and reaches for his towel. He decides that this is not the time to be a shy awkward teenager. It’s the time to go after what he wants, and he wants to be with Blaine. He’s going to pack an overnight bag and have Bentley hide it in the trunk. Pleased with his decision, he thinks that he better get a move on and get ready for the after-parties… and Blaine. In his haste, he stumbles over the bottom lip of the shower stall’s frame and lands on the floor.

“Everything okay there, Kurt?” Bentley asks on the other side of the bathroom door. “I heard a loud noise.”

“Not really, Bentley. Can you come in and give me a hand? I’ve twisted my ankle.”

Bentley enters the bathroom and wraps his arm around Kurt, helping him move to his bedroom. Once Kurt is situated on his bed, Bentley rushes to the kitchen and pulls out a bag of peas from the freezer. Bentley returns to the bedroom, places a pillow underneath Kurt’s ankle and places the bag of frozen peas on top.

“It looks pretty swollen, Kurt. I think you might be better off staying at home tonight and keeping it iced.”

Kurt’s lower lip sticks out in a pout. “But I want to spend time with Blaine tonight. I want us to be together.”

“Trust me when I say that everyone who knows you and Blaine want you to be together. But I really think that it’s a bad idea to go to the after-parties when you can barely stand on your ankle, let alone walk. Why don’t I pick you up first thing tomorrow and you can wake up Blaine?”

“It sounds sensible,” Kurt reluctantly agrees. Although he doesn’t want to be sensible at the moment, maybe it would be better to have the talk with Blaine when there isn’t the craziness of the diva-off night.

Bentley takes out his phone and calls Blaine. After updating him on Kurt’s twisted ankle, he hands Kurt the phone. “Blaine wants to talk to you.” Kurt is grateful that Bentley leaves his bedroom to
give him some privacy.

“Darling, are you okay? Bentley didn’t feel like you need to go to the hospital, but do you want me to ask Amy to come over tonight? I’m sure she would do it in a flash. She absolutely adores you.”

Kurt internally squeals when he hears Blaine call him darling. “No, that’s okay. I’ll just go to sleep. I’m just disappointed that I won’t be spending time with you tonight.”

“I want to spend time with you too. But before you know it, Bentley will be picking you up tomorrow morning. We really need to talk about things as soon as we can.”

Kurt nods his head and replies, “I like the sound of that.”

“Tell me I didn’t make up this evening in my head,” Blaine whispers.

“You most definitely did not. Now go back to your legion of fans. It’ll be tomorrow morning soon enough.”

Chapter End Notes

Songs used in the chapter
Sam’s ringtone - Wake Me up Before You Go-Go’ by Wham!
Playing in the theater before the performance – ‘Bossy’ by Kelis Blaine
Songs used during the diva-off ‘Naughty Girl’ and ‘Diva’, both by Beyoncé

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. Here is the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics.

It was such an honor to have fhartz91 as a special advisor for this chapter. She helped to make this chapter so much better, and me a better writer. She’s a very talented author and it’s a MUST to read some of her stories. Want a short fluffy story with a twist that makes you gasp? She’s got them. Want a long story that’s so smoking hot that you’ll throw your head in the freezer afterwards? She’s got them. Want to dip your toes into other ships or fandoms? She’s got them. Want any combination of the above? Yep, she’s got them all. Too many wonderful stories to mention here, so I’ve created a special collection of some of my favorite Klaine stories. Please go check them out and leave the kudos and reviews they deserve.

I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr.

Next up: Uh, uh. Not telling you this time!
Klainegate

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Scandal is gossip made tedious by morality.” – Oscar Wilde, Lady Windermere’s Fan

Monday (September)

Kurt cracks one eye open as he hears his phone ring. He looks at the clock and can’t imagine why anyone would want to talk to him at 6:30am on a Sunday morning after Fashion’s Night Out, the diva-off and the after-parties. He glances at his phone and accepts the call when he realizes it’s his publicist.

“Hayley, do you know what time it is?”

“Sorry if I woke you up, but there’s something you’ve got to see. I’ll send you a link. Once you’ve watched it, give me a call. I’m on my way to the office. Don’t say anything to anybody except ‘no comment’ until we figure out what to do.”

Hayley ends the call abruptly, and Kurt is puzzled by her cryptic message. He sits up and swings his legs to the side of the bed. His ankle is no longer swollen and so he tentatively stands up. He’s relieved that he can put weight on his ankle. He’s glad that he took Bentley’s advice last night and stayed at home. His livelihood depends upon him able to strike poses.

Kurt goes to the bathroom, careful not to put too much weight on his left leg, and wonders what could possibly have happened overnight. When he’s settled back into bed, he receives a notification for Hayley’s new message and clicks on the link to a video.

The beginning of the video includes a clip of Blaine’s diva-off performance and Kurt smiles as he remembers how Blaine had worked the stage. The smile quickly disappears as the stage fades away and then the video reappears focused on the backstage dressing room. There, for all to see, is Kurt pulling Blaine in for a dirty and messy kiss. Oh. My. God.

It doesn’t stop there – someone got the whole thing on video. Kurt’s body involuntarily trembles as he continues to watch. ‘Diva’ is playing softly in the background, but the panting and moaning and growling – did he really growl at Blaine? – can be heard clearly. Was Blaine really that vocal? Kurt squints his eyes as if that will make it all go away as he watches the thrusting, the licking, the biting until they both had orgasms.

With shaky fingers, he switches to Twitter and discovers that the video is trending - #DivaBlaine, #DivaSexTape, and #Klaine are on top of the list. Kurt would have been amused at the ship name if he wasn’t so utterly mortified. Kurt tosses his phone aside before he can glance at the tweets. Sobs start to rack his body when he thinks of the scandal. Last night had been so perfect, with his first kiss, his first sexual experience with another man, and it was so special because his firsts were with Blaine. And here is that moment – so intimate and private – on the Internet for everyone to see.

How could this possibly have happened? Who took the freaking video? He can’t believe for a moment that it was Unique or even Blaine. But who else was around? Kurt’s thoughts spiral until
they feel out of control. When his phone starts ringing, he doesn’t think to look who it is. He swipes the screen and answers, “Hayley, I just saw it.”

“What the hell, Kurt! You told me Anderson treats you with respect!”

Kurt immediately recognizes the voice, and it’s not Hayley’s. It’s the voice of the one person he really doesn’t want to talk to right now. “Dad, it’s not what you think.”

“What do ya mean it’s not what I think? I have eyes, Kurt. I saw Blaine practically eating your face and pushing himself against you…. And those sounds and words that came out of his mouth? Trust me, no parent wants to see his child treated that way.”

“It wasn’t like that! At the time, it didn’t feel at all like it looks on video. Blaine was respectful and honest with me. It was a private moment between Blaine and myself… The first private moment we’ve had, I should add.”

Kurt drops his head, feeling so ashamed that his father has watched the video. As tears form in his eyes, he sniffles to control the crying. Kurt can hear his father sigh deeply at the other end of the line.

“Look, son. It just wasn’t what I’d expected to watch while eating my Wheaties this morning. Are you okay, Kurt? Are you safe?”

“I’m not sure. My PR agent is figuring out a plan, and in the meantime, I’m sitting tight. I have to talk to Blaine and find out what happened and who took the video. Rachel moved out last week, so I’m on my own, but that’s a good thing ‘cause I don’t think I could face anybody right now.”

“Do you wanna come home? You’ll be safe with me.”

“I can’t, Dad. The lease here runs out in a couple of weeks and I have to find a new place to live. I also have to decide where I’m going to work. I’m also expected at the New York Fashion week coming up. So yeah, I’ve got to be in New York until at least the end of the month.”

“I can always get Timmy to take over the garage and stay with you instead. Help you out with the move.”

“Can I let you know, Dad? I think I need to talk to Hayley and Blaine first.”

“Sure thing, son. But remember, the offer is always there. Just say the word.”

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“Kurt, are you alright? Safe? Can you look out the window and tell me what you see?”

“Thank god you called, Blaine. I can’t believe what’s happening,” Kurt replies as he walks over to the Bushwick loft’s window and looks down at the street. “There’s a couple walking a dog, some families on the way to the park, and some guy picking through the garbage bags. Nothing unusual. Why?”

“My apartment building is swamped with fans, the paparazzi and the press. It’s so crazy that the police have arrived and are setting up barricades. Don’t come over this morning. I’m going to lay low for a while and stay with Unique.”
“D-d-do you know what happened Blaine? Who took the video?”

“I don’t know, but I’m going to get to the bottom of this. And when I do… That person is going to be very, very sorry.”

“I’m so angry about this. They had no right…”

“I know, Kurt. I’m angry about it too. My lawyers are getting an injunction to get it off the Internet, although that doesn’t mean it’s going to stop circulating. Gifs are springing up everywhere. We can’t control that.”

“Oh my god, Blaine. I always thought that my first time – our first time – would be special. But now it feels ruined, and I’m going to be haunted by the photos and gifs forever.”

“Shhh… Don’t think like that. It was special… And you are so very special to me. We’ll get through this, but it might take some time. Look, the next few days are going to be crazy with lawyers, PR agents, the press, etc. Please leave it with me. Hayley will let you know what’s going on.”

“So when am I going to see you next, Blaine?”

“I’m not sure. I think we need to keep some distance for the next few days. We don’t want to feed the media frenzy even more by being seen together. I need to make a press statement about it, so maybe after that? But if you need anything in the meantime, contact Tina. She’ll pass along the message. My phone is going crazy, so I’m switching it off once we finish this call.”

“Oh, Blaine. I trust you and know you’ll figure this out.”

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Blaine switches off his phone with a heavy heart. Last night had been so perfect. He had won the diva-off, boosted Vogue’s reputation, and raised $15 million for charities at last count. Cooper was by his side throughout the evening and his father was proud. But the most perfect thing of all was kissing Kurt.

They had been acting like fools before last night – both afraid that the other didn’t reciprocate what they felt. All it took was one kiss to resolve the matter. Blaine had planned out a speech, the music, the setting for their first kiss so many times in his head. But when Kurt pulled him in and kissed him with so much passion, it was perfect. It felt so good – so right – and more, well, just… more.

Touching, smelling, tasting Kurt - Blaine had felt as if all his pent-up emotions were unleashed last night. Kurt’s little gasps and whimpers, feeling Kurt’s hands and lips move along his body, only added fuel to the fire inside him. In hindsight, Blaine should have stopped them when things were getting overheated. However, all rational thoughts flew out of his mind when Kurt’s hands grabbed his hips and started thrusting. Blaine had never seen this more commanding side of Kurt – wanting him, needing him – and it was the hottest. Thing. Ever.

Blaine’s only regret is that they hadn’t had time to themselves afterwards – to revel in the feeling, whisper sweet nothings, and make out some more. There were fans to meet, photos to pose for, press to talk to, and the endless parties. He had been a little disappointed when Kurt twisted his ankle, but he had understood that it was best to ice it, and Cooper was there to support him. In retrospect, Blaine’s glad that there aren’t photos of them at the after-parties. It would only have made this media circus even worse.
Blaine leaves his study and returns to the dining area, where there is a gathering of people – Tina, Unique, Bentley, Isabelle, lawyers, PR agents, and Vogue staff.

“The judge signed the injunction ten minutes ago. The video’s coming off YouTube,” Jenni from Legal reports.

Blaine smiles for the first time that day. “Well, that’s the first small victory. Now tell our outside legal counsel that we must find out who’s responsible. They can hire private detectives or hackers working from their bedrooms, I don’t care. I am not going to rest until I find out who was behind this.”

“Do you have any enemies?” Jenni asks.

“There are lots of people who would like to see Vogue brought down a notch or two. But I can only think of one enemy that I personally have. You can start with Sebastian Smythe over at Elle magazine. He wouldn’t have done this himself. Using a lackey is more his style.”

Blaine moves towards the floor-to-ceiling windows and looks down. The police are controlling traffic and the ever-increasing crowd.

“I’ll need to leave soon – it’s getting crazy out there. Unique, could you please pack me a bag of clothes? Leave behind anything too recognizable like the yellow sunglasses. I’m going incognito, so jeans, T-shirts and beanies please.”

Unique nods her head and she disappears to the back bedroom.

“Bentley, can you please go to the concierge and tell them that I plan to leave in an hour? I have no idea how I’m going to get out of here.”

“The escape is all sorted. I borrowed my brother’s van, and it’s in the underground parking garage. Three undercover policeman are there and ready to leave with us. There are also police cars in position to escort us if the crowd sees you and tries to follow the van. I’ll let everyone know when you plan to leave.”

The next hour is filled with setting out a plan of what needs to be done. The press conference is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday afternoon. Blaine, Unique and Bentley make it out of the building safely, with no-one on their trail. Blaine wishes that he could go to Bushwick and curl up inside Kurt’s arms, and find love and comfort, but he knows he has to fix this problem first.

*****

Monday

“Dude! I asked for a photo of you and Kurt making out, not a full video of the whole thing,” Sam jokes.

“Ha, ha, very funny - not! This is turning out to be a nightmare. I’m holed up at Unique’s and spending almost every waking moment trying to sort out this mess. Thank god Isabelle has taken over and is getting the October issue out. I had the most awkward phone conversation with my father last night. He didn’t say he was disappointed, but I could hear it in his voice. He said we’d talk about it when I come home for Christmas and god, I’m not looking forward to that conversation.”
“I’m glad I’m not in your shoes. I wanna talk to you about a couple of things. Do you have the time?”

“Sure. Amy has come over to Unique’s to help out with things. She’s just started cooking dinner so yeah, I’ve got some time. What’s on your mind?”

“Have you seen the ship war that’s on Twitter and Tumblr? Blam vs Klaine? It’s actually pretty funny what they’re saying. I’ve been keeping on the down-low, which, trust me, isn’t a problem when you’ve got the hotel’s honeymoon suite booked for a week. But what’s going to happen at the New York Fashion Week later this month? I know I’m supposed to work at some of the events, but how’s it going to play out? Even if things with the video get sorted out, it’s just going to start over again when I’m seen around you and Kurt.”

“Oh god, Sam. I didn’t even think about that. I’ve been so focused on the press conference tomorrow. What a mess everything is! I’ll have Vogue release you from working the New York Fashion Week and talk to Wes about getting you jobs at the London Fashion Week instead. That way, we can always say you couldn’t be at both events and it wouldn’t look like we’re scared - which, of course, we are.”

“That sounds okay, but I’m not sure if Mercedes is going to like me going overseas so soon after the wedding. Ya know, she’s sort of addicted to me.”

“How’s Mercedes holding up through the Blam stuff?”

“She’s nervous that it could jeopardize her recording contract under some sort of morals clause. I keep telling her that she’s done nothing wrong, but she says that ‘cause I’m her husband, they could still do something. So we’re planning to keep our marriage a secret, at least for a while.”

“I’m really sorry, man. I had no idea that when Kurt and I… umm…. got together, it would end up like this. I was thinking more about living happily ever after. What a joke that turns out to be. Kurt doesn’t deserve this… or maybe me.”

“Stop it, Blaine! I’m not going talk to you if you say such crap. You know I’m the number one Klainiac, right?”

Blaine gently chuckles when he hears Sam using his and Kurt’s ship name, because he secretly loves it.

“Blaine, before you go to sleep tonight, go check out KrianFeels’ story. They updated yesterday, and I swear they know us - it’s a flashback to Krian’s first time. It’s more up your street than mine. It’s full of candles and rose petals and way too many I love you’s. The sex is super vanilla – I mean, Kevin even kept his socks on, for god’s sake.”

“You’ve actually read gay porn while you’re on your honeymoon?!?”

“It isn’t like that, dude! I got bored when Mercedes spent ‘me time’ in the bathroom. Did ya know girls can spend over an hour in a bubble bath?”

When they end the call, Blaine clicks on the notes app and types in ‘New York Fashion Week’. He’ll have to focus on it once tomorrow’s press conference is over. His overriding instinct is to protect Kurt from the media circus – to protect him from awkward moments and intrusive questions.
He needs to figure out a way for Vogue to be at events at the New York Fashion Week without Kurt involved.

*****

Tuesday

“To conclude, it was a personal moment that was violated by an unknown person recording, and it was an invasion of our privacy. Our great legal system agreed and the video was pulled off the Internet within hours. In no way do our actions reflect the diva-off, Fashion’s Night Out, or Vogue. I will not rest until I have found out who the perpetrator is, and then I plan to take action. It was an unfortunate incident, and it’s taking the focus away from where it should be - the charities who need our support. I’ll open this up for questions.”

Kurt clicks the ‘off’ button on the TV remote control. He’s heard enough. Blaine looked every inch the Vogue executive in his tailored Brooks Brothers suit. His statement was eloquent and touched on every point in his and Vogue’s favor. But something about it didn’t sit quite right.

Why would Blaine call it an ‘unfortunate incident’? Kurt would have preferred it if Blaine had confirmed their relationship. Of course, that would have required them discussing it, and Blaine hasn’t been in touch since Sunday morning. Kurt knows that they have agreed not to talk until after the press conference, and Hayley’s done a great job keeping him in the loop of what’s happening. However, Kurt feels so alone, holed up in the Bushwick loft by himself as he has been the past few days.

The part of Blaine’s speech about Sam was ambiguous as well – ‘very close…. There for each another… Nothing has changed.’ Kurt knows that no secrets about Blaine and Sam would have been revealed at the press conference. Kurt regrets that he and Blaine haven’t had a heart-to-heart talk yet. While Blaine did tell him it was over with Sam, he didn’t exactly tell him when they had broken up. Without knowing all the details, Kurt has a nagging feeling that maybe there’s still some truth to Blam. And why did Blaine decide to move in with Unique of all people? Could she have made the tape? After all, she didn’t look very surprised when she caught them in the dressing room together.

Kurt has a whole lot of questions that can’t be answered until he talks to Blaine. In the meantime, he’s bored and decides to do a workout at home since he can’t get to the gym. He changes into a red sleeveless workout shirt and red-and-white-striped shorts and inserts his secret Richard Simmon’s workout disc into the DVD player. After a one-hour aerobic exercise full of positive thinking, Kurt takes a long hot shower. He plops down on the couch and looks at his phone – no missed calls and no new messages. Kurt then decides to take matters into his own hands and picks up his phone.

“Hi Tina. It’s Kurt here. Is Blaine around?”

“He’s still at the press conference giving individual interviews. Afterwards, he’s having dinner with Jake Silverstein from the New York Times. They want to run an article with Blaine’s version of events in the Sunday magazine. Is it urgent? Can I help you?”

Kurt clenches his fingers around the phone, frustrated that he can’t get a hold of Blaine. “No, it’s not urgent.”

As soon as he ends the call, he sees a new text notification.
I think we should meet up – S Smythe

Kurt groans with the reminder that he needs to make a decision about which modeling contract to sign very soon, but he doesn’t want to talk to Elle magazine until he’s had a chance to talk to Blaine... Whenever that might be.

*****

Wednesday

“What do you mean, Vogue doesn’t need me at the New York Fashion Week! I don’t understand.”

“They feel that right now, your presence will spark talk about the Klaine sex scandal all over again. Blaine really wants to protect you from all of that,” Wes calmly replies.

“I bet he does – I haven’t heard anything from Blaine since Sunday morning. Does Vogue still want to renew my contract?” Kurt asks with a shaky voice.

“Blaine has confirmed that they do, but they want to keep you out of the limelight for a little while.”

“Has Elle rescinded its contract offer?”

“No. Sebastian Smythe still calls me every day asking for news. I just got off the phone with Hayley and she’s swamped with offers for interviews. There’s a lot of money on offer for a tell-all story.”

“There’s no way I’m going to be that person who sells his story to the highest bidder in town. Tell Hayley to reject them all.”

Kurt looks at his phone, and there’s still no word from Blaine. Kurt can’t even imagine what the hell is happening or why Blaine hasn’t personally told him about not being needed at the New York Fashion Week.

He scrolls through his texts and finds the one he was looking for. He quickly types in a reply.

I’ll meet you tomorrow for lunch. Send me the deets. Just make sure it’s someplace where I won’t be recognized – K Hummel

Before it can sink in that he has actually texted Sebastian Smythe, his phone vibrates with a reply.

A silver sedan will pick you up at noon. The driver’s name is Dick.

*****

Thursday

Kurt wakes up and reluctantly grabs his phone – there’s been nothing but bad news since Sunday morning and he dreads looking at it to find out what has happened overnight. He’s taken to keeping his phone on silent during the day, and most certainly off overnight. His eyes pop open wide when he sees countless notifications of texts and missed calls from Blaine. Before he can look at the messages, his phone starts ringing and he accepts a call from Rachel. Kurt spaces out as she rants on about how California wasn’t what she expected – how the TV crew and cast are catty and nobody
appreciates her talent. When Kurt feels he’s had enough of her whinging, he interrupts her.

“Sorry to hear that TV land is different from what you expected. But is that really why you called?”

“Oh, Kurt. I didn’t mean to go on so long about it. I really called to see how you are doing. I saw… err… the video on the Internet.”

“I’m doing just fine. My first kiss and whatever was on the Internet for everyone to see. I’ve had the most embarrassing call ever with my dad. I’ve been told to stay put so I haven’t left the loft since Saturday night, but I’ve got to find a new place to live in ten days’ time. I can see a few people with cameras hanging outside on the street, which is making me nervous. I haven’t spoken to Blaine since Sunday morning because he’s too busy talking to the press. And Wes tells me I’m not longer ‘required’ for New York Fashion Week. So yeah, I’m just hunky-dory.”

“God, Kurt. It makes my problems seem so trivial. I wish I was there for you. I always knew that Anderson was looking out for himself and would dump you as soon as he’d had you.”

“I don’t think it’s quite like that, Rach. After all, Blaine has been so busy…”

“Too busy to contact you before yesterday? I don’t think so. He’s looking out for number one, and it’s high time that you do too.”

Kurt isn’t sure how to respond to Rachel’s remark. Sure, Blaine has been busy fielding the press and running Vogue. But maybe Rachel is on to something.

“We’ve talked before about how when something doesn’t work out, there are new doors you can open. Your life is certainly different now than it was six months ago, when you were working at the diner and getting turned down at every audition. You have other options besides Vogue and you should look after what is best for you. You’re so caught up in Blaine that you can’t see the wood for the trees. Promise me that you’ll put yourself first.”

Kurt thinks about what Rachel’s just said and all the changes in his life over the past six months. She’s right – there are plenty of options for him out there.

Kurt doesn’t bother looking at Blaine’s texts or listening to the voicemails. Rachel’s call has put him behind schedule and he needs to get ready for his lunch meeting at noon.

*****

When Kurt tentatively steps out of his apartment building, he sees a couple dozen people milling around. Even though they appear to be fans, shouting words of encouragement, he wonders how they’ve found out where he lives. Kurt smiles and waves, but quickly enters the car that’s waiting for him. Five minutes later, he is dropped off at the front of a nightclub. Even though the door has a sign hanging that it’s closed, the driver indicates that Kurt should walk in.

Kurt cautiously enters the darkened nightclub, looking for some sign of life. He slowly walks forward to a silhouetted man and breathes a sigh of relief when he recognizes Sebastian Smythe. He slides into the booth on the opposite side and notices that the lights are being switched on.

“Have a Diet Coke,” Sebastian says, sliding a large glass towards Kurt.
“You know my drink order?”

“There’s not much I don’t know about you. That’s my job. What I don’t know is what’s going on in your head right now.”

Kurt cautiously tells Sebastian what little he knows, careful not to show Blaine in anything other than a positive light. He knows that Blaine and Sebastian are rivals, and is interested in hearing Sebastian’s perspective on events.

“Can I ask you something, Sebastian?” When Kurt sees the other man nod, he continues. “Wes told me that you and Blaine have known each other since high school and you’ve been rivals since the day you met. Why is that?”

“Blaine and I are the type of people who want to be top of the heap. I’m very straight-forward about what I want and how to get there. But Blaine Anderson? He’s a lot more devious than people give him credit for. Anderson puts on a mask with his dapper ways, and no-one can act more caring and sincere than him. But take away the façade… Blaine’s looking after number one. I could see this in high school. God knows what went on behind closed doors with certain members of the Warblers’ Council, because Blaine got all the solos. Every. Single. One.”

“Are you saying that Blaine is promiscuous?”

Kurt sees Sebastian’s expression change – was that a look of surprise? - but it quickly returns to its usual smug smile.

“Blaine used to go to Scandals, the local gay club, when he was a teenager, and he still does when he goes back home for the holidays. He’s always very popular at Tuesday’s Country Bear Nights. He’s such a cock slut.”

“I can’t believe that. Blaine has always been a gentleman with me.”

Sebastian raises his left eyebrow and smirks. “That’s not what I saw on the Internet on Sunday morning.”

Kurt’s cheeks redden, knowing that Sebastian has seen that video. “That was the first time.”

“Blaine’s always likes playing the long game. You know, the thrill of the chase. But once the prize has been landed, his interest starts to fade.”

Kurt isn’t sure what to say. Is he really some sort of prize Blaine’s added to his trophy case?

“At least I’m straight-forward and I’m not pretending to have feelings for anyone. I think you and I could take Elle magazine to great heights. I promise you this – I will always take care of you. After all, I’m here right now. Just say the word and I’ll help you sort out this mess.”

*****

When Kurt’s on his way home in the backseat of Sebastian’s car, his phone starts ringing. When he sees that it’s Blaine calling him, his thumb hovers over the options on the screen. Before lunch, he would have eagerly accepted the call to talk to Blaine. However, he needs time to digest what Sebastian has told him, so he declines the call.
When he exits the car, Kurt is blinded by flashing cameras. *Oh, god. They found out where I live.* Kurt can hear the press and bystanders calling out to him.

“How does it feel to be Blaine Anderson’s flavor of the week?”

“How could you do that to Sam?”

"Why do you live in such a dump when you have a rich sugar daddy?"

"I guess we now know why Anderson made you Vogue's fresh face."

Kurt pulls his head down and quickly enters his apartment building, saying “No comment.” When he enters the loft, he makes sure that the door is double-locked. Kurt slowly slides down the door until he’s sitting on the floor, curled up, with his face between his knees, trying to figure out what to do next. His initial instinct is to call Blaine to fix his problem and whisk him away from the paps.

However, is that really an option?

After all, Blaine was too busy for him earlier in the week. Blaine said he would call after the press conference, but instead Blaine had met with the New York Times to tell them his own version of the ‘unfortunate incident’. And then there was Wes’ phone call informing him that he was no longer required for the New York Fashion Week.

From what Sebastian has told him over lunch, Blaine is a self-serving sort of person. Sure, Blaine just tried to call him yesterday and on the way back from lunch, but why? Did Blaine want to rescind the Vogue contract offer? Tell him that they should keep a distance between them for longer? Would Blaine really help him out now?

Rachel also said that Blaine would toss him aside when he got what he wanted. Kurt *does* have other options besides Vogue, and maybe Rachel is right – he should look after numero uno. Kurt decides to give Blaine one last chance and calls him at the office.

“Mr. Anderson’s office. How can I help you?” an unknown female voice answers the phone.

“This is Kurt Hummel. I need to speak to Mr. Anderson urgently.”

“I’m sorry, but he’s in a meeting and cannot be disturbed. If you leave a message, I’ll make sure that he gets it.”

“Who are you? Is Tina there?”

“This is Cassie and I’m standing in for Tina while she’s at the printers. She won’t be back in the office until tomorrow. Would you like to leave a message?”

“Never mind,” Kurt replies tersely, and he presses the ‘end’ button on his phone.

Kurt heads towards the window and sees that the crowd has grown since he entered his Bushwick apartment building. Kurt’s finding it difficult to breathe. He just wants the nightmare to be over. He can only think of one way out of this mess. With trembling fingers, he makes a phone call.

“Okay, I’ll sign with Elle. Just get me out of here!”
“Relax, Kurt. You’re doing the right thing. Pack a suitcase and Dick will collect you. The rest of your things will be moved tomorrow.”

Chapter End Notes

I’m not expecting anyone to like this chapter. I want to reassure you that this is a Klaine story and we all know how those end :). There is no Kurtbastian end-game, mid-game or any game. I love Klaine and I hope you trust me to give you an interesting story that stays true to their characters. And of course plenty of delicious chapters with them together… later.

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. Here is the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics.

I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr.

Next up: Blaine finds out that Kurt has signed on at Elle Magazine.
September

Yesterday, Kurt Hummel signed a one-year modeling contract with Elle Magazine. The 19-year-old model started his meteoric rise to fame when he signed on with Vogue last February. Hummel was touted as their new ‘fresh face’ and was first seen on the cover of its May issue. He’s since been featured in every Vogue issue and was in Marc Jacobs’ advertising campaign last summer.

Sebastian Smythe, Elle’s editor-in-chief, reports, “We are happy to have Kurt on board with us at Elle and we have exciting plans for him to feature in every issue. Make sure to subscribe to the Elle newsletter, because we’ll release behind-the-scenes photos and news when Kurt starts working next week.”

Wesley Montgomery, Hummel’s agent at Fushion NYC, stated that Kurt is not available for comment. Montgomery denied rumors that Vogue dumped the fresh-faced model once the infamous Klainegate video was released. “Mr. Hummel’s contract with Vogue expires at the end of this month, and he’s been exploring a number of exciting offers on the table. The timing is purely coincidental.” - Fashionindustrynetwork.com

Blaine closes his eyes and resists the urge to throw his tablet against the wall. He’s shocked that Kurt has signed a modeling contract with Elle without telling him. Hadn’t they agreed to sit tight and speak after the press conference? Blaine now knows why Kurt hasn’t answered his phone or replied to the texts. In one single action, Kurt has brought on a media frenzy again.

Blaine’s stomach twists in knots. He has left countless voicemails and texts suggesting that they get away together this weekend. Tina has even booked a cottage in Woodstock through Airbnb. Not only is it the peak foliage weekend to see the autumn colors, they would have time to really talk away from the media circus in New York City. He has been hoping that Kurt would agree to be his boyfriend. What they have shared backstage at the diva-off has been tainted by the Klainegate video, yes, but doesn’t it mean anything to Kurt? The thing that hurts most of all about Kurt signing with Elle is that it feels like a personal rejection.

****

Blaine feels exhausted as he exits the elevator at Vogue’s executive level. He has just given an impromptu press conference outside the Vogue building upon his arrival. It went pretty well, with ‘We are sad to see Kurt Hummel go… It has nothing to do with the video on the Internet last weekend… There were many competitive offers before Fashion’s Night Out…We wish Kurt Hummel every success in the future…’

“Wait till I get my hands on that bastard! Kurt will be sorry he was ever born,” Tina exclaims when Blaine enters his office suite.
“Don’t be too harsh on Kurt. It’s been difficult for everybody since the diva-off. Can you arrange an emergency meeting for the management team at noon? We need to go over the next few issues to discuss their contents, without Kurt in the spreads.”

Blaine can hear Tina mumbling as he enters his office, “And to think I thought Kurt was perfect for you.”

On top of his desk is a formal notice from Wes informing him that Kurt will not be accepting Vogue’s contract offer. There is also a huge vase of white lilies. He hunts around the bouquet, pulls out an envelope and reads the message in the enclosed sympathy card.

*My thoughts are with you at your time of need – Sebastian*

Blaine rips up the card and shouts out, “Tina! Get these flowers out of here – I don’t want to see them anywhere in the building!”

*****

After an intense management meeting, where Blaine asks everyone to focus on finding Vogue a new ‘fresh face’ model, he returns to his office. Blaine’s so busy thinking about the effect of not having Kurt and Sam in upcoming issues that he startles when he hears Unique rushing into his office.

“Chandler! It’s got to be him that took the video backstage at the diva-off. I came right over as soon as I figured it out,” Unique exclaims, panting for breath.

“Slow down, girl. Sit down and calm yourself down. Can I get you some water?”

Unique nods and quickly sits down on the sofa, and continues talking as Blaine finds a seat on a nearby chair.

“Both Chandler and I have been on set this week, shooting for next month’s issue. Chandler has been acting skittish and startles when someone approaches him. Chandler’s acting strange, which is really saying something, because he’s normally all sorts of strange. Anyways, I decided to return to the dressing area a little earlier at lunchtime to clean the make-up brushes. Before I entered the area, I could hear Chandler on the phone, and he wasn’t happy.” Unique stops to take a sip of water.

“Oh, really? Do tell,” Blaine replies, prompting her to continue.

“I’m not sure who Chandler was talking to, but he was begging for a meeting. Chandler then went on to say that he doesn’t feel safe and he’s sure that everything will be linked back to him. Then I remembered that Chandler was loitering in the hallway backstage after the diva-off. You know, before I came back for the…umm…final touch-ups. He was also outside the backdoor when you left, and busy with his phone.”

“That’s very interesting, Unique. Thanks for letting me know. I didn’t see Chandler, but then again, I had another person on my mind at the time. Leave it with me and I’ll check it out.”

*****

After issuing instructions for Tina to summon Chandler to the office for a meeting, Blaine feels he can no longer put this off. He spends a few moments composing himself, going through what he is
going to say in his mind. Then he picks up his phone and calls Kurt. To his surprise, Kurt answers on the first ring.

“Blaine,” Kurt says sharply.

“Kurt.”

“I take it you know by now.”

“You think so? Couldn’t you have had at least told me yourself?”

“It all happened so quickly. There were the paparazzi at my door…. And I had met with Sebastian earlier in the day who said he would help me, dangling the Elle contract in my face.”

“You were with…. with Sebastian?”

“It doesn't matter who I was with, Blaine. What matters is that I was by myself. I needed you. I needed you around and you weren't there!”

“That’s not fair, Kurt, and you know it. I’ve been working day and night to fix the damage caused by the video and we agreed not to talk until after the press conference. I’ve been calling you nonstop ever since.”

“Oh, you mean the unfortunate incident? The one that you have distanced yourself from and have been telling your version of events about to the press?”

“You know that what’s in the media is PR stuff. Kurt, we need to talk. That’s why I suggested getting away this weekend.”

“I’m not interested.”

“What!? You’re not interested in talking with me? You need to know…”

Kurt interrupts, “What are you going to tell me? That what went on in the dressing room after the diva-off was a mistake? That you want me to be your friend? Ugh! I can’t deal with this right now! It was a stupid decision to talk to you. Rachel’s right. I need to look after myself for a change.”

Blaine is shocked to find that Kurt hangs up on him.

*****

“Ouch! That sounds like it was a painful conversation.”

Kurt quickly turns around from the window and replies, “Sebastian, I didn’t know you were here.”

“I hope you don’t mind that I let myself in. The door was open. I see that the movers are almost finished here. Your furniture has been placed in storage until you figure out what to do with it.”

“Oh… Right. I guess I’ll sell it all. This apartment has everything I need. God, it’s just another thing on my long list of things to do.”

“Consider it done. I’ll deposit the sale proceeds into your bank account. I’ve got a new phone for
you, with a new number. You can decide who you give the number to… or not.”

“Thanks… Ooh, wow. How did you get the new iPhone? It hasn’t been released yet.”

Sebastian smirks and replies, “I’ve got friends in low places. That’s all you need to know. I’ve already added my contact details. Call me if you need me for anything. In the meantime, take the week off to settle in. Robin, the head of the photo and art department, will contact you about work next Monday.”

After Sebastian has left, Kurt looks over his new phone, checking out the new features. He rolls his eyes when he sees that Sebastian had added himself in the contacts as *sex on a stick*.

*****

“No worries, Sam. I figured you would move to LA to be with Mercedes. Look, it’s probably not a good time anyways for you to return to New York. Give me your new address and I’ll have Amy arrange for your stuff to be sent to you.”

“Thanks, man. I knew you’d understand. Get someone to send me my work schedule and I’ll return to New York City to be on set.”

“Do you know what you plan to do at the end of the year when your contract is up for renewal?”

“Umm… I’m not sure. Mercedes and I are talking about it. She’s concerned that if I continue to model for Vogue, that people are still gonna talk about us and Kurt. But I don’t want to let you down, man. You’re my bro. Can I let you know next month?”

“Sure, take all the time you need. I think you and Mercedes need to focus on what’s best for your marriage.”

“So what have you been doing with yourself lately? I haven’t seen you in a few weeks,” Sam asks.

“Not much, I’ve been feeling down for obvious reasons. How about you?”

“I’m learning to surf, but it’s driving Mercedes crazy ‘cause the chicks keep checking me out. But a crazy Mercedes is pretty hot! Otherwise, Mercedes has been putting in long hours at the recording studio, so I’m home by myself a lot.”

“I know that feeling, Sam. It sucks.”

“Not really. I’ve always liked doodling stuff and with surfing, it’s given me an idea. A sort of comic about people who meet surfing on the weekends, hook up, and stuff like that.”

“This isn’t a modern-day Baywatch is it? I thought those days were long over.”

“Nah. It’s more like people who don’t feel like they fit in but do when they find each other.”

*****

Early-October
Blaine groans as the sun hits his eyes when the curtains are suddenly opened, and he sees Amy standing at the foot of his bed.

“I don’t have to be at work today. It’s Columbus Day weekend. Actually, what are you doing here? You have the day off.”

“Blaine, you’ve been moping around for a few weeks. I think I’ll scream if I hear Adele sing one more song about break-ups. You’ve also been binging on ice-cream and junk food. Don’t think for one moment that I don’t notice the Cheeto dust around your mouth.”

Blaine cheeks redden and he quickly wipes around his mouth. He thought he had been so careful sneaking in snacks but obviously not. He watches Amy rooting through his chest of drawers and pull out his running gear.

“Blaine, you need to go for a run and shake those cobwebs off. In the meantime, I’m going to prepare you a healthy breakfast. Then after you have eaten, I’d like a little talk with you.” Amy pauses and then adds with a hesitant voice, “If that’s okay with you?”

Blaine fondly rolls his eyes and replies, “Sure. It looks like a perfect morning for a run.”

*****

Blaine returns from his run, a little out of breath. He can’t believe how out of shape he’s become over the past few weeks. He looks around the penthouse, and it looks different now that Sam’s stuff is moved out. Before he can dwell on how lonely he feels without Sam and Kurt in his everyday life, Amy pops her head out from the kitchen. “Go take a shower. Breakfast will be ready in ten minutes.”

Blaine takes a quick shower, but spends the whole allotted time in the bathroom. He first shaves closely to remove any stubble. Then he squeezes a large dollop of hair product into the palm of his hand and carefully gels back his hair until it’s smooth and slick. He’s taken to gelling his hair on weekends – it makes him feel more in control on the outside. It’s a reminder of years ago, when everything was going his way.

After a breakfast consisting of a power smoothie and a vegetarian omelet, Amy goes to the couch and pats the seat next to her. Blaine pours two mugs of coffee and joins her.

“I really hate to see you this way, Blaine. I know you’re upset, but you need to pull yourself out of this slump before it starts to destroy you inside.”

Blaine sighs deeply and slumps down to rest his head on Amy’s shoulder. “I know; it’s just… I’ve tried to call Kurt, but his phone number has been terminated. I’ve gone over to his place, but the neighbors told me he has moved out with no forwarding address. Kurt has even blocked me on his social media accounts. I’ve lost Kurt forever and I’m not sure what I did wrong. It… really hurts.”

“You’re grieving for someone you’ve lost. You won’t believe me now, but over time, that hurt will slowly fade away. Everything has a way of working out, one way or the other. Your happiness doesn’t depend upon one person or thing. You have to find happiness deep within yourself. You are a wonderful man and you will bounce back.”

“Thanks, Amy. You’re pretty wonderful too.”
Amy pauses for a few minutes before she continues speaking. “Do you know what I liked best about Kurt? It wasn’t anything particular about him – although Kurt’s a remarkable young man. It was his effect on you. Instead of burrowing yourself away at work and going to those public events with Sam, he gave you strength to open up and try new things.”

“Well, you’re right about that. Kurt has given me an entirely new perspective on life. I had so much fun with him exploring new places and experiencing new things. I’m really going to miss our dates and knocking things off our bucket list.”

“Who’s to say that you can’t still go on checking things off your list? Bucket lists don’t just go away when you’re on your own. I think you should find something to channel your energies into. Something that makes you happy and creative. Something you do just for yourself.”

“I’ve always had music to help me through bad times, but when I sit down at the piano now, my fingers refuse to find the keys. I feel haunted by Kurt’s voice singing ‘Blackbird’ to me.”

“Then try a new hobby. You’ll find your way back to music when you’re ready.”

Blaine mulls this over in his mind, because Amy’s right – he has spent too much time wallowing. He thinks back to his conversation with Sam last week. Sam’s trying out new things with his surfer comic idea, and who knows where that will lead. “Well, I do like a good crafts project. I haven’t scrapbooked for a while. Maybe…”

Amy quickly interrupts. “Can I be honest? I don’t think scrapbooking is a good idea right now. You’ll focus on the past and the memories. You need to think about making new memories before you get the paper and stickers out.”

“I guess you’re right. But what else can I do?”

Amy rattles a list of potential hobbies that she has researched on the Internet over the past few days, and Blaine interrupts her when she says something that interests him.

“Photography?”

“When you think about it, photography’s perfect. When you’re taking photos, it makes you look at what’s in front of you from a different perspective. Often you see things through the camera that you normally wouldn’t notice. You can go out and have new experiences and capture new memories. If you get stuck for ideas, there are tons of communities on the Internet, including ones that give you a weekly challenge to complete.”

“I love taking pictures with my phone, so maybe this isn’t a bad idea.”

“You can keep taking them with your phone, buy a fancy camera or take a course about the more technical aspects of photography. I’m sure that the camera guys at work can show you a trick or two.”

“How did you get to be so smart?” Blaine asks.

“I don’t know about that,” Amy replies, blushing. “Remember, Blaine, you’re not alone. There are a lot of people, including me, who want you to be happy and who are here to support you.”

When Amy eventually leaves, Blaine feels a little bit better. He goes to the Internet and googles
‘creative photography’.

****

“Chandler Kiel is here to see you,” Tina announces.

“Send him in.”

When Blaine looks up from his computer, he sees Chandler enter, trembling. Chandler glances at the casual seating area in the office, but Blaine indicates for Chandler to sit on the chair in front of his desk. When he sees Chandler squinting from the sunlight pouring through the window, Blaine adjusts the window blinds so Chandler’s a little bit more comfortable. This isn’t a CIA interrogation, after all.

“Why?”

“Why what?” Chandler responds with a trace of defiance.

“We can play this one of two ways. You either talk to me truthfully now about the video or we can have a meeting in an hour’s time with the lawyers and the police. So, I’ll ask you again - why?”

Chandler slumps in his chair and passes a hand over his face. “Ever since Kurt joined Vogue last February, you’ve had it in for me. I’m never involved in the important photo shoots anymore. Kurt gave me the cold shoulder when I was trying to be friendly. When someone else said he would take care of me if I gave him some information, I decided to take him up on the offer.”

“You have been used on plenty of photo shoots, just not the ones where Kurt has been a model. Kurt told me you made him feel uncomfortable, that you were bombarding him with inappropriate texts.”

“I was trying to make Kurt like me,” Chandler whines.

“Kurt assured both me and HR that it wasn’t a case of sexual harassment. So, it was decided to allow you to stay, but to remove you from any work where Kurt was the model. Now back to the video. How did you take the video?”

“I was coming backstage to talk to you about getting reinstated onto the important photo shoots. I figured you would be in a good mood after winning the diva-off. I could hear you talking to someone, so I cracked open the door to peek. When you were standing so close to each other and holding Kurt’s hand against your heart, I decided to take a video.”

Blaine sighs. He’d been so consumed in everything Kurt at the time that he hadn’t noticed that the door was ajar. “The employment handbook contains a strict privacy policy about staff, which includes both Kurt and myself. Keeping my private life to myself is very important to me.”

“Honestly, I didn’t think he would put it up on the Internet.”

“So who did post the video to the Internet?”

“Sebastian Smythe. You won’t tell him I told you, will you?”

Blaine decides not to answer this question and pushes a letter across the table. “This is a letter of your employment termination. You will not be getting a reference letter. Go pack up your things and get
Once Chandler has dashed away, Blaine thinks about the video and the wreckage that it has caused. Blaine isn’t surprised that it was Sebastian behind the video – he had expected it. If Kurt only knew how he had been manipulated. Sebastian has created this problem in order to get Kurt to move over to Elle magazine.

Blaine is faced with an important choice. He can hold on to his anger and bitterness – take legal action, find a way for Kurt to learn about the video’s culprits, and seek revenge against Sebastian. However, that won’t get him Kurt back - the damage is already done. Or Blaine can let the anger and bitterness go – get on with his life, be a better man than Sebastian, and lead Vogue to become the best fashion magazine based on its merits.

Tina buzzes the intercom “Do you want me to get Jenni in Legal?”

“Don’t bother, Tina. It’s not worth it.”

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“I’ll summarize what we agreed in the meeting. The November issue goes as planned, pulling photos of Kurt from the spreads. December is the usual holiday issue and the main features will be one on cocktail dresses and an accessory gift guide for fashionistas.”

Blaine looks around the table and sees the Vogue managers furiously typing notes. Everyone looks happy with the new plans for future issues. The dramas of the ‘Klainegate’ video and Kurt moving to Elle Magazine have blown over. The media is now focused on identifying the celebrity who was involved in a threesome – reported in the British tabloids, but not named.

“January will be the India-inspired theme. We’ll send some staff to Mumbai to cover its Fashion Week, which is happening in a couple of weeks. Vogue India will be responsible for the main article and photo spread. We’ll be looking outside our normal advertisers for this issue – Air India, travel agents and luxury resorts.”

Blaine smiles at everyone and adds, “We’ll have the issue wrapped up by mid-December so that everyone can have time off over the Christmas holidays if they want to. I don’t know about you, but I could sure use some downtime. It’s been a busy and crazy year.”

When the meeting is over, Blaine leans over Isabelle and whispers, “Are you available for a drink after work? I need to talk to you.”

“Sure, Blaine. Call me when you’re ready to leave.”

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Once two glasses of wine and some nibbles have been served in the secluded booth, Isabelle immediately starts the conversation. “This is a great idea, Blaine. I don’t feel as if we’ve had a chance to really talk since Fashion’s Night Out. I’ve been worried about you. How are you doing?”

“I’m doing okay. The paparazzi aren’t hassling me anymore. I don’t envy the celebrity involved in the threesome when his name is found out. I’m glad that the New York Fashion week is now over. Thank god my mother came to New York to help me out. The press was a little bit more respectful about their questions with her by my side.”
“Your mother is great. She could be a model herself.”

“Please don’t tell her that. You’ll only give her ideas. Life’s complicated enough at the moment.”

“So, have you spoken to Kurt lately?”

“The last time we spoke was the day Elle announced that Kurt was their new model. Let’s just say that the conversation didn’t go very well. Kurt’s so angry at me, like the whole video drama was my fault. I left it for a week for both of us to calm down and figure out where we go from here, but now his old phone number has been disconnected, and he’s moved out of his apartment. He’s left no way for me to contact him. So, Kurt is the one who’ll have to get in touch with me if he wants to, but I’m not holding my breath for that one.”

“You really care for Kurt, don’t you?”

“I really do, and I always will, only, I’ve been reminded recently that I need to stay focused on myself.”

“That sounds like a good idea, Blaine. Is there anything I can do to help?”

“As a matter of fact, there is. I feel like I need to get away from New York and everything that’s happened over the past month. I enjoyed myself on my trip to India last March – meeting people at the local Vogue office, talking to designers and figuring out the fashion trends. Since I was the driving force behind the India-inspired issue for January, it feels like my baby. I want to go to India with the crew in a few weeks’ time.”

“That’s a great idea. I agree you need to get out of New York and I think you should go. Besides, having the Anderson touch on location will make for a better issue.”

“If you’re willing, I’d like you to take over things in New York while I’m gone. I trust your judgment in wrapping up the November issue.”

“I’m honored that you’ve asked me. I’m more than happy with that.”

“I knew I could count on you,” Blaine replies as he pours them another glass of wine.

“When was the last time you have taken a vacation?” Isabelle asks.

“Not since last Christmas. Why do you ask?”

“If you’re going all the way to India for its Fashion Week, why don’t you take an extra week or two for yourself and relax? I think it would do you good to spend time there without work pressure and responsibilities.”

“Now that you mention it, a vacation sounds really, really good right now. I’ve always wanted to see the Taj Mahal. Last March, people were telling me about old Raj palaces that have been converted into hotels. They sound pretty cool. So yeah, a trip to Agra and Rajasthan sounds perfect. Do you mind holding down the fort for an extra two weeks? You would also be responsible for getting the December issue finalized.”

“Of course not, Blaine. I can do articles about cocktail dresses and gift fashion accessories in my
“Sleep.”

After warm hugs goodbye, Blaine walks towards the office to meet Bentley, thinking about things he needs to pack for a three-week trip. Along the way he sees a hanging sign for a camera shop. He notices that the ‘Open’ sign is still hanging on the window, and with a sense of excitement, he enters the shop.

Chapter End Notes

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. Here is the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics. I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr.

The KurtBigBang started last week and there are already some really great stories posted. Completed stories, 15k word minimum, Kurt is the main character, artwork and/or videos, and all ships. I had the privilege of being the beta for Lilyvandersteen’s story, Picture Perfect which was posted last Sunday. I encourage you all to read it.

Next up: Kurt at Elle Magazine
“Today, we’re shooting the article about boots for the November issue. We’re recreating iconic images of boots in popular culture, slightly updated for new boots that can be bought from our advertisers.”

“I don’t have to wear UGG boots, do I?” Kurt asks tentatively, wondering if he could even bear to place his feet in that walking fashion disaster.

Robin, the head of Photography and Art, laughs out loud. “No, we have other plans for you.” He pulls out a sparkling red thigh-high boot with a six-inch stiletto heel.

Kurt instantly recognizes the footwear from Kinky Boots. He hasn’t been able to see the play on Broadway, but he has enjoyed the movie.

“I-I-I’m not going to be dressed as a drag queen, am I? ‘Cause I can’t do that. It would definitely give my father another heart attack.”

“No, you won’t have a drag queen look. There might be parts of the outfit that are usually seen on women, but you’re definitely going to look all man.”

Kurt gives a polite smile at his new boss at Elle Magazine. So maybe he can do this – after all, he’s always firmly believed that fashion has no gender boundaries.

Kurt is whisked away to the dressing area to get ready for the shoot. He needs to lie down on the floor to squeeze into the red hot-pants and do up the top button. He begs the stylist to loosen the black corset-styled top that has two nude sleeves with an intricate sequin design. Kurt then sits down in the make-up area, where the hair stylist uses his gelled-up fingers to spike Kurt’s hair up this way and that. When Kurt looks at the end result in the mirror, he gasps – he looks like he just got out of bed after a night of fantastic sex. The make-up artist brushes glittery gold eye shadow across his eyelids and then applies a thick line of black eyeliner to make his eyes pop in the photos.

Kurt walks to the set alone and sits on a chair with six pairs of red boots in different sizes in front of him. He carefully tries the boots on and is relieved that he finds the right size on the fourth attempt. The long boot fits snugly over his calves and stops just over the middle of his thigh. Once both boots are on, Kurt stands up, wobbling a bit because of the high spiky heel. He slowly walks back and forth to get used to the feel – the boots are more comfortable than he thought they would be.

“Do you need some time to get used to the boots?” Wyatt, the chief photographer, asks.

“No, I’m good to go. I’ve got experience with platform boots from my high school show choir days.
Can you believe that I once had to dress as Lady Gaga in her ‘Bad Romance’ outfit?"

Soon the camera is snapping as instructions are called out and Kurt listens carefully before striking a new pose. With every new position, he gains confidence, and his experience on set at Vogue helps. But somehow it doesn’t feel quite the same as a photo shoot at Vogue. There’s no Unique gently teasing him as she touches up his make-up. There’s no Liam saying quiet words to bolster his confidence as he checks the pins on his outfit. There’s no Steve behind the lighting giving him a thumbs-up. And there’s no Blaine. As the camera clicks away, Kurt thinks of Blaine’s ‘Wannabe’ performance and can’t help but smile.

“No smile, Kurt. That’s not the look we’re after. Now give me… sultry.”

After an hour or so, the photo shoot stops for lunch, and Kurt is told he can change. He quickly changes into his comfortable yoga pants and his favorite Wicked T-shirt, which has a witch’s hat screen-printed on the front and “Everyone Deserves to Fly” written in cursive underneath. Kurt goes to the canteen, selects his food and sits at a table by himself. He feels awkward as others stare at him and then return to their own private conversations. Sure, he’s the new kid on the block, but Kurt didn’t expect the cold shoulder he’s getting from everyone. He can’t help but think how different the atmosphere is here compared to Vogue, where people were so friendly, warm and welcoming.

A loud-sounding bell indicates that the lunch hour is over. He sees a Nancy Sinatra look-alike dressed in a white mini dress and boots enter the set with a guitar in her hands. Kurt slowly walks over to Robin to find out when he’s next needed.

“No till Wednesday, but you have lots to do to get ready for it.”

Robin leads him out of the photo studio, through a narrow hallway or two, and Kurt gulps when he enters a mirrored room with finely polished wooden floors… and a stripper pole.

A woman bounds up to him, smiling brightly.

“Hi! I’m Viveca. I like your T-shirt, and I hope that you really are ready to fly. I’m gonna teach you how to work the pole. Don’t look so scared – it isn’t going to bite you.”

Kurt turns around and gives Robin a questioning look.

“On Wednesday, we’re going to shoot photos of you posing on the pole. You need to get comfortable with it beforehand. Any problems?”

“I’m not going to have to act like a stripper, am I? Because no, I can’t do that. Remember me telling you that my dad’s got a weak heart?”

“Relax, Kurt. Your clothes will stay on. We want you to pose in some of the classic pole dancing positions. We want it to look sexy, but classy.”

Kurt slowly nods and wonders what he’s gotten himself into. That afternoon, Viveca takes him through some basic pole dancing positions and spins, and on Tuesday, they work through more advanced tricks like the Z-seat, the Spinning Straddle, and the Diamond Cut. Kurt has never been so grateful for his yoga training, because the pole dancing uses every muscle in his body.

“You’re a natural, Kurt. You could be a pro.”
“Thanks, Viv… I think? You know, this is a lot more fun than I thought it would be. I’m really impressed with how physically fit you need to be to do even the basic moves.”

“Don’t give up your day job, tiger. Take that back – I’d be very interested in a private lap dance later,” Sebastian smirks as he enters the studio.

Kurt rolls his eyes and gives Sebastian his trademarked bitch-face. “Do I look like a stripper?”

Sebastian bumps his shoulder against Kurt’s. “Just messin’ with you. But speaking of strippers, I thought we should go to Eastern Bloc’s tonight to catch the action on the pole. You might learn a trick or two.”

“Okaaay. I’ve never been to a strip club before. Is the club… umm… sleazy?”

Sebastian shrugs his shoulders. “I wouldn’t call it sleazy… Maybe interesting is a better word. We’ll be fine going on a Tuesday night. I’ll be right with you the entire time, princess, don’t you worry.”

Kurt agrees, and arrangements are made to meet later. Kurt quietly laughs to himself because there is no way he’s going to bump into dapper Blaine at this sort of club.

And New York is full of all sorts of experiences, right?

*****

When Wednesday’s photo shoot is done, Kurt is aching all over. He rubs the balls of his feet after he’s taken the red kinky boots off. His legs feel like jelly and his quads are literally shaking, and he doesn’t feel he can lift anything heavier than a feather because his biceps are so sore. Thank god Robin gave him the rest of the week off. He plans to spend the whole time soaking in the tub.

Last night, at the Eastern Bloc Strip Club, was interesting to say the least. Kurt did get some ideas for poses from the professional pole dancers and appreciated their performances even more after his sessions with Viveca. The bartenders only wearing speedos definitely got his attention. When Kurt noticed men leering at him, he stuck close to Sebastian for the rest of the night. It was as if Sebastian couldn’t help saying sleazy pick-up lines to him, and it was exhausting having to come up with retorts after a day practicing on the pole. He left the club by 11pm, while Sebastian was arranging for a private lap dance with one of the dancers.

After Kurt has changed into his own clothes, he goes to the techies’ area to see the shots taken that day. Kurt puffs out a deep breath when he sees the images of himself on the computer – he’s never seen himself look like this before. The outfit, with the make-up and hair, make him look like he’s ready for a racy night out on the town. The various positions on the pole make him look masculine, with bulging arm and leg muscles. He has a sultry pout on his lips and his expression conveys that he’s in charge and can get any person he wants.

Kurt likes the look, but it doesn’t feel like it’s the real him. The photos are entirely different from the ones taken at Vogue, with his smiling face and sparkling eyes – conveying a message of hope and innocence. With him dressed up like a Broadway part, it feels like a copycat idea from Vogue’s Hamilton-inspired spread - and just a bit tacky.

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“But you’ve gotta give me a job. Vogue fired me! With no reference, I have nowhere else to go!”
Sebastian sees Chandler pacing back and forth in his office, unable to control his frustration. “I don’t have to do anything. You got the money for your services, now scram.”

“Blaine Anderson knows you were behind it… He forced it out of me. He’s going to go after us and I need your protection.”

Sebastian is pleased with the small confirmation that Anderson definitely knows. Sebastian figures that Anderson had already worked it out for himself.

Chandler continues to rant, “You can’t treat me like this. I’ll tell the press what you’ve done!”

Sebastian sympathizes with Chandler’s predicament, but there’s no way he’s going to hire him. If Chandler was a mole inside Vogue, he could become a mole inside Elle. Chandler has proven that he isn’t a trustworthy person.

“Oh, please - save your sob story for your mother. If Anderson was planning to go after me, he would have done it weeks ago. Do you really believe that the press will believe you? There is nothing that traces me back to the video. When the press reports that you were behind it, Anderson won’t have any choice but to start legal proceedings against you. I suggest that you go back home to Ohio. If you get lucky, you can work for Wilson and be surrounded by beefy football player look-alike models.”

*****

“Don’t tell me you’re not into basketball. I would have thought you would like ogling tall man in shorts,” Sebastian remarks, and he dips a chicken wing into the blue cheese sauce.

“If I wanted to see tall men’s legs, I’d watch swimming. Speedos are more my thing,” Kurt snarks back. His cheeks redden at the image of Blaine in his tight-fitting red bikini pants. Yes, a much better image than sweaty men running back and forth for the sake of a ball and a hoop.

They are with a few of Sebastian’s friends for their usual Monday night get-together. Kurt takes a look around the GYM Sportsbar, touted as the friendliest gay sports bar in New York City. It’s got a relaxed atmosphere and Kurt understands why Sebastian likes hanging out here with his friends. There are loads of TV screens dotted around the bar, but Kurt notices that nobody’s paying attention to the game – they’re too busy watching each other.

“Did you check out the blond at the end of the bar? He’s going to be mine later,” Randy whispers, who is sitting across from Kurt.

“Okay, but I’ve got dibs on Mr. Cowboy Boots over there. He can ride my cock anytime,” Woody retorts.

“So, Kurt, who do you have your eye on? Or are you saving yourself for me?” Sebastian asks.

Kurt coughs as he tries to swallow down the bite of his shrimp tempura roll in his mouth. The guys around the table are laughing, but Sebastian pulls his chair closer to Kurt.

“Hey, I’m only joking. Kurt, you’ve got to loosen up a bit. We’ve gotta get you laid. Tell me who you like the look of and I’ll get him over here to join us.”
Kurt is thankful he doesn’t have to answer Sebastian because just then the bar explodes with cheers when Hussan Whiteside scores a goal during the very last second of the game.

Randy immediately signals the server to bring them the bill. “The game’s over. Man, the Heat were on fire tonight. Now let’s go down to the locker room and turn up the heat ourselves.”

Whilst everyone at the table takes a final look at the guys in the bar, Kurt leans towards Sebastian and asks, “This place has a locker room?”

“It’s the name of the room in the basement that has good music to dance to. It’s got soft lighting, making it easier to get close and personal,” Sebastian replies, waggling his eyebrows.

“I think I’ll take a rain check. I’d like to go home now. It was a long day at the photo shoot and I have to be back on set by 8am.”

“Okay, princess. I’ll just text Dick to come pick you up.”

Sebastian swiftly moves to the front door, and Kurt races to catch up. By the time they get to the curb, Dick has arrived with Sebastian’s car. Before Kurt can open the car door, Sebastian has already returned to the bar.

“No wonder you call him princess. What’s up with him?” Randy asks when he sees Sebastian enter the locker room.

“Lay off him, guys. He’s 19 years old and a cherry-boy. I give it six months hanging out with us and he’ll be hooking up with guys left, right and center.”

“But hasn’t he been in New York for almost a year? He’s so uptight,” Woody remarks.

“He hasn’t kept the right sort of company. You know how dorky and uptight they are over at Vogue. The Elle factor will rub off on him sooner or later. Now enough talking… the brunet pale-faced twink over there is mine tonight. He looks like a screamer.”

*****

Kurt slumps back into his seat in the car and closes his eyes, trying to block out the rap music blaring from the car stereo system. He knows that Sebastian is really making an effort to have him settle into his new life at Elle. Sebastian’s friends are smart, sophisticated and confident. They are friendly towards him, and Kurt can tell they make an effort to try and keep their conversations relatively PG when he’s around. But in spite or because of their efforts – he doesn’t know which - Kurt has certainly learnt a lot about the gay scene in New York.

Sebastian and his friends are the type of guys who throw themselves around in a series of one-night hookups that never seem to end. They’re proud of it and like nothing better than to boast about their conquests the next day. It’s been a learning experience, but Kurt thinks it’s been a valuable one, for as much as he can admire their dedication to the cause, Kurt knows it’s not the lifestyle for him.

Hayley is no longer his PR agent (she was fired by Sebastian, who said Kurt didn’t need a PR agent, and certainly not an agent connected with Vogue), but Kurt does remember how she stressed that each public action does have consequences and he needs to make his personal life work with his values and beliefs. So, no, he’s not going to have random hookups. The Klainegate video has already proved how fast things can escalate.
Kurt is grateful that Sebastian never mentions Blaine, Vogue or the video. It would be so awkward, and Kurt wouldn’t know what to say. In spite of keeping busy at Elle during the day and in the evenings with Sebastian, he feels nostalgic for the days at Vogue… and for Blaine. He longs for the comradery at Vogue and how everyone truly cared for him. If he’s honest with himself, he misses Blaine even more – the shy smile that Blaine reserves only for him, Blaine’s excitement when they are doing something new on the weekends, the small thoughtful things Blaine does for him each day… Kurt wonders what Blaine is doing now. Blaine is probably stretched out on his sofa, watching the Gilmore Girls Revival on Netflix, laughing at Lorelai’s whip-smart remarks, picking up the little jokes and obscure pop culture references.

Kurt knows that there’s no going back. He has burnt his bridges with Vogue and with Blaine when he made the decision to work for Elle. But that doesn’t make the heartache go away – it just leaves a dull ache thinking about what might have been.

*****

“Amy, I’m home!” Blaine shouts as he sets down the suitcases. He gives her a huge hug when she rushes from the kitchen.

“You look fantastic, Blaine – so tanned and my god, your hair has gotten so long! India must really have suited you. I see that you have even picked up some new clothes.”

Blaine twirls around in his new Indian Kurti shirt - a hand-embroidered tunic. “I had to buy another suitcase, I bought so much.”

“I can see I’ll be busy for days with the laundry. So, how was the trip?”

“It was fantastic. The first week was super busy attending events at Mumbai’s Fashion Week and figuring out plans for the January issue. In spite of that, I loved every minute of it. I met so many different sorts of people and saw different designs and materials. It gave me so many ideas that went beyond the India-inspired issue.”

“I’m glad that work went well, but I’m more interested in the last two weeks – your holiday.”

“It was amazing. The sites were unbelievable – the Taj Mahal in Agra, the Mehrangarh Fort in Jodpur, the fort in Jaisalmer… The list goes on and on and on. I stayed in the old Rajs’ palaces that have been converted into hotels. Those Rajs certainly knew a thing or two about luxury. Half a suitcase is full of toiletries from the bathrooms for you.”

Amy smiles broadly at the news of these little treats. Leave it to Blaine to think of others, even when he’s taking a shower on holiday.

“That camera I bought before I left was the best idea ever. Every time I went out exploring, I felt all five senses come alive – the smells of the street food, the colors of the women’s skirts and Chunari, the constant noise of the busy street. Did you know that cows roam freely on the smaller roads? Well, anyways, I wanted to capture it all with my camera. India is also a country of contrasts, with extreme poverty and wealth. I was able to see this more clearly as I was taking photos.”

“I’m glad that you enjoyed the new camera. So, when am I going to see the photos?”

“Maybe next weekend. I took so many pictures that I had to buy an extra memory card for the
camera. I’ll have to whittle down the 12,000 images to maybe a thousand for you to take a look at. I might have gone a little crazy taking photos of the little kids in the villages.”

Amy’s eyes widen, wondering how much time it will take to look at a thousand photos. She knows that it’s so worth it, to see Blaine so excited again.

*****

“Thanks, Isabelle. It looks like you’ve got everything under control. Are you still planning to be in New York over the holidays in December?”

“Yes, Blaine. Now go book that flight to Ohio so that you can be with your family for Christmas. By the way, those new ideas you have are truly inspiring. I can’t wait to talk about them at the next management meeting. I’ll catch you later,” Isabelle replies, as she makes her way out of the office.

Even though it’s the first day back to work from his India trip, Blaine feels really good about things. Isabelle has proved to be a good choice as the acting editor-in-chief because everything is smoothly humming along at Vogue. Sure, there are little things that need his attention, but they aren’t so urgent and he can deal with them over the course of the week. Blaine looks over his calendar to see what events he needs to attend next month. His heart sinks when he sees the Whitney Art Party in his diary in a few weeks time.

The fundraiser for the Whitney Museum of American Arts is a must-attend as Vogue covers the event each year. It’s a highlight in the City’s art world calendar and everybody who’s anybody attends – and that includes Sebastian Smythe. The Smythe family are known for their generous donations, so no doubt Sebastian will be at a high-profile table… with Kurt. There is no doubt in Blaine’s mind that Kurt will be there. This will be the first opportunity that Sebastian will be able to publicly gloat in front of Blaine.

Blaine knows he will need someone with him – to support him throughout the event, but more importantly to help him out seeing Kurt for the first time since the diva-off. He immediately discounts Tina. God knows if he could get her claws out of Kurt when she sees him. Sam is definitely a no, although he’s sure his friend would fly to New York to help him out. However, it would only fuel the media’s interest in Blam and Klaine again. He doesn’t want to ask his mother – although she would help in a heartbeat – as he would look like such a mama’s boy after she helped him out during the New York Fashion Week last month. He then gets an idea whom to ask and picks up his phone.

“Squirt! You’re back from India. I take it you’re still in one piece? Any Delhi belly?” Cooper asks.

“Let’s just say I’m not going to be eating spicy food anytime soon. Hey, I was wondering if you could come to New York in November?”

Blaine leans back in his chair, and explains about the Whitney Art Party and the extremely high likelihood that he would see Kurt again.

“No worries. I’m happy to help out. The Anderbros will rule the event!”

“Thanks, Coop. I’m so glad that I can count on you. I’ll book your flights for that weekend and you can stay with me. Just one thing…”

“What’s that, little bro?”
“It’s going to be so awkward seeing Kurt again. Promise me you won’t make a scene. No pointing fingers, no accusations – I want to keep things low-key.”

“Don’t worry about me, squirt. I’m a great actor and I know how to behave myself in public.”

Blaine rolls his eyes at this last comment. Cooper’s acting skills is exactly what he’s worried about.

*****

The next weekend, Blaine spends time going through the photos taken in India, reminiscing about all the great times he had on his trip. After dinner, he decides to watch ‘3 Idiots’, a Bollywood blockbuster he picked up in Mumbai. Blaine frowns to himself when his phone starts to ring - he was really enjoying the impromptu dance performance. He pauses the DVD and eagerly accepts the call when he sees Sam’s face on his phone screen.

“Sam! I’ve been trying to get hold of you for days.”

“Sorry, dude. I’ve been catching the waves. What’s up?”

“I took a look at those scans you sent me. You’re too modest about your doodles. The comic is really, really good. I would totally read more of it.”

“Really? I mean, even Mercedes likes it, but I don’t know. What could I do with this?”

“Have you thought about starting a web comic? Who knows, it could get really popular and before you know it, some newspaper empire might want to syndicate it.”

“Well, I like to mess about on my computer, so I could try to create it electronically. What do you think of the story?”

“The characters are fun and they get themselves into really interesting situations. I bet there will be Krian fans that get into this in a big way.”

“That’s a good idea. I’ll think about it. Maybe post something on Tumblr. I’ll send you a draft first so you can let me know what you think.”

Blaine can hear Sam take a deep breath on the other end of the line. He knows Sam well enough to know that he has bad news, but doesn’t want to say it.

“Look, dude. Mercedes and I have talked about our future lately. I’m not sure if I want to be a model any more. You know, when I met you ten years ago, I really wanted to be a country singer. But then I started hanging out with you and let you take pictures of me for your blog. Then everything snowballed with the underwear ad and the Vogue contract. I’m not sure what I wanna do with my life. I’ve got Mercedes now and we’re thinking about starting a family. Maybe it’s time to grow up and find a job that I can have until I’m old.”

“I get it, Sam. I wasn’t expecting you to renew your contract with Vogue. If there’s one thing I’ve learnt this year, it’s that exploring new options is a really good thing. You’re crazy talented, man. Go perform at some local country bars and see if you enjoy it.”

“Thanks, bro. It really means a lot to me that you’re okay with things. So, what are you doing tomorrow night? Going to any Halloween parties? What are you dressing up as?”
“I’m going to Isabelle’s for her infamous annual Halloween party. This year’s theme is superheroes. I just got back from India and haven’t had a chance to pick up a costume, so I’ll go as Nightbird.”

When they eventually finish their call, Blaine thinks that Sam is making the right move. Blaine might not like the decision because if Sam doesn’t work for Vogue, he won’t see Sam very often. However, he’s determined to support Sam the same way Sam has helped him all these years. Blaine makes a mental note to research web comics tomorrow. But for now, he wants to get back to the movie. Those three guys are real idiots when they’re dancing.

Chapter End Notes

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. Here is the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics.

I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr.

The Kurt Big Bang is still posting new completed stories. Gingerfic has posted a wonderful story, The Edge of Glory. Sunshineoptimisman, one of my favorite writers, has started posting her new multi-chapter story, Callaway Place. I urge you to check out both these stories.

Next up: Kurt and Blaine meet up at the Whitney Art Party.
Kurt didn’t set the alarm clock the night before, so he wakes up naturally in the late morning. He takes a long hot shower and spends double the usual time on his moisturizing routine. When he’s finally ready for the day, it’s almost noon. He leisurely strolls to the corner bodega, pulling his jacket lapels up to fend off the cold wind.

“Hey, Kurt. I was expecting you earlier. You must have had a late one last night. What did you get up to on Halloween?” Samar, the newsagent, greets him as he pulls out a few issues of Elle from under the counter.

“I stayed home last night, greeting trick-or-treaters. After all, Halloween was invented for children. They were so adorable in their outfits.”

Kurt hopes this excuse is plausible, because he ended up alone on Halloween night, staying up late polishing off the left-over candy and watching The Rocky Horror Picture Show. Sure, Sebastian had invited him out to a party at a gay nightclub and even picked out matching costumes for them. Kurt couldn’t imagine wearing the costume at a gay club – it was a burgundy-colored spandex one piece outfit, so tightly fitting that it left nothing to the imagination. Kurt didn’t want photos of himself dressed like that showing up on the Internet the next day. After all, he has his dad’s health to consider.


“Good to know. I’m getting a few more things and then you can ring me up.”

Kurt heads to the refrigerated section and picks up some fat-free milk, then goes along another aisle to pick up some Indian herbal tea. He pauses at the magazine rack, then quickly grabs the new Vogue issue.

After paying, Kurt walks to Gramercy Park. He had planned to sit on a park bench and drink a grande non-fat mocha while pouring over the Elle issue, but the cool wind is whipping across his face and the clouds look dark. Kurt abandons the park and quickly goes back home to 8 Gramercy Park South.

After climbing a flight of stairs (there’s an elevator in the building, but using the stairs is one more way Kurt can keep fit), he enters his one-bedroom apartment and turns on the electric kettle to make a pot of Indian herbal tea. He looks around the main room and can see his knick-knacks and personal items, but in spite of them, it doesn’t feel like home. Even though the furniture that came with the condo is sleek and ultra-modern, it’s not very comfortable. The super-king-sized bed takes up most of the bedroom’s space. Most nights, he feels lost in the huge bed on his own, so he sleeps with
Bruce, his boyfriend pillow.

Sebastian had offered the services of his interior designer if he wanted anything changed, but Kurt declined, knowing that to make this his home, he would have to decorate it by himself. Kurt has already bought posters of his favorite Broadway musicals and plans to replace the modern abstract paintings on the wall once the posters have been framed. Even so, the condo needs little warm homey touches to make the space feel like his. Normally, Kurt would be excited to explore the little markets around New York City, but he dreads doing it now because it will remind him of Blaine. They had so much fun at the Brooklyn Flea Market together. That day had been pretty perfect, with Blaine getting more enthusiastic and confident as they explored the stalls. After sharing that experience with Blaine, he’s not looking forward to shopping on his own.

He takes a close look at himself on Elle’s cover - they have used one of the photos of him in the kinky boots posing on the dance pole. Elle has selected a photo that makes him look a bit slutty. He quickly scans the issue and sees the full spread about boots. He covers the bottom of each photo and tries to guess the iconic scene. After he’s guesses *Pretty Woman* and imagines Julia Roberts in similar black PVC thigh-boots, Kurt realizes that he hasn’t had the usual morning call from his father when a new issue goes on sale. He takes his cup of tea and sits down on the sofa. He shifts around, not able to get comfortable, so he gets a pillow from the bedroom and lies down on the sofa instead.

“Hi, Dad. I was expecting you to call earlier today. Did you see this month’s issue of Elle?”

“Yeah, I saw it, buddy. Sorry I didn’t call sooner. I had to get to the garage early to make sure Mrs. McMillan’s car was ready before noon. Gimme a sec – I’ll close the office door.”

Kurt waits patiently, hearing his father tell Timmy to take over and which cars to work on. He’s surprised that his father is closing the office door. Usually, the other mechanics are fighting over the phone to congratulate him and talk about the magazine photos.

“I’m back, son.”

“So, what did you think of the Elle issue? I knew I would be on the cover.”

“You certainly look different, kiddo. I wasn’t expecting to see you on a stripper pole. They didn’t make you do anything….”

“No, I didn’t strip, if that’s what you’re thinking. Besides, it’s called a dance pole and there are lots of people who use it to work out to keep fit.”

“That’s what they might do in New York, but here in Lima, that pole is only used for one thing. Frankly, I’m a little concerned. The cover photo made you look as if there was no-one important to you.”

“It’s just a job, Dad. You know, like a role in a play. I was acting a part. Of course, it’s not really me,” Kurt reassures his dad.

“I know there’s been a lot of changes in your life in the past month… The new job, the new condo, the new friends. I’ve seen those photos of you stumbling out of nightclubs, and places I never thought you would go. Don’t throw yourself around like you don’t matter. ’Cause you do, Kurt.”

“I haven’t done anything wrong, Dad. I’m not drinking or doing drugs or having random hook-ups, or anything like that. I’m trying to experience New York City with other gay men.”
“I get it, Kurt. I really do…. And I’m glad you’ve met other gay men. But there’s all different kinds of gay men in New York City. I’m worried that you’ve gotten into the wrong sort of crowd. Treat both yourself and others with respect and you’ll find that they will respect you back.”

After another five minutes of awkward conversation about Kurt not going home for Thanksgiving, Kurt promises his dad he’ll try to make it home for Christmas. When he presses the ‘end call’ button, Kurt feels exhausted.

Kurt picks up his tablet, and after replying to his e-mails, he switches to Twitter. As expected, #KurtHummel and #Elle are trending. He grimaces as he sees that #KinkyBootsKurt is also on the list. As he continues to look at the trending tags, Kurt’s curiosity is peaked when he sees #Nightbird. The only time he has heard of Nightbird was from Blaine teasing him about his high school fantasies. He thought that Nightbird was a superhero Blaine had made up in his head. He presses #Nightbird to find out what it is. Kurt mouth drops open when he sees a photo of Blaine. OMG! He really does have a Nightbird outfit! How can Blaine look so dorky and sexy at the same time? God, he really is my teenage fantasy come true!

Kurt carefully looks at the photo of Nightbird. Blaine’s hair is slicked back with so much gel that it almost looks like a helmet. He notices that the lycra suit fits him comfortably but not too loosely as Kurt’s eyes move from Blaine’s powerful thighs to that pert ass of his. Kurt moves quickly on, trying hard not to think about how those fleshy cheeks had felt when he was squeezing them. The plastic shield over his chest looks a little bit corny, but it does accentuate Blaine’s tiny waist and broadens his shoulders. The black cape is flowing and the electric-blue lining makes the whole outfit pop. Then Kurt looks at Blaine’s face and notices that he’s sporting a tan. Blaine isn’t the sort of guy that would spend time in a tanning salon. Blaine must have been somewhere with a hot climate, and Kurt wonders if it was for work or a vacation.

He scrolls through the photos and can tell that Blaine is at a party. When he sees Isabelle Wright’s name mentioned in a tweet, he realizes where Blaine is and does a quick search. The new photos show people having fun at Isabelle’s place on Halloween night. He spots Tina dressed with an oriental fan on her head (tagged as #AsianPersuasian), Isabelle as Catwoman, Liam as the Green Lantern, and Unique’s own remarkable interpretation of Wonder Woman. Sam’s conspicuously absent from the photos and Kurt wonders whether it’s because he and Blaine are really broken up or whether Sam was on the west coast getting his own action.

There’s photos of people talking, laughing, and having a great time. He spots videos of people dancing and can’t help but notice how Blaine uses his cape on the dance floor. He then sees a group photo with Blaine in the center. They all have their arms around each other’s shoulders with huge smiles on their faces. Blaine’s life seems so different to his right now. Kurt has had enough and tosses his tablet aside.

This is totally unfair! It should have been ME there – having fun with a great group of friends. Not sitting home by myself in a self-induced chocolate haze.

Kurt is so lonely.

Since Kurt joined Elle, he hasn’t made a single new friend. There simply isn’t the comradery at Elle that there is at Vogue. Although he enjoys living at Gramercy Park South, he hasn’t met any of his new neighbors. They seem to keep to themselves and there’s no neighborhood feel like there is in Bushwick. Sure, Sebastian has gone out of his way to take him out at night and introduce him to his friends. But it isn’t fun, and it makes for awkward conversations when Kurt doesn’t want to hook up
with other guys. Kurt would much prefer to spend time with his old friends at Vogue… and with Blaine.

*****

“I saw those photos on Twitter today. I can’t believe you still have that Nightbird outfit,” Pamela chuckles.

“I wasn’t planning to go, but then Unique told me in no uncertain terms that I had to go out with her and have some fun. And you know, she was right. After one Black Devil Martini, I loosened up and really enjoyed myself.”

“I like that Unique. She’s a positive influence on you,” Pamela replies.

“I’m not sure whether you’ll still think that when you hear her plans. Unique wants to take me back to Lips NYC to catch the drag queen show. We went there once a couple months ago when I was preparing for the diva-off.”

“It sounds interesting - just don’t go on stage and give a performance. That would definitely give your father a heart attack.”

“How is dad? We haven’t spoken much since… you know. I’m a little bit nervous about seeing him again at Christmas.”

“I’m not going to lie. Your father was very angry when he saw that video of you and Kurt on the Internet. You can’t imagine the talk at the country club and at work. However, we’ve discussed it a lot and he has calmed down in the meantime. He wants to have a talk with you when you’re here in December.”

“I’m so not looking forward to that.”

“I think that sometimes you underestimate your father, Blaine. Promise me you’ll hear him out and not get angry and run away this time when the talk gets difficult. If you listen carefully to everything he has to say, I think your father will surprise you.”

There’s a pregnant pause in the conversation as both Blaine and his mother think about the upcoming talk. Fortunately, Pamela switches the topic of conversation. “Cooper told me he’s going to New York next weekend to attend the Whitney Art Party with you. Something about Kurt being there as well?”

“Yeah, the Smythes give generous donations to the museum, so I know that Sebastian will be there, and I’m sure he’ll take Kurt.”

“You and Sebastian… I can’t believe this rivalry has been going on for so long. I’m not sure whether you bring out the best or the worst in each other. How do you feel about seeing Kurt again?”

“I have mixed feelings. Part of me can’t wait to see him. I really miss him. But there is another part of me that dreads it. I still feel so raw inside. Thank god Coop agreed to come and help me out.”

“I’m glad that you and Cooper have worked out things. Cooper loves you and really wants to be there for you.”
“I know, and I love him too.”

*****

“You look hot tonight, killer. You’re gonna make every person wish that you pick them to go home with tonight. Maybe we can make our own after-party?” Sebastian smirks, waggling his eyebrows.

“Cut it out, Seb. You know I’m not going home with anyone tonight.”

Kurt is secretly pleased that Sebastian has complimented his looks tonight. He’s spent the entire day pampering himself and getting ready for the big night. He’s wearing a Maoschino sports coat with the New York City skyline printed in the fabric. A simple pair of black pants and a white cotton shirt tone down the outfit. The bright blue tie highlights the color of Kurt’s eyes.

After posing for photos along the red carpet, Kurt and Sebastian enter the museum, which is already heaving with people. They have quick words with Adam Abdalla, one of the event’s co-chairs. Sebastian then guides him to meet other event VIPs and celebrities, and before Kurt knows it, he is face-to-face with Blaine Anderson. Kurt quickly looks Blaine over, who is looking very debonair in his suit. Kurt knows the black Dsquared2 Jacquard Camouflage blazer very well – he owns it himself. He smiles at Blaine but instead of the usual sparkling eyes responding, Kurt sees a forced smile and soft sad eyes.

“Sebastian… Kurt. Nice to see you both. Do you remember my brother, Cooper?”

Sebastian steps forward and shakes Cooper’s hand. “Of course I do. I haven’t seen you since the Dalton graduation. What are you up to these days?”

As Cooper chats to Sebastian about The Young and Restless, Kurt looks down at his shoes to stop himself staring at Blaine. His heart races when Blaine leans in and whispers, just loud enough for only himself to hear, “You’re just as stunning as I remember, Kurt.”

Kurt looks up and sees the tinge of red spread across Blaine’s cheeks, the sweet shy smile, the warm honey-colored eyes, and the sincerest expression across his face. Kurt clears his throat and tries to keep calm.

“You’re looking good yourself, Blaine. I notice you have a tan. Have you been anywhere exciting recently?”

“I went to India last month for a few weeks. The country is amazing.”

“Did you go for work or play?” Kurt politely asks.

“A bit of both. I needed to get away from New York City… and things for a while.”

“It obviously did you some good. You look… umm… great.”

Kurt chews on his bottom lip, contemplating saying something else. He misses Blaine so much and he wants Blaine back in his life, but he’s not sure how that could work. But this sort of opportunity is rare, so Kurt decides to test the waters.

“We must get together soon, perhaps for a coffee?”
“Yeah, I’d like that,” Blaine whispers. “You know my number. Now, I’ll have to excuse myself. Isabelle was expecting me to return with her drink ten minutes ago.”

As Blaine disappears, Kurt’s glance lingers on his ass. If anyone had asked him, Kurt would have told them he was merely making sure that the tailoring of Blaine’s suit was perfect. And it was.

“I promised my mother that I’d speak to that artist over there. I won’t be long,” Sebastian mumbles as he heads toward an exhibition.

“Don’t call him.”

Kurt turns around and is surprised to see Cooper still by his side. “Excuse me?”

“Don’t call Blaine… No coffee date. You’ve put him through hell and back this past month. I’m not going to let you hurt him again. I know guys like you - all hot and cold when it comes to other men. But Blaine isn’t like that, and he deserves better. So, don’t call Blaine unless he really means something to you. If I hear that you’ve met up with Blaine and got his hopes up without a substantial commitment, rainbows, unicorns and hot make-up sex….”

Cooper looks around and then takes his finger and points, poking Kurt at every next word, “I. Will. Tear. You. Apart.”

Cooper pulls back his hand and adjusts his tie. “I think we understand each other. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I need to find Blaine.”

Kurt is stunned by what Cooper had said. It’s Blaine who’s hot and cold and had an open relationship with Sam. It’s Blaine that called their first time an ‘unfortunate incident’. It’s Blaine that wasn’t there when Kurt needed him the most. However, a part of his heart tugs when he remembers Cooper telling him that Blaine isn’t happy. Maybe Kurt means more to Blaine than he has realized.

Kurt looks around to find Sebastian and finds him still talking to the artist. Kurt knows by the way Sebastian is standing and the expression on his face, that Sebastian is arranging for a hook-up later that night. At that moment, Kurt wishes he was with anybody at the party but Sebastian.

Kurt’s father has raised him to believe that he matters, and love and family are the top priorities in life. There’s no room for this in Sebastian’s hedonistic lifestyle. By being associated with Sebastian, other people will think he has the same views. The proof was right there in Cooper’s conversation with him. Somehow, he has to disassociate himself from Sebastian.

Kurt couldn’t possibly say anything to Sebastian. After all, Kurt is not his mother. Sebastian has never pretended to be someone he’s not. But what can he do?

*****

Kurt is sitting in the back corner at the latest Elle photo shoot, waiting for the signal that it’s his turn on the set. After hearing the others snigger and whisper when he left the dressing area, Kurt feels self-conscious in the all-leather one-piece body outfit. It’s not so much that the studs are digging into his skin, but more about how tight-fitting the bodysuit is. There’s absolutely nothing left to the imagination. Kurt wonders what his father will think when he sees the photos of him in a ‘Leather and Lace’ photo spread.

To top it all off, his outfit is a gaudy combination of leather and lace. Kurt knows that this could be
misconstrued by some – a sort of announcement that he’s bisexual. This isn’t the message that Kurt wants to convey at all - he’s is definitely into ‘leather’ and not into ‘lace’. Since he had figured out his sexuality back in high school, Kurt has been proud to be gay, to be himself. No, he doesn’t like this photo shoot one little bit. He quickly shoots off a text to Sebastian. “We need to talk. I'll come to your office after the photo shoot.”

After the photo shoot is over, Kurt goes to Sebastian’s office and declines the offer of a glass of wine. He needs all his wits about him for this conversation.

“I’m not happy at Elle, Sebastian. I feel very uncomfortable in the clothes that I’m modeling. It’s about the image I’m conveying.”

“You don’t like looking sexy and in control? Most models would kill for that look,” Sebastian replies, chuckling.

Kurt sees Sebastian’s smirk and wishes that he could wipe it off his meerkat face.

“I know that… But with each photo shoot, I feel I’m losing a piece of myself. It’s like I don’t matter and neither does anybody else.”

“Kurt, chill out. It’s just a photo - an image – you need to keep it in perspective. It’s like an acting job and this is the role that you were born to play.”

“I know all about acting roles, Sebastian. I’ve auditioned for plenty when I first arrived in New York City. The difference is that I was able to choose the roles I auditioned for. Here at Elle, I have no choice.”

“Kurt, I’m going to be brutally honest with you. You’re by far the highest paid model that Elle has ever had and we need to recoup the cost of your salary, housing and other perks. If we use you for traditional photo shoots, our readership numbers will go up a little, but not enough. You in edgier photo spreads boosts Elle’s circulation numbers and profits so much more. I know you would prefer photos of yourself in trendy and conservative clothes. But it isn’t going to happen – sex sells. You need to get your head around that fast, because it isn’t going to change.”

Kurt can’t argue with that logic – after all, Elle is a business. But that doesn’t mean he likes the role he’s playing. After a quick goodbye, Kurt calls a taxi to go home. He doesn’t feel he can stomach Dick and his rap music in the private car right now.

Later that night, Kurt thinks over his role at Elle. When he signed the contract, he had thought he knew what he was getting into, but boy, was he wrong. He lost the control over any say of what he was doing, and what his image would be.

During his time at Vogue, his wishes and their demands intertwined seamlessly. The more Kurt thinks about it, the more he understands that it was all down to Blaine. Kurt admired Blaine as a person – his goals and values. It was this very essence of Blaine that made him a great editor-in-chief and Kurt had implicitly trusted how Vogue used him as a model.

At Elle, it’s different. There is always the push of their demands and pull of Kurt’s wishes. Kurt can’t put his hand on his heart and say that he trusts Sebastian. He’s out for himself – look at the way Sebastian parties and hooks up every night. There was no doubt in Kurt’s mind when he left the Elle offices - he would have to model exactly how they want him to.
Kurt bitterly laughs, now knowing that he should never have left Vogue in the first place. Kurt does have a break-out clause in his Elle contract, but he’s not sure whether to use it. Would he be burning bridges like he did when he left Vogue? Would he ever get another modeling assignment after that?

Kurt really needs a break from it all so he can think the whole thing through. Next month is Christmas, and it would be a perfect time to go home to Lima and talk things over with his dad. He makes a mental note to himself to push Elle to agree to the time off.

*****

“Pleeease come home for Christmas. I’m going to be in Lima too. It will be like old times. We can go to the Lima Bean and have sleepovers. I miss our heart-to-heart talks.”

“I miss them too, Rach. I desperately want to go home next month. I haven’t seen you since September and my dad since July. Elle said there was a 99% chance that I could have the Christmas holidays off, but they don’t want to commit until the very last minute.”

“So how are things at Elle?”

“They’re okay, I guess. They certainly have no end of rather interesting photo shoots for me to do.”

“And Sebastian Smythe? Is he looking out for your interests? Introducing you to the right sort of people? Are you keeping your eye on the ball? What matters?”

“Oh, Sebastian is certainly introducing me to a lot of people, but I’m not sure they are the right ones.”

When they end their phone conversation, Kurt is angry at himself. Angry for listening to Rachel and following her past advice. She has made plenty of mistakes herself over the past six months – quitting NYADA and Funny Girl, and getting involved in the worst sitcom in the history of television, just to name a few. If he had followed his own instincts, he wouldn’t be here by himself working for Elle. He could have been in Blaine’s warm arms with love wrapped around him.

*****

Kurt checks in the mirror one last time and decides that he looks fine for tonight. The outfit consists of a conservative dark gray suit, combined with a medium grey waistcoat. Underneath his T-shirt is a light grey long-sleeved shirt, buttoned up to the top. Over that is a grey and olive green paisley scarf and his blackbird brooch on the jacket lapel. He’s not sure if this is what to wear for the premiere of Yank My Doodle, It’s A Dandy!, but then again, he’s never watched a gay porn movie before.

Sebastian had insisted that Kurt go with him, and told Kurt he would learn a lot from the movie. Kurt only agreed once Sebastian had assured him that there was no red carpet event involved. He prays that there won’t be any paparazzi hanging about afterwards. He can just imagine what his dad would think if he knew what sort of movie premiere he had attended.

Once the guy has yanked out his doodle, Kurt shuts his eyes, and keeps them firmly closed for the rest of the movie. At times, Kurt puts his finger into his ears, quietly humming to himself. It was one thing to hear Blaine when they had their time together after the diva-off, but these guys sound like cheap by-the-hour whores.

“I thought that was very tastefully done,” Sebastian remarks when the movie finishes and the lights
switch back on.

Kurt rolls his eyes at the pun.

“Come on, Kurt. We should go to the reception. There will be a lot of really interesting people to meet.”

The premiere’s reception is held in the theater lobby. Sebastian blends right into the crowd, talking to the performers and other enthusiastic audience members. Kurt gets himself a glass of mineral water and stands quietly in the corner, hoping nobody will notice him. After fifteen minutes, Kurt decides he’s had enough and wants to go home. He doubts that Sebastian will even miss him with all the eye candy around. Before Kurt heads off, he decides to go the restroom. He opens the door and finds Sebastian there with the star of the movie. Are they re-enacting a scene in the movie? Kurt didn’t think that position was even possible.

“Kurt! Wanna make it a threesome?” Sebastian asks between thrusts.

Kurt doesn’t bother answering. He needs to get out of there fast. He races out the back door and jumps into the first taxi he sees. When Kurt gets back to the condo, he takes a long hot shower, hoping to cleanse away the memories of tonight. Once settled in his bed, Kurt grabs his tablet and goes to the LastMinuteTravel website. He needs to go home and regroup.

*****

“Ladies and gentlemen, the captain has turned on the “Fasten Seat Belt” sign. We are now crossing a zone of turbulence. Please return to your seats and keep your seat belts fastened. Thank you.”

Kurt chuckles to himself as he checks that his seat belt is securely fastened. It seems to him like his life is filled with turbulence at the moment. It’s hard to believe that only fourteen months ago, he was on a plane from Lima to New York City. So much has happened to him since he has moved, both good things and bad. He reminisces over the early days, living with Rachel and working at the Spotlight Diner. Even though life seemed easier then, he also remembers the pain of audition rejections and not fitting into the theater scene.

Everything had changed when he interviewed at Vogue and got the modeling job. Kurt had found something he enjoyed doing and, as it turned out, he was pretty good at. But it was more than that. It was how everyone at Vogue was so warm and friendly. Unique’s special brand of sassiness, Isabelle acting like a mom, … Even Chandler with his ridiculous flirty texts. And, of course, there was Blaine.

Blaine had sparked something inside him that Kurt had never felt before. It wasn’t only his gorgeous looks. It was his brains, his generosity, his sincerity, his… everything. Kurt had genuinely enjoyed hanging out with Blaine and doing stuff together. It was as if they were soulmates, and he had deeply fallen in love. Their first kiss cemented the feeling in his heart forever. Kurt blocks out thoughts about the diva-off and the video from his head. It’s too painful to rehash that period in his life – it still feels so raw.

Elle has opened his eyes about how there are different ways of doing things. The magazine is almost as popular as Vogue, so it does produce results. Even though everyone gets paid more money than at Vogue, the atmosphere is different - more competitive, everyone out for themselves. While Vogue had featured him as a model to project an image of youthfulness and innocence, Elle uses him in an edgier, sexier way. It’s a way he doesn’t like, because it’s not him, not his very essence.
And, of course, there’s Sebastian. He has shown Kurt a whole other side of being a single gay guy in New York City. Kurt cringes thinking about places he’s gone to with Sebastian and his friends. Last night was the final straw – what the hell was Sebastian thinking when he invited him to join as a threesome at the reception of some stupid gay porno movie?

He can’t fault Sebastian per se. After all, Sebastian’s been brutally honest about his views about guys and relationships. However, it doesn’t feel right. It doesn’t feel like Kurt. Kurt prefers watching trashy reality shows, exploring new places, seeing Broadway shows, spending time in classy places. Things he had done with Blaine.

“Ladies and gentlemen, as we start our descent, please make sure your seat backs and tray tables are in their full upright position. Make sure your seat belt is securely fastened and all carry-on luggage is stowed underneath the seat in front of you or in the overhead bins. Thank you.”

Kurt double-checks his seat belt and deposits his empty plastic cup and crumpled napkin into the sack when the flight attendant performs a final check. Kurt then tries to figure out what to do. Part of him wants to talk it over with his dad and let Burt’s wisdom guide him to a decision. But a bigger part of Kurt wants to make the decision by himself and prove to his father that he’s now his own man. One thing he knows for sure is that he’s very strong – he has managed to survive the hell hole that was McKinley and get out of Lima – and so he will get through this.

Kurt has had enough of life in the fast lane to last him a lifetime. He also knows that he cannot continue to do the photo shoots Elle wants without feeling morally conflicted.

Over the past few months, his moral compass has been spinning, and Kurt knows which direction he wants it to point.

So maybe it’s not necessarily knowing where life is going, but more about knowing where he doesn’t want it to go. Rachel is right in one way - life is full of options, but the most important lesson she doesn’t seem to appreciate is that one option is ‘no’. Kurt isn’t sure what he wants to do, but he’ll trust his instincts and let his core beliefs guide him. He can’t be true to himself without them.

“Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Dayton, Ohio. Local time is 2pm and the temperature is 26F. Please check around your seat for any personal belongings you may have brought on board with you and please use caution when opening the overhead bins, as heavy articles may have shifted around during the flight. At this time, you may use your cellular phones if you wish.”

When Kurt hears those magic words, he turns off the airplane mode on his phone. He quickly fires off a text to his dad. Landed. Meet you at baggage claim. K xx

The second text is easy to compose as well. It’s short and to the point.

Sebastian. We need to talk. I’m breaking my contract with Elle, effective immediately. - K Hummel

Chapter End Notes

I wish each and every one of you a Merry Christmas/Happy Hanukkah (they happen to fall in the same period this year). If you have some spare time over the holidays and are looking for something to read, I suggest checking out the Big Klaine Index on Tumblr. I
was one of the many who worked on this project to recommend our favorite Klaine fics. There are plenty of older hidden treasures and newer fics from authors who are still actively writing. The recs are sorted by trope and the index provides the word count and rating (where available). I promise you’ll find some new stories.

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. Here is the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics.

I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr.

Next up: Kurt is in Ohio for Christmas and makes an important decision about his future.
Once Kurt is back home in Lima and has caught up with his dad’s news, he goes upstairs to his bedroom. He might as well get the call to Sebastian over with. Kurt is surprised when Sebastian answers after the first ring.

“Last night, I went too far. I know it was stupid of me to ask you to join us, but I was caught up in the moment. Is this why you’re evoking your right in the contract to quit Elle?”

“Partially, but not really. I’ve given a lot of thought to what you said about my role in the Elle magazine photo spreads. I appreciate that ‘sex sells’, but that isn’t the role I was born to play. I haven’t felt comfortable at Elle since I joined, and now, I need to move on.”

“Are you sure it’s not about me?”

“Sebastian, in some ways, I admire you. You’re young to be Elle’s editor-in-chief and you know what you want out of life and chase it. It just doesn’t fit in with what I want. I have other dreams.”

Kurt can hear Sebastian chuckle over the phone. “You know, you and Blanderson are like two peas in a pod. I can see why you get along so famously. Are you going back to Vogue with your tail between your legs?”

“No, I don’t think I’ll ever go back to Vogue. There’s too much history there, and the media would start the Klaine frenzy all over again. I’m now in Ohio and I’ll stay with my dad until the New Year. Over the holidays, I’m going to figure out the right thing to do… for me.”

“As long as you don’t go back to Vogue, I’m okay with your decision. I wouldn’t want Anderson to get the better of me. Let me know what your plans are, and remember that returning to Elle is always an option in the new year.”

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The next afternoon, Kurt brings down all the Christmas decorations from the attic, while his father goes out and buys a Christmas tree. After dinner, Burt puts on his favorite Phil Spector Christmas album, and they start to decorate the tree.

“I wish I’d remembered to bring home mom’s Christmas tree ornaments. I packed so fast that I didn’t even think of it.”

“Never mind, kiddo. The tree will still look great and our memories of your mother are in our hearts, where they belong. You’ve been quiet since you’ve come home. Wanna talk about it?”
Kurt nods and takes a deep breath. “Everything happened so fast this year. One day, I show up at Vogue to interview for an internship at its website department, and the next thing I know, I’m a model. After the Fashion’s Night Out, my life was spinning out of control with all the media attention the video with Blaine got. Moving to Elle seemed like the only option. To be honest, quitting Elle yesterday was the right thing to do. You were right, I didn’t fit in there and I didn’t like what my life was becoming.”

“I had an uneasy feeling when you were working at Elle. I’m glad you came to your senses and decided that the sort of lifestyle you’ve been leading the past few months isn’t right for you. I’m proud of you, Son. It takes real courage to take yourself out of a situation you’re not happy in. Remember that you’re in the driver’s seat in your life. You can do anything you set your mind to.”

“That’s the problem, Dad. I don’t know what I want to do. There’s always Broadway and studying at college. However, I want to figure out a way I can make modeling work while I’m still young. I think the money I can make will give me a lot of freedom when I’m ready to move on to other things. I need to find a way to choose modelling gigs that don’t include Vogue.”

“Have you talked to Wes yet? Isn’t it his job to find you options?”

“I e-mailed Wes yesterday, asking him to send a formal contract termination notice to Elle. I think I should figure out in my own mind what I want first.”

“Maybe if you explained to Wes what you did and didn’t like about working at Vogue and Elle, he’ll come up with some useful suggestions. I’m sure he’s seen it all before.”

“That’s a good idea, Dad. I’ll call him on Monday. Tomorrow, I already have a shopping trip with Rachel planned.”

*****

“Do you think my dads will like these sweaters?” Rachel asks, holding up one sweater with a teddy bear wearing a Christmas stocking on its head and another sporting a bedazzled Christmas tree.

“No and no. Come on, Rach. They’re Jewish! Let’s go take a look at the sweaters over there. Those are a lot more sophisticated and classy, just like your dads.”

While Kurt waits for Rachel to buy the sweaters that has his personal stamp of approval, he can’t help but notice the display of Christmas bowties. He zooms in on a red tartan bowtie with crisscrossed bands of green, white and black. It’s much more sophisticated than the bowties with Christmas prints, and it would go with so many holiday outfits. It would be perfect for Blaine. Even though they aren’t even speaking, Kurt can’t help but buy it. Maybe Kurt will wear it on Christmas day.

When Rachel walks toward him with a shop bag, Kurt announces, “Let’s hit Sears. I need another present for my dad, and you know they have the best selection of flannel shirts.”

“My feet are killing me, Kurt. Can’t we stop at the Lima Bean for a break? We haven’t been back there yet this holiday, and we need some catching-up time. Besides, I have something important to tell you.”

Kurt agrees to the respite and they drive the short distance to the Lima Bean. When they enter the coffee shop, Kurt notices that nothing has changed. There’s still a crack in the bakery display cabinet
and the worn tables haven’t been replaced. Kurt is comforted by the idea that some places are always the same. They order their drinks and sit down at their favorite table near the window. Kurt takes a sip of his grande non-fat mocha, enjoying a moment of nostalgia.

“So with Mr. Shue spending more time in D.C., McKinley is looking for a new glee club director. I’m taking the position.”

Kurt looks up and sees Rachel’s smile and her concern about his reaction. “Rachel Barbra Berry, you are just full of surprises.” He gives her a pointed look and adds, “I’m sure you’ll be an excellent director, as long as you don’t let a diva hog all the solos. Are you doing this because you want to… or are you running away from LA?”

“I don’t run away from anything. You should know that, Kurt. I’ve decided to come home and regroup. When this job came up, I thought that if I brought a glee club to Nationals, it might open new doors for me. So, for the next six months, it feels right for me. Who knows what will come after that.”

Rachel takes a sip of her soy milk green chai latte, and continues. “So have you thought about what you’re going to do when you return to New York?”

“I’m not sure, Rach. I have some money saved up, and I need to have to find a new place to live. After that, I’ll figure it out.”

“Have you heard from Blaine recently?”

Kurt knows that Rachel is fishing at mentioning Blaine’s name so that he’ll think about what ‘options’ Blaine could provide. He wants to stay clear from that sort of conversation.

“I bumped into Blaine at a museum party last month. He looked great, but the conversation was very short. He did mention that he had just returned from a vacation in India. God, I wish I could do something like that. It sounds so much better than spending time in Lima.”

“Why can’t you, Kurt? You just told me that you’ve got money saved and no plans in New York. Why not have a vacation yourself and go to Europe – hit the top fashion cities like London, Milan and Paris.”

“You know, you might be on to something, Rach. I’ve always wanted to travel and Paris has been on my bucket list as long as I can remember. I’ll think about it. Now we’ve really got to get to Sears. Flannel shirts are calling my dad’s name.”

*****

When Kurt returns home, he looks around to see if his dad has come home early, which he hasn’t. Kurt’s lips turn into a smile when he sees the Vogue issues carefully arranged on the coffee table. His dad has even framed his first cover page and hung it in the guest toilet. Who knew what his friends thought when they were doing their business on the toilet with Kurt smiling at them on the photo? Kurt has already discovered the huge stacks of extra copies in the guest bedroom closet. No wonder Blaine had to order extra copies of Vogue for Ohio.

Kurt climbs up the stairs, hides his shopping bags and stretches out on his bed. He’s glad that his father isn’t home from work yet, because it gives him some time to think. Rachel might have a lot of crazy ideas, but this afternoon, she had given him a good one. Why couldn’t he travel? His last
vacation was when he went to New York City for Nationals eighteen months ago. Before that, it was camping trips with his dad. Kurt has some money saved, and it’s not like he’s got anything planned. Last February, Wes had arranged for him to get his first passport, so the world could be his oyster to explore.

He quickly gets up when he hears the front door open and shut, and then heavy footsteps going up the stairs. Kurt pops his head out of his bedroom door and greets his dad. “I didn’t get a chance to cook dinner. I was out with Rachel all day Christmas shopping. How does Chinese take-out sound?”

“Sounds good, kiddo. Let me shower and change, and I’ll meet you downstairs.”

Once the food is delivered, Kurt quickly transfers the wonton soup, steamed dumplings, braised tofu, and stir-fried vegetables into serving bowls. There’s no way Kurt will eat directly out of the Chinese take-out cartons – he’s got standards, after all. His dad soon joins him and they are silent as they eat dinner. Kurt laughs to himself when his dad picks up a piece of tofu, inspects it, scrunching his face, and then puts it back down.

“So how’s Rachel? Did she talk your ears off?” Burt asks.

“She’s good. She’s staying in Lima for a while. Can you believe that she’s going to take over the glee club at McKinley, now that Mr. Shue spends most of his time in D.C.?”

“Yeah, I know. I bumped into Hiram Berry at the Chief Supermarket the other day.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“What? And ruin Rachel’s surprise? I thought it was better you found it out from her.”

“So, Dad…. I’ve been thinking… You know, about what I’m going to do in January…”

“Spit it out, kiddo. You can tell me anything.”

“Well, Rachel gave me an idea today.”

Burt rolls his eyes. “I’m not sure I wanna hear it, but go on.”

“There’s nothing to say that I have to go back to New York City in January. It’s not like I got a job or a place to live there. I’m thinking of taking a vacation to somewhere I’ve never been. See more of the world than Lima and New York City.”

Burt looks up from his plate and nods. “You’ve been working hard this year and a vacation might be just what you need. It could be like a reset button. This vacation idea is something you should do for yourself. Only, I’m concerned that you might be running away from things... or people.”

“It’s not like that, Dad. I think I need time away from New York City to get a better perspective on life and where I want to go. I don’t have to have everything decided at the age of nineteen. This is the time for me to experience new things.”

“So, any idea of where you wanna go? The Caribbean is supposed to be warm right about now.”

Kurt shakes his head, giggling. “Can you imagine me taking a beach holiday? Just think what the sun would do to my skin. I’m thinking more about going to Europe.”
“Europe!” Burt says in surprise.

“Who knows when I’ll be able to take a break like this again. Wes got me a passport when I started modeling, but I’ve never had a chance to use it. Nobody is expecting me to be in New York City in January. Even though it’s the middle of the winter, I’ll still have fun at the sites and museums. And the shopping! Think how amazing my scarf collection will be. Even more so than it is now.”

“I’ll call Hermes and warn them, then,” Burt replies, resigned to the fact that Kurt will be going to Europe.

*****

“Happy holidays, Kurt. You’re still in Lima?”

“Happy holidays to you too, Wes. Yes, I’m still in Lima. I plan to be here until the new year. Thanks for sorting everything out with Elle.”

“It was surprisingly easy. I thought Sebastian would give us a hard time, but he didn’t. Any ideas what you want to do next?”

“I really don’t know, Wes. I still want to continue modeling, but I’m not sure what my options are. I’m pretty good at burning bridges, and I’m not sure what my reputation is.”

“Don’t worry, Kurt. Your reputation is fine. You left Vogue when your contract was finished and you were within your rights to terminate the Elle contract. You’re still in high demand.”

“One thing I know for sure is that the next time I model, I want more control of what I do.”

“Most models freelance and aren’t under contract with one magazine or fashion house. I think this should be the way forward. You get to pick and choose the modeling jobs that you want, and the rates are very good. The only downside is that you won’t have a steady income, but that won’t be a problem since you are in high demand.”

“That makes sense. I can be my own master and in charge of things. What I’m really thinking about now is taking a vacation in the new year. I haven’t had one in a very long time. I want to get away from New York City for a while. There are too many painful memories there at the moment.”

“Sounds like a good idea, Kurt. You could also use that time to really think about what type of modeling gigs you want to do. Any idea where you might go?”

“I’m not sure yet. I’m thinking about traveling to Europe. A friend suggested to hit the top fashion cities, like London, Paris and Milan. I’m really considering it. Paris has always been on my bucket list.”

“Can I make a suggestion?” Wes asks.

“Go on. I’m all ears.”

“Our records show that you studied French in high school.”

Kurt is a little bewildered as to where the conversation is going, but he replies, "Y-y-yes. Yes, I did. I
even got an ‘A’ in the AP class during my senior year.

Wes continues his train of thought. “Have you ever considered modeling in Paris?”

“Paris?! Is that really an option?”

“It sure is. Models are needed all over the world. With your reputation, it won’t be a problem to get offers from both magazines and designers. My agency has an office in Paris. Should I contact them and see what there is on offer?”

“Why not? Go ahead, Wes. I’ve got nothing to lose.”

*****

During the next few days, Kurt is glued to his phone. Wes has sent him numerous e-mails about plenty of good opportunities for modeling work in Paris. *Maybe this dream of combining a vacation and modeling work in Europe is really going to happen.*

After reading the latest offer, Kurt bounces down the stairs to join his father in the living room. The Buck Eyes game is on in the background, but his dad’s not really paying attention. His eyes are on the wood burning in the fireplace and he looks like he is deep in thought. His dad was initially supportive of him taking a vacation in Europe, but has been quiet since he relayed Wes’ news about possible modeling jobs in Paris.

“Hey, buddy. I didn’t hear you come down. You look pretty happy. What’s up?”

“Wes sent me an e-mail ten minutes ago. His agency in Paris said that Dior is looking for a fresh face for their new perfume campaign and they’re very interested in me.”

“That’s great, son. Those perfume ads in Vogue don’t seem very risqué.”

“You read Vogue?” Kurt asks, in a disbelieving voice.

“You know, the issues that you were in. I looked at every page to make sure that I didn’t miss you in a photo. I might have seen an ad or two. Didn’t read any of the articles, mind you. I’m really happy for you.”

“You say you’re happy for me, but you don’t *look* happy. What’s going on, Dad?”

“I can understand why you want a fresh start, but is there any other reason you want outta New York City?”

Kurt isn’t surprised that his dad has asked him the question. His dad has always had this special way of reading him so easily.

“Okay, Dad. Yes, Blaine is part of the reason. In spite of everything that has happened, I still love him. I can’t help it. It’s so hard to be in New York City without him. Every time I do something fun, I think about how much Blaine would it enjoy it too. Every time I do things I would rather not, I wonder what Blaine is doing instead. I can’t stop thinking about him. I want him, but I don’t know how to fix things between us. Distance might help me sort out my feelings, one way or the other.”

“Relax, son. You’re still young. If you are meant to be together, you’ll find a way back to each other.
Everything will work out the way it should be in the end. Who knows? You might find a French guy that knocks your socks off.”

Kurt laughs at the thought of meeting Jacques and Pierres, speaking English with cute accents.

“Just promise me one thing, buddy. Don’t stay in Paris forever. I don’t know what I would do if…”

Kurt jumps up and gives his dad a big hug. “Never. We have always had each other and that’s the way it’s going to be. There are vacations and birthdays and Christmas…”

*****

“Dior’s willing to wait until early February to start the photo shoot. They’ll also give you 10% in advance to help you settle in Paris. Louis Dubois will be your local agent in Paris and he can fill you in on the details closer to that time.”

“Wow. That’s great, Wes. I’ve already booked the flight. When I arrive, the first thing I need to do is sort out somewhere to live.”

“I’ve got news on that front as well. Louis knows how young you are and doesn’t feel comfortable putting you in one of the apartments they have to house their models. There are people coming and going all the time, and it can get pretty wild at night.”

“Louis doesn’t think I can handle it?” Kurt asks.

“It’s not that, but you said yourself that sort of lifestyle isn’t what you’re after. Louis has a great aunt who has a spare bedroom in her home. It’s on the top floor, so you’ll have plenty of privacy. It’s in a very central location in the smart part of Paris. He’s asked his Auntie Line to take you under her wings, so to speak.”

“I kind of like the idea of living in someone’s home for a while. It will give me a chance to see how the French live. I can also brush up on my French.”

“It doesn’t have to be forever. It’s just a place to tide you over until you figure out where you want to live.”

“Tell Louis I’ll take him up on the offer. Can he e-mail me her contact details? I’ll need to tell her when I’m arriving. Just one more thing…. Will Louis now be my agent?”

“Louis will be your local agent for work in Paris. I’ll still be in charge of your account. I’ll be involved in finding opportunities for you, no matter where you are.”

“Good. I like having you on my side.”

“There’s one last thing I want to talk to you about, Kurt. It’s Blaine. When Blaine finds out that you have left Elle, which won’t be announced until January 1st, he’s going to call me to find out what happened at Elle and what you’re doing now. Blaine is going to find out sooner rather than later that you’re in Paris – the fashion world is actually pretty small. I’d like to tell him where you are. I feel I owe him that much, although I won’t tell him about the circumstances around you quitting Elle.”

“Yes, of course. Tell Blaine, but make sure that it’s not until after January 1st. That’s the same day
that I fly to Paris, so it won’t matter much.”

*****

Kurt does his best to get all his essential outfit pieces squeezed into four suitcases. Kurt has sent a list of items that he needed to Wes, who arranged for them to be delivered to Lima. The rest of his items in New York City were placed in storage. Once the suitcases are closed up and weighed, Kurt feels ready for his flight to Paris the next day.

Kurt can’t help but think about Blaine and wonders if the distance between them is a good thing or not. He’s heard through the grapevine that Sam hasn’t renewed his Vogue contract and has moved to LA. So, Blaine was honest with him when he said that he and Sam were no longer an item. So much has happened since the Klainegate video went viral, and Kurt is not sure how they can make it back to each other.

Kurt pulls out his tablet and goes onto Twitter to see what’s happening at the end of the year. He looks at tweets under #BlaineAnderson. There’s a photo of the Anderson family on Christmas day – Blaine and his father are wearing traditional Indian shirts and a pashmina is wrapped around his mother’s shoulders. Kurt takes a closer look at Blaine and his father, for they look so alike in many ways. What surprises Kurt most is that they all look genuinely happy. Maybe Blaine had overblown the strained relationship with his father. Kurt reads the description underneath, Merry Christmas from Westerville.

Kurt realizes that Blaine was in Ohio for Christmas, just a few hours away from Lima. Is Blaine still there or did he return to New York for the New Year’s Eve celebrations? Kurt’s fingers are itching to pick up his phone and call Blaine. This would be the last chance to talk to him before leaving for Paris.

But what would he say? Would it change things between them? In the back of his mind, he thinks about what Cooper had told him last month at the Whitney Art Party. Don’t call him unless he really means something to you and without a substantial commitment.

Kurt is certainly not quite there yet - not able to make a substantial commitment to Blaine. He wonders whether he will ever be that confident in his feelings about Blaine again. He puts down the phone and goes to the living room to spend time with his dad… And to resist the temptation of calling Blaine.

*****

“Six hours ahead. We can Skype before 5pm in Lima, but if it’s really important, call me anytime.”

“Relax, Kurt. I’ve got it. You’ve left the sticky note on the computer to remind me. Now call me when you land. I wanna know that you’re safe.”

Kurt laughs at his father’s words. Playing it safe hasn’t always worked out for him, either in Lima or in New York.

“I sure will. I’m going to miss you, Dad,” Kurt whispers as he holds his father tight, trying to memorize the feeling of his safe harbor, the person who would always help him in both the good times and the bad.”

Kurt feels he has to leave now, before he breaks down into tears. He extends the handle of his carry-
on suitcase and quickly rushes to the airport security line. Once the TSA official has checked his passport and ticket, he takes one final look at his dad before moving on to his great new adventure.

Chapter End Notes

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. Here is the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics.

I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr.

I hope that everyone has a wonderful New Year. I promise that Kurt won’t be in Paris forever.

Next up: Blaine is in Ohio for Christmas and has a meaningful talk with his father.
Blaine's Christmas in Ohio

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I've learned that two people can look at the exact same thing and see something totally different.” - Unknown

December

“Thanks for getting the paperwork for the Monarch Foundation ready so quickly,” Blaine says sincerely, as he signs a huge stack of legal documents at his lawyer’s office.

“My pleasure. I didn’t mind in the least, particularly since it’s for a good cause. Hope you have happy holidays this year.”

Blaine leaves his lawyer’s office with a huge smile on his face and feels like skipping along the street. For years, he’s wanted to support the LGBT community in smaller towns - create a place where people of all ages could connect, hang out and seek advice. Provide temporary housing for those that are homeless or running away from a terrible situation. Sure, there are places like this in the larger towns and cities across the US, but this sort of option doesn’t exist in small Mid-Western towns.

Last week, Blaine was told what his annual bonus would be, to be paid in early January. He had expected a large bonus—Vogue’s increased circulation and profits over the past year made sure of that – but he wasn’t expecting such a substantial discretionary amount. He knew instantly what to do with the money and contacted his lawyer to set up a non-profit foundation. Now his dream could finally become a reality.

The timing is perfect. Tomorrow he’s going home to Ohio for ten days over Christmas and the new year. He’s always planned for Westerville to be the first place to establish a Monarch House. He’ll look for a suitable property during his trip, and by the time the paperwork will be ready for the purchase, his bonus will be paid into his bank account. He can count on his mom and some Dalton teachers to help out until he can hire a director.

Blaine runs through his mental checklist of what he needs to get done today. Thank god he bought everyone’s Christmas presents while he was in India. He pulls out his phone to call his mother to arrange for a real estate agent to show them properties. He needs to get a move on things before he gets on the plane for Ohio tomorrow.

*****

Blaine walks briskly back to his car. At breakfast, his mother mentioned that the Lima Lenscrafters was the only store in the area that had the special Carolina Herrera SHE sunglasses that she desperately wants for Christmas. She had talked to the manager the previous day, who agreed to hold the pretty blue pair for 24 hours. Blaine is all too happy to take the not so subtle hint and buy them, even though it’s a long drive to get them. After all, she’s helping him to find the perfect place for Monarch House, although yesterday’s property hunting came to nothing.
Blaine pulls the car out of the parking lot and turns onto West Elm Street, but is soon caught up in a traffic jam. The roads are as busy as expected two days before Christmas. He spots a sign with a coffee cup and ‘The Lima Bean’ written across the top, and decides to take a break from the heavy traffic. When he walks toward the coffee shop, Blaine wonders if he should order his usual medium drip or something fancy like a latte with peppermint or an eggnog spice. He abruptly stops when he looks into the coffee shop window and his heart begins to race. There, sitting at a table for two, are Kurt and Rachel Berry.

Kurt looks even more stunning than Blaine remembers. Kurt’s hair is perfectly coiffed, showing off his rosy cheeks and his piercing blue eyes. His legs are crossed under the table and they look as if they go on forever. Kurt’s attention is focused on Rachel, who is talking excitedly, waving her arms through the air.

God, how he misses Kurt. India would have been so much more fun if Kurt was there to experience it with him, but it’s the little things about Kurt that he misses the most. The random texts they had sent each other each day as a way of saying ‘I’m thinking about you’. Watching The Young and Restless together, with Kurt’s snarky comments, judging Cooper’s character and acting skills. Not really doing anything special, but hanging out and getting to know each other better. Most of all though, he misses Kurt’s hugs – a reminder of how Kurt made him feel special and taken care of.

Kurt had never called him for that coffee he had suggested at the Whitney Art Party last month, but Blaine hadn’t thought that he would. Not with Sebastian around Kurt, making snide comments about Blaine and smearing his reputation. Here in Ohio, though, things might be different. Away from New York City and Sebastian, maybe they could find the time to really talk. Could they clear the air and salvage something from the past?

But what is he going to say? He hadn’t expected to see Kurt in Lima and he doesn’t feel prepared for that discussion. Besides, what could they possibly say to each other with Rachel there as well? He’d have to come up with some sincere compliment about that godawful TV pilot of hers that aired last month.

Blaine isn’t sure how long he’s been standing outside the Lima Bean gawping at Kurt, but he needs to choose what he’s going to do before Kurt notices him and the decision is out of his hands. Panic starts to rise in him. Blaine quickly heads back to his car and takes off for his parent’s place in Westerville.

*****

“You look pale, Blaine. Weren’t you successful on your jaunt? The manager promised me…”

“No, it has nothing to do with ‘the jaunt’ as you call it. It’s something else. I want to think about it on my own for a bit, if you don’t mind.”

“I’m about to watch How the Grinch Stole Christmas. That was always my favorite Christmas movie growing up. Why don’t you join me and we can talk - or not talk - if you want?”

Blaine lies down on the couch in the den as his mother sets up the DVD. She then joins him on the couch and places his head on her lap. When she starts playing with his hair as they watch the movie, it feels comforting and soothing– a reminder of how they used to watch movies together when he was a little boy. When every Who in Whoville is singing and the Grinch’s heart grows three sizes, Blaine sighs deeply and says, “I saw Kurt. He was at a coffee shop in Lima.”
Pam continues to stroke Blaine’s hair and replies, “How did it go? Did you work things out?”

“I didn’t talk to Kurt. He didn’t even know I was there. He was with a friend, and we would only have made polite small talk if I had interrupted them. It would have been so awkward, so I left.”

“Now that you know he’s in Ohio for the holidays, why don’t you call him after Christmas and see if you can meet up?”

“I don’t know. I don’t think Kurt is interested in me. I haven’t really spoken to him since the diva-off, and lord knows I’ve tried. When we bumped into each other last month – you know, when Cooper was with me at the Whitney Art Party – Kurt said he would call me to arrange to meet for a coffee, but he never did. I know that it’s not really a fixable problem. It hurts knowing that I love him but can’t have him. I wish things between us had turned out differently.”

“Blaine, I know it hurts right now and it will take time for you to get over him, but honey, you’re doing all of the right sort of things. You’re so much more relaxed since you went to India in October. Setting up the first Monarch House will keep you busy and keep your mind off Kurt. At some stage, though, you’ll need to let your feelings towards Kurt go. Start dating new men. There are plenty of fish in the sea…. After all, the New Yorker Magazine just dubbed you ‘the ‘#1 Gay and Single Hot Dude in New York City’ for the second year in a row.’” Pam does air quotes around that last sentence and pokes Blaine gently in the ribs.

Blaine rolls his eyes at his mother. He’d rather not be the hot dude in the city, and certainly not single. Sure, there’s plenty of men who want to be with him, but not the man that he wants. He gets up from the couch and stretches, and is surprised to see his father just inside the den’s door. He wonders how much of the conversation with his mother he’s heard. Blaine’s body tenses as he thinks of the inevitable talk he has to have with his father about the video. His father gives him a curt smile as Blaine leaves for his bedroom. Blaine needs to gift-wrap those sunglasses before his mother hunts his bedroom for them.

*****

“Sup, Sam? Are you and Mercedes in Kentucky with your family?”

“Yeah, we got here last night. Merry Christmas. What did Santa bring you?”

“The usual… A Christmas bow tie, some music scores I wanted, stuff like that. What about you? Were you naughty or nice this year?”

“Definitely both. I had to be naughty to get something nice.”

“That’s pretty cryptic. What do you mean?”

“Mercedes is pregnant!”

“That’s fantastic news, Sam! When’s the due date?”

“June 14th. Please, please, please don’t tell anyone. We wanna keep it under wraps until the birth. Mercedes will finish recording her album before she really starts to show. Then in August, she’ll start another tour. I’ll go on tour with her to take care of the baby.”

“It sounds like you’ve got it all figured out. Your secret is safe with me. I have another idea of what
you can do when you’re on the tour bus with Mercedes.”

“What’s that?”

“Keep creating that webcomic! You’re really onto something. Biffy is so adorable as the surfer who loves to bake cupcakes. Then, you have the leader of the pack, Jamie. I think you should make him gay, but in the closet, and struggling with it. It could really create some tension in the story.”

“That sounds cool. I’ve set Jamie up with a father who was the World Surf Champion back in his day. Everyone has high expectations of Jamie, so yeah, maybe he turns out gay. Could you help me figure out this Jamie dude? I mean, I don’t know what it’s like being in the closet.”

Blaine roars with laughter. “Me neither!”

Sam whispers into the phone, “By the way, did you check out KrianFeels’ update yesterday?”

“Yeah, I did. I loved how Brian and Kevin sang ‘Baby It’s Cold Outside’. Very clever to take such a traditional song and twist it for two love-struck gay teenage boys.”

“I’m not talking about that part. I was thinking about later… You know, when Kevin throws Brian on the piano and fucks him. A piano is probably higher than his dick. So how could he possibly do it?”

“Sam, sometimes I worry about you.”

*****

“Blaine, can you step into my study?” Michael, Blaine’s father, asks.

Blaine’s heart sinks with these words. He knows that he has to have ‘the talk’ with his father and no talk with his father in the study is good news. Since he’s been home, they have avoided speaking about the Klainegate video, but now the time has come.

Blaine wishes that Cooper had been able to get time off from work to come home for Christmas, to divert the attention away from him. His mother squeezes his arm and smiles – it feels as if she’s secretly telling him to be brave. And then the strangest thing happened. His mother walks to his father and gives him the exact same gentle squeeze and smile. She then quickly disappears to the kitchen to do the washing-up after the Christmas meal.

The study is just as Blaine remembers it. There’s a big imposing dark oak desk with a wall-length bookcase behind it, filled with hardback books about history, business, and biographies. A deep red oriental carpet fills the space in front of the desk, and there’s an antique wooden cabinet filled with whiskey bottles and crystal-cut tumblers. Blaine reminds himself that he is a 28-year-old man and isn’t under his father’s control any longer.

His father pours whiskey into two glasses and indicates for him to sit down. Blaine decides to start the conversation, to get it over with.

“I’m really sorry about the video, Father. I had absolutely no idea it was being filmed and would be put on the Internet for the whole world to see. I must have been an embarrassment to you.”

Michael takes a sip of his whiskey and nods.
“It was a difficult time afterwards. You should have heard the jokes made at the country club, particularly since we held that fundraising party the previous night. However, your mother and I have held our heads up high and continue to go to the club on the weekends. It’s been a real lesson on who your true friends are. In future, be more careful. I’m not saying you should go into the closet, but just make sure that there’s no-one else around. I… err… think that’s enough of that subject, don’t you?”

Blaine firmly nods and thinks he’s got off lightly about the video. He’s relieved that his father considers the subject matter closed. His father is looking more relaxed now, so Blaine decides to ask about what has really been bothering him for months.

“I have a question for you, Father. After the diva-off performance, you sent me a text saying that you loved it. What exactly did you mean by that?”

Blaine’s father takes a sip of his whiskey. Blaine can tell that he’s thinking carefully about what he’s going to say.

“Watching you perform at the diva-off... I realized that you have achieved more than most men in their lifetimes. There you were, on stage, showing the world exactly who you were. A man who runs a multimillion-dollar media empire. A man who’s passionate about raising money for charity. A man comfortable in his own skin. And yes, a gay man who is proud of who he is. The feather jacket was a little over the top, but you owned every moment on that stage. You were brimming with confidence and looked so happy. You deserved to win. So yes, I loved the diva-off performance. I was very proud of you.”

Blaine is surprised at his father’s words. “I thought you didn’t like me being myself? Being gay?”

His father takes another sip of his whiskey before answering. The air is thick with tension.

“Blaine, when you were 13 years old, you sat your mother and myself down in the living room one day and told us that you were gay, in your most earnest and serious voice. Frankly, I was shocked. The Walnut Springs Middle School had sent us something about the sex education classes the previous month. I thought they had put the idea in your head.”

“Father, it’s not like that. You don’t get to choose your sexuality. It’s something you’re born with.”

“I can’t say I understand that entirely. When I was 13 years old in the late 60s, I never thought about my sexuality. It was assumed that boys would marry girls, have two kids, and live in the ‘burbs. I never doubted that for myself.”

“Just because you didn’t doubt it, doesn’t mean that there weren’t others who were different… who were gay.”

“I’m from a different generation than you. I didn’t know anybody who was gay at school. If there were f… gays, they were definitely in the closet. It was illegal back then. You could go to jail for doing things with someone of the same sex.”

Blaine takes a sip of his drink, reminding himself of how things have progressed since his father was growing up. “Times have certainly moved on from then – and for the better. You were so angry at me at the time, but you hardly said a word.”
“I wasn’t happy that you were gay, Blaine. However, I did know that nothing was going to change your mind… or who you are. At the time, I was thinking of AIDS and how difficult your life would be not fitting in. Frankly, I was thinking about not having a grandchild - my own flesh-and-blood grandchildren.”

“But gay men can get married, have two kids and live in the ‘burbs. It’s what I want for myself! We can find a surrogate and have our own children using artificial insemination.”

“Blaine, think back to fifteen years ago. Same sex marriage was only recently legalized in Ohio after that Supreme Court ruling. Surrogacy hadn’t even crossed my mind as an option. I thought that was something couples did when a woman had plumbing problems. I have learnt a lot since you came out to us. Your mother has helped with that. But at the time, I didn’t know anything and felt out of my depth. I felt uncomfortable talking about it.”

“Is that why you got rid of me to Dalton when I got beaten up at the Sadie Hawkins dance?”

“I didn’t get rid of you. I was trying to protect you! I didn’t think you would survive through graduation at a public high school. Look what they did to you during your freshman year! I couldn’t let that happen again. Dalton had that great anti-bullying policy and was accepting of students like yourself. And they were willing to take you after the start of the school year. There wasn’t really any choice, so I took out a second mortgage to make that happen.”

“But why did I board? I could have been a day student. I felt as though you were abandoning me.”

“We weren’t abandoning you, Blaine. You loved wearing those bow ties and brightly-colored clothes. It was obvious you were gay. I was worried about what would happen to you after school and on the weekends, hanging around the kids in the neighborhood. I knew you would be safe at Dalton, so that’s where you stayed. Besides, you were so happy there.”

“Okay… but even when I was home during that first summer, you were trying to make me straight by working on that car.”

“Honestly, Blaine, that was not my intention. I wanted to spend time with you so I could understand things… who you were. When I was growing up, I worked on a car with my father. I enjoyed it and I thought you would as well. Look, I’m not a perfect person or father. I was doing my best and it was the only thing I could think of.”

Blaine mulls over what his father just told him. He could sort of understand his father’s intentions back in high school, but he would have to think that through carefully later. However, he couldn’t see why his father had been so insistent for him to study business at college.

“Why didn’t you want me to study music in college? You and mom always encouraged us to play instruments and sing. Hell, you even got me that job at Six Flags over the summers.”

“Blaine, when I was in college, I wanted to be a musician more than anything else in the world. I met your mother during my second year and I fell deeply in love. With her love of the piano, I thought we were going to conquer the world. But then she got pregnant with Cooper during our senior year. I had to find a way to support your mother and a baby. Your grandparents had told us in no uncertain terms that we had made our bed and now we had to lie in it. I knew we were going to be on our own after graduation with a baby coming. Starting a music career wasn’t an option, so I took as many business courses as I could in the last semesters. When we graduated, I started work at the insurance company. I was so grateful to be able to put food on the table and support your mother and Cooper.
That was very important to me.”

“But what does that have to do with me?”

“I thought that as a gay man, you’d be alone all your life, needing to support yourself. You were so bright and got such good grades at Dalton. When you got accepted at Harvard, I was so relieved. I knew that sort of college education would keep you in good stead all your life. Music was always going to be important to you, but I thought it would be a hobby, like it is for your mother and me.”

Blaine isn’t sure if he likes that his father thinks he’ll be alone all his life, but at least he’s being honest with Blaine. “So you’re okay with me being gay?”

“I might not like it, but it’s who you are. I’ve learnt to accept it. Never think for one moment that I don’t love you… Because I do.”

Blaine slowly gets out of his chair, walks over to his father, who is also standing, and gives him a hug. “I love you too. Wow, I’m going have to think about this and get my head around it. Good night, I’m heading off to bed.”

*****

After a shower, Blaine changes into his pajamas and climbs into bed. His mind is still reeling from the talk earlier that night. His father made Blaine look at his childhood memories in an entirely different light. Did he really get everything wrong? Was his father’s version of his childhood what really happened?

Blaine pulls out his scrapbooks and flicks through the pages. He laughs at the photo of himself wearing his first Nightbird outfit that his Aunt Laura created from an old Batman costume. He cringes when he sees himself in colorful plaid shirts and bow ties. He has certainly learnt a lot about fashion since those days. While Blaine doesn’t think you can judge someone’s sexuality by the clothes that they wear, he would have definitely been given a hard time by the boys in the neighborhood.

As he flips through the scrapbook pages of his Dalton days, he thinks fondly back to the times with the Warblers. For all the important competitions and graduation - moments that really mattered to him - his father was there in the photos. He didn’t remember that his father had attended all those events, too busy goofing off with his friends.

Blaine goes to his closet and pulls out the shoebox containing the photos of his father and him working on that stupid car. He’s never wanted to scrapbook them and be reminded of the project. For the first time in years, he pores over the photos. Sure, both he and his father are smiling for the camera, but their body language is telling a different story, of tense awkwardness. He’s never appreciated that his father was just as nervous as he was.

Amy was right. The camera lens can show a different perspective of what’s straight in front of you. It’s neither the right one nor the wrong one, just a different view. So maybe the true version of what went on during his teens is not his or his father’s. What if it’s a blend of the two?

*****

Blaine and his mom are sitting around the kitchen table, looking at houses for sale in the Westerville area on the computer. They have spent the past two days with a real estate agent looking at properties
that have the potential to become the Monarch House. Blaine leans back in his chair and groans, “I never thought it would be this difficult to find a place.”

“Don’t give up, sweetie. We’ll find the right place. It’s going to take time, though.”

His father joins them at the table with three mugs of coffee he has made while listening to their conversation.

“I was talking to Blake Pemberwell at the club last weekend. His father died last month and he plans to sell the place on the corner of East Walnut and Summit. It’s a huge three-story house with a large backyard. It’ll need fixing up because I doubt old man Pemberwell did anything to the place since his wife passed away fourteen years ago. It’s within walking distance of Westerville South High School. There’s also a bus stop close by to go downtown. Blake’s going to put it on the market in January.”

“I know the exact house you’re talking about. It would be perfect!” Pam exclaims.

“I was really hoping to have a house decision wrapped up this vacation, but I guess I can come back next month to check it out,” Blaine comments with a sigh.

“How about I call Blake and see if we can give the place a once-over while you’re here? I’m sure he wouldn’t mind.”

Michael walks to the study to make the phone call. After five minutes, he returns with a smile on his face. “Blake doesn’t mind at all. He told me where the key is hidden on the front porch. So, what do you say, Blaine? Want to go check it out?”

Blaine is stunned that his father’s offering to go house-hunting for his new charity project. He looks at his mother, who has a gentle smile on her face. “I’m going to start making that lasagna that you both like so much. Count me out.”

After a ten-minute drive, Michael parks the car in the driveway of an old rambling house. The paintwork is peeling off, but it looks structurally sound. They explore the rooms on each floor, mindful of the dust and the clutter. When they return to the main living room, Michael starts to speak excitedly.

“That top floor would be perfect for the dormitory. You can easily fit two sets of bunk beds into each room. The second floor could work for the staff offices and there could be individual counseling rooms. The basement is big enough that you could have both a pool table and a ping pong table set up. The kitchen would have to be completely ripped out, but then again, I’m sure that there all sorts of health regulations it’ll need to comply with. This living room would be perfect with a big-screen TV, a place for people to relax…”

Blaine is stunned by his father’s rambling. “You’re really into this, aren’t you?”

“Maybe we should have renovated a house when you were a teenager instead of working on a car.”

“Ha! Maybe we should have, although I suspect I would have thought you were going to squirrel me away inside it.”

“Like Rapunzel waiting for Prince Charming? I think that you’d have liked that idea.”

Blaine roars with laughter. He honestly can’t remember ever joking around with his father, but it
feels good.

*****

“Blaine, can you come join me in the study?”

Instead of feeling the usual dread at being summoned into the study, Blaine jumps up eagerly to go join his father. Blaine notices that his father’s chair is pulled around to the front of the desk. Once they are sitting next to each other, Michael start to speak.

“I just got off the phone with Pemberwell. He hasn’t signed an agreement with a real estate agent yet. He’s always been a procrastinator, and this time, it works in our favor. He’s agreed to accept a bid lower than the asking price he was planning. After reminding him that this is for a good cause, that he doesn’t have to pay a commission and that he’ll get cash in a few weeks’ time, he agreed to knock off 20%. It’s under your budget, so you’ll have money for those renovations needed. Are you interested?”

“Oh my god, this is happening… Yes! I want the house.”

“I’ll let Blake know tomorrow. Leave it with me. I’ll get my lawyer to start the necessary paperwork. Your mother’s interviewing possible directors, so maybe I can find an architect to come up with a plan for the renovation?”

“You would do that for me?”

“I wouldn’t offer, if I didn’t want to help out. Help you out, that is, Blaine.”

Blaine has a warm feeling inside. Maybe they should have renovated a house together when he was a teenager. There’s been something else on his mind and this is as good as any time to bring it up.

“Can I ask you about something? When you mentioned Rapunzel waiting for Prince Charming…”

“I know. You want to be Prince Charming… Or maybe Nightbird rescuing Prince Charming?”

Blaine laughs at his father’s joke, thinking of himself in his Nightbird outfit saving Kurt, who’s wearing a tiara.

“Very funny. No, I was thinking about what your reaction would be if I brought a guy home that I’m serious about and want to marry? I mean… It’s one thing to be proud of me - all aspects of me - but it’s another matter altogether meeting the love of my life. And yes, I do dream of getting married and having kids.”

“I think I’m going to need a whiskey to get through this discussion. Will you join me?”

“If you think you need one, then so do I.”

“Is this about Kurt?” Michael asks as he pours an inch of whiskey into two glasses.

“Maybe. I don’t know.”

“Don’t play coy with me, Blaine. I’ve been honest with you this entire holiday. The least you can do is be honest with me.”
“Okay… Yes. At least, I hope it will be Kurt.”

“You probably won’t agree with me, but I know you very well. Your mother’s been showing me the photos of you and Kurt on the Internet this past year. One thing I know for certain is that you’re in love with Kurt. It’s written all over your face. I also might have heard that conversation with your mother a few days before Christmas – after you saw Kurt at a Lima coffee house. I know that this Kurt is someone special in your life.”

“I want him to be.”

“To answer your question, I’d be fine with it if you brought home somebody. Knowing that you were settled and happy with someone would mean a lot to me. I would look closely to make sure he’s the man you deserve… that he… err… loves you back. It might be a little awkward at first, because I’m not used to seeing two men together, but I’ll get used to it over time. I’ll really try for you. But Blaine, never ever put on a performance with someone in my house like I saw in that video.”

Michael pauses when he sees Blaine blushing, then adds, “Far too many feathers for my liking.”

Blaine almost chokes at the last remark. Does his father really have a sense of humor? Before he can say anything, his father continues to speak.

“You and me – we’re more alike than you think. We Anderson men never do anything half-hearted. When we meet that someone special, we fall in love deeply and passionately. It’s a once-in-a-lifetime thing. The other day, I heard your mother encouraging you to date other men. My advice to you is… Don’t do it.”

“What?! You want me to stay single all my life? You just said that you were okay with me bringing home a man!”

“I don’t want you to bring home any man, Blaine. I want you to bring home Kurt. If you really love him, go after him, Blaine. Talk with him, beg him, do anything you have to do to win him over.”

Michael looks in the distance and starts chuckling, getting louder with each passing second.

“What’s so funny, Dad?”

“There was a time when your mother and I had a rough patch at the beginning of our senior year. She wanted nothing more to do with me, but I wanted her so desperately. I actually serenaded her in the outdoor commons area to win her back.”

Oh. My. God! Is that where I get it from?!

“You’ve got to be kidding me. I can’t imagine it!”

“Well, imagine this… One lunchtime, I borrowed my friend’s boom box and sang ‘Maybe I’m Amazed’ to your mother in front of her friends and most of the student body. I think I won her over when I jumped onto the ledge of the fountain and then slid on my knees towards her at the end of the song.”

“So what happened after that?”
“Cooper.”

*****

*Baby, I'm amazed at the way you love me all the time,*
   *And maybe I'm afraid of the way I love you.*
*Maybe I'm amazed at the way you pulled me out of time,*
   *You hung me on the line.*
*Maybe I'm amazed at the way I really need you.*

Blaine is in his bedroom, listening to the classic Paul McCartney song. The words that his father sang to his mother all those years ago resonate with him as well. He scrolls through his photos of him and Kurt on his phone – not the ones taken by the paparazzi, but those taken when they were at the Brooklyn Flea Market, Central Park, Governor Island, and at home. His father was right. It’s painfully obvious that he’s been in love with Kurt from the start. Although he’s looked at the photos thousands of times before, he sees something different now.

He’s always thought that Kurt’s blushing and sweet smiles are endearing - part of his nature. But maybe they are only on Kurt’s face for Blaine. Kurt looks at him as if he’s the single best thing in the world. Kurt looks as if he’s in love. *I’ve been an idiot! It’s been staring me in face all this time. I wasn’t brave enough to believe it.*

*Baby, I'm a man, maybe I'm a lonely man*
   *Who's in the middle of something*
   *That he doesn't really understand.*

Tomorrow is January 1st, and a time for new beginnings. For once in his life, Blaine sees things very clearly and knows what he needs to do.

*****

Blaine stomps the snow off his boots when he steps onto the front porch. He’s glad to see the pick-up truck in the driveway because it’s a sign that somebody’s home. After ringing the doorbell, the door slowly opens.

“Blaine! I wasn’t expecting you. Come inside. It looks like there’s another storm brewing.”

Blaine enters the Hummel house and takes off his boots and pea jacket. He looks around the main room and is disappointed when he doesn’t see anybody else. “Is Kurt here?”

“Sorry, you just missed him. I dropped him off at the airport a couple of hours ago,” Burt replies.

Blaine closes his eyes and sighs deeply. He’d thought that this was going to be the perfect day. He had it all planned. “I guess I’ll catch up with him next week when we’re both in New York.”

“Kurt won’t be in New York next week. He’s moving to Paris.”

Blaine feels as if the wind has been knocked out of him. “Paris!?”
“Come have a seat, Blaine. I’ll tell you all about it.”

Burt goes to the kitchen to grab two beers and joins Blaine in the living room. Burt explains how Kurt had felt working at Elle and why it had been necessary for him to break the contract. With no specific plans for the future, Kurt had decided to combine his modeling work with travel.

“Kurt could have always come back to Vogue. I would have hired him in a heartbeat,” Blaine insists.

“I don’t think he could, Blaine.”

“Does this have to do with me? Did Kurt feel like he had to leave the country to get away from me? Is he that angry at me?” Blaine asks with a trembling voice. He can barely contain the tears that are welling up in his eyes.

“It’s nothing like that. He’s not mad at you. It actually has nothing to do with you,” Burt replies. “Kurt is 19 years old and is trying to figure out what path to take in life. It seems as if it was only yesterday that Kurt had grand plans to attend NYADA and become a star on Broadway. You’ve shown him that there are other options available. Kurt needs to work out how his modeling career fits into the newer version of himself.”

“But I like any version of Kurt. Why can’t I be there for Kurt while he’s going through this?” Blaine asks, placing his head in the palms of his hands. “I love him. I’d marry him tomorrow if he’d have me. And now I’ve lost him forever.”

Burt sighs and looks at Blaine for a long moment. Finally, he says, “I know my son very well, and he looks at you as if you’re the most precious person in the world. Kurt is still young. If you’re meant to be together, you’ll find your way back to each other. Everything will work out the way it should be in the end.”

“But how do you know?” Blaine retorts.

“Because that’s life. You need to relax, Blaine, and not force it. Kurt won’t be in Paris forever. He’ll make his way to you when the time is right. Can that be enough for now?”

Blaine nods slowly, because it will have to be enough for now.

Burt gets up from his recliner and looks out the window. “Blaine, you’re staying here tonight. The storm has started and I’m not comfortable with you driving back to Westerville in this weather. How about you change into something of Kurt’s and we watch a Buckeyes game on TV? We’re in luck - they’re playing in Arizona today.”

Blaine goes upstairs to Kurt’s room and changes into a pair of sweatpants and a McKinley hoodie. Kurt’s clothes feel strangely comforting to Blaine, as if Kurt is wrapped around him. He texts his mother that he’s spending the night in Lima before heading downstairs to join Burt once again in the living room. Blaine hopes that Burt is right and everything will work out in the end.

It just has to.

Chapter End Notes
Song used in the chapter - ‘Maybe I’m Amazed’ by Paul McCartney

Happy New Year everyone!

So, there you have it – my version of Blaine’s father. For more thoughts about Blaine’s father and other things in this chapter, head to the story’s master post on Tumblr (HKVoyage) and check out the author thoughts section.

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. Here is the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics.

Next up: Kurt in Paris.
“If you are lucky enough to have lived in Paris as a young man, then wherever you go for the rest of your life it stays with you, for Paris is a moveable feast.” - Ernest Hemingway

January

After Kurt has paid the cashier, he stuffs the new goodies in his messenger bag. He’s bought dozens of postcards of the Eiffel Tower and a Christmas tree ornament of the monument. Even though he could buy these anywhere in Paris - probably at a fraction of the cost - it seems much more authentic buying them at the Eiffel Tower gift shop. The Eiffel Tower is even more impressive in real life than the photos he had flicked through back in Lima. The 360-degree panoramic view at the top is amazing, and Kurt promises himself he will return one evening to see the city of lights.

Kurt’s life has certainly changed over the past two weeks, since he arrived at the Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris. Kurt’s first modeling assignment at Dior starts early February. In the meantime, he’s playing the tourist, visiting the top tourist attractions. He bought a Paris Metro travel card and is slowly figuring out the routes of the principal lines. Next week, he plans to buy a Paris museum pass and visit the Louvre, the Centre Pompidou, and the Musée d’Orsay. Of course, two days will be spent at the Palais Galliera, the City of Paris Fashion Museum.

Kurt walks across the bridge spanning over the Seine River to the nearby Place du Trocadéro, a public park with sculptures and an array of fountains. When he turns around, he can see the Eiffel Tower in all its glory and pulls out his phone to take photos. Trip Advisor was right – this is the best spot to view the iconic structure. His stomach starts grumbling and Kurt checks the time, and realizes it’s way past lunchtime.

He heads to the 16e Arrondissement, a few streets away, the section of Paris where he lives. He loves exploring the area and its local shops - patisseries, sidewalk cafes, bars, and artisan food shops. He constantly has to remind himself that he can’t explore the local clothing boutiques until he starts working again next month.

Kurt smiles when he sees the sign for La Petite Marquise, the bistro around the corner from where he lives. He enjoys the food and the atmosphere, and can’t wait until spring so he can sit in the outdoor area. The bell jingles over the doorway as he enters the bistro, and Kurt immediately sits at his favorite table - the one that’s by the window that lets him watch the passers-by. If it happens to be the table assigned to the cute male garcon – well, that’s an added bonus. Kurt takes his French phrase book out of his messenger bag. His high school French has been useful, but it hadn’t taught him enough of the practical phrases he needs to know in a bistro.

“Bonjour, Monsieur. You’re a little later today than usual.”

Kurt looks up from the menu and smiles when he sees the cute waiter. He doesn’t know his name, but he mentally calls him Adonis, after the god of beauty and desire. Kurt has already mentally calculated that the slender man is an inch or two taller than him. He has wavy sandy-brown hair, which flows freely to the tops of his shoulders. His green eyes sparkle at Kurt, as he gives him a smile.
“Let me guess. Steak frites (steak with French fries) and a glass of rouge maison (house red).”

Kurt smiles and meekly nods his head. When Adonis leaves the table towards the bar area, Kurt face-palms. He’d really meant to ask for something else and be more adventurous, but he loves steak frites too much to vary his order. It has far too many calories and grams of fat, but once he starts work again, he’ll go back to his usual diet. For now, Kurt loves the delicious flavors of the succulent steak and the crispy potato pieces. It’s a simple dish, but it feels like comfort and richness all rolled into one. Kurt knows that, if he’s honest with himself, the dish reminds him of Blaine.

Kurt fondly remembers his last birthday, when Blaine took him to a small French bistro in Manhattan. The things Blaine did that day to make Kurt’s birthday special. Kurt misses spending time with Blaine and wishes his friend was here to explore Paris with him. Blaine has a way of making everything feel like an adventure. Kurt wonders if he has made the right decision in moving to Paris. Should he have returned to New York City and contacted Blaine instead? So many other factors play into their friendship - it seems impossible that they could make their way back to each other. Maybe in a year’s time, when he returns to the US, but for now, he’s going to enjoy Paris.

After finishing his lunch and giving Adonis a generous tip, Kurt heads back home, which is only around the corner. When Louis, his local agent, had arranged a room with his great-aunt, Kurt had no idea that he would be living in one of the most affluent and prestigious residential areas in Paris. The 17th-century town house has been in the family for generations. It’s a three-story sandstone terraced house and it has the typical ornamental wrought iron black bars across the windows. When Kurt unlocks the front door, he can hear the footsteps of Louis’ great-aunt coming to greet him.

“Kurt! Come sit down, mon petit. Your feet must be sore from your sightseeing. Come to the front parlor with me. Join me for a cup of tea.”

“Merci, Madame,” Kurt politely replies.

Kurt’s hostess tutts and cocks her head to the side. “Madame… We are friends, n’est-ce pas (is it not)?”

Kurt smiles at her and nods. It’s true, however far apart in age they are, they get along very well.

“So call me Emmeline. Madame, ça fait si vieux (Madame, that makes me feel so old).”

When Kurt enters the front parlor, he carefully sits down in an ornate chair, whose tapestry seat has seen better days. As Emmeline pours the tea from the antique china pot, Kurt looks at her, taking in every detail. He reckons that Emmeline is in her late 60s, maybe older, and judging from the framed photos scattered through the room, she was a beauty in her day. She obviously enjoys the finer things in life and is constantly reminding him that she was once the grande dame in Paris’ high society. She’s been a widow for years (maybe decades) and now she keeps to herself, enjoying outings with only a select few.

While they drink their tea, Kurt tells Emmeline in his best French about his day’s outing to the Eiffel Tower and the Place du Trocadéro. Emmeline quietly listens, correcting a few faux pas in his French.

“Run along and get ready, mon petit. We can’t be late for Giselle tonight at the Paris Opera Ballet. Of course, no-one can compare to Sonia Petrovna’s debut performance. Did you know we were childhood friends?”
Kurt carefully climbs up two floors, using the old narrow rickety back staircase to get to his room in the attic. It used to house the servants, but it has long been abandoned. There’s only enough room for a bed, a nightstand, a small wardrobe and a sink. The bathroom is one floor down and has an antique claw-foot bathtub. The porcelain layer is fading in places, exposing the cast iron hidden underneath.

Kurt’s excited about attending the ballet this evening. He’s never seen a ballet performance live before. Emmeline is doing her very best to show him a different side of Paris, one that she knows so well.

Before getting ready, he grabs his tablet and gets caught up with his friends on Twitter. Scrolling through the messages, he sees a photo of Blaine (Kurt’s been meaning to stop following Blaine, but he always seems forgets to do so). On the photograph, Blaine and his father are standing in front of an old dilapidated house, with a sign reading ‘Under Offer’. Underneath is written, *The first Monarch House.*

There’s a link to a news article at the Lgbtqnation website, describing the Monarch Foundation and the purchase of the first Monarch House, located in Westerville. Kurt reads the article and learns that Blaine used his Christmas bonus to establish the Monarch Foundation. Kurt is very impressed with what Blaine has done. Places like the Monarch House are definitely needed in smaller towns in Ohio.

Kurt is not surprised that Blaine has done something like this. He has always been generous with his time and money. Part of Kurt wishes that he was back in New York, to help with Blaine’s plans. On the other hand, Blaine looks pretty happy without him. He puts Blaine resolutely out of his mind, looks at the time and yelps. He’d better finish getting ready for the ballet, for Emmeline waits for no-one.

*****

“I hadn’t been to the Louvre in years, mon petit. Ack! – too crowded with tourists. Je déteste ça (*I hate that*). But you need to have seen the Louvre at least once in your life, so I was happy to show you its secrets.”

Kurt is glad that Emmeline took him to the museum - she knows a senior curator at the Louvre. They were able to jump the queue to see the Mona Lisa, and the curator also gave them a personal tour of the most precious artworks.

Kurt and Emmeline sit down in the front parlor, for their now daily ritual of taking afternoon tea together. Kurt needs to start work next week, and he’s almost relieved. Those three weeks of sightseeing and museums have really wiped him out. He only wishes to slouch on a comfortable couch and watch trashy reality TV… or maybe *The Young and the Restless* – Cooper’s character is always good for a laugh or two. Kurt starts to think about those rainy days when he and Blaine liked nothing better than to hang out at home. He misses Blaine so badly and wonders if there is any way to get him back.

“*Mon petit*… I can tell you have a man on your mind, yes? And you think only he will make you happy, yes?”

Kurt slowly looks up at Emmeline. He knows her well enough by now to know there is something on *her* mind. He really doesn’t want to discuss Blaine with her – it feels too personal and he’s not ready to share – so he nods and looks away.
"Pah! You're too young to - how do they say this in English - put all your eggs in one basket? Now is the time when you should experiment. Try out a few men and find out who you like. What you like. One true love... Weeeell... I've never believed in that, you know. Love isn't something that magically appears and then stays with you for always. Love is what you make of it."

Emmeline wheezes and takes a sip of her tea before continuing.

“There are many men out there that could make you happy. In different ways, yes, but that is the beauty of it. I’ve had three husbands, and each one changed me. Profoundly. Because I evolved with them. We grew together. We built our relationship. We made it work. You need to learn how to do that, too. And this man? If he is really meant for you, you will find your way back to him. One day.”

Later that night, when Kurt’s in bed in his attic room, he thinks about what Emmeline has told him about love. He’s never thought you could really love more than one person. He’s always thought there’s only one true love – a soulmate – out there for him. But maybe love isn’t like that at all?

He certainly agrees with Emmeline’s views about having to work at relationships. He’s already learnt that in his friendship with Blaine. Maybe he could learn a thing from Emmeline and her experience with l’amour (love). She certainly seems to know a thing or two about the ‘affairs of the heart’, as she puts it.

*****

Emmeline insists on taking him out for a special treat in the late afternoon on the last Sunday before Kurt starts working. Kurt wears one of his suits and Emmeline takes special care with her outfit, which comprises a dark gray wool two-piece suit and a red fox fur stole. After a ten-minute taxi ride, they enter Hôtel Meurice, the famous five-star hotel in the 1st arrondissement of Paris. The lobby is opulent, from its patterned marble floors to its huge crystal chandeliers hanging from the ceiling. Kurt has never seen anywhere quite like it. Emmeline hooks her arm inside Kurt’s and leads him to the Restaurant Le Dali for afternoon high tea. The maître d’ quickly greets them and leads them to table set for three.

“Are we expecting someone else?” Kurt enquires, because he doesn’t remember Emmeline mentioning more company.

“I’ve asked my grandson, Antoine, to join us. Yeeees, you wonder how a woman so young and beautiful as I can have a grandson already, eh? Weeeell, I started very young!”

Kurt fondly rolls his eyes as Emmeline cackles away. He’s so appreciative of her liberal views towards gay men. Maybe her grandson is part of the reason, although he suspects she’s seen everything in Paris’ high society over the decades.

“I think you’ll like Antoine. e will show you anozzer side to Paris than I can. Ah, here he is now.”

Kurt stands up to greet Antoine. Kurt’s polite smile becomes genuine when he sees Adonis – the cute waiter from the bistro – standing in front of him. Kurt and Antoine both start to laugh, and Emmeline gives them a puzzled look.

“You know each other?”

Antoine bends down to give her a kiss on the cheek. “Bonjour, mamie. Lovely to see you. Kurt and
I have seen each other at the bistro where I work, but we haven’t formally met.”

When Antoine turns to face him, Kurt can see the twinkle in his eyes. “Enchanté (nice to meet you), Antoine.”

Soon their high tea is brought to their table, and Kurt’s eyes open wide at the offerings. There are finger sandwiches, toasted to perfection with a variety of fillings such as smoked salmon, pesto and mozzarella, foie gras, caviar and tuna… Scones with clotted cream and jams… Cookies and tiny cakes, as well as a wide range of French patisserie, each pastry a work of art and absolutely mouthwatering. After the waiter has poured the hotel’s signature tea into their cups, they begin eating the offerings.

Conversation is kept light during the meal. They mainly discuss Kurt’s adventures over the past four weeks. Antoine gives Kurt some suggestions on other things he might want to see in Paris. Kurt cringes every time Emmeline hints that Antoine should take him. Emmeline might be a wonderful lady, but subtle she is not. Kurt’s surprised to find out that Antoine is an artist, working at the bistro to pay his rent. He lives on the Left Bank, in his art studio. Antoine seems passionate about making art and helping people.

“Excusez-moi, I need to use – comment ça se dit en anglais (how do you say in English)? - the little girls’ room.”

As soon as Emmeline has left the table, Antoine leans in close to Kurt. “Mamie is really something. No?”

“She certainly is.”

“When mamie gets something in her mind, she makes sure everyone knows it. Listen, Kurt, I’ve wanted to find out more about you for weeks. I was hoping that you would make the first move. But never mind, it doesn’t matter now that we’ve met. Next Saturday night, there’s band playing in a small bar on the Left Bank. I think you might like it. Will you join me?”

“Like in a date?” Kurt asks, wanting to make sure he interpreted the invitation correctly.

“Yes, you can call it a date if you want to.”

Kurt chews his bottom lip as he makes his decision. Antoine certainly is handsome and charming. Antoine definitely isn’t like Sebastian, but Kurt doesn’t know enough about him to compare him to Blaine. If he’s in Paris to make a new beginning for his career, why not a new beginning for matters of the heart?

“Oui, I’d love to go.”

*****

Blaine giggles when he reads the tagline on Lips NYC sign – ‘Every woman has a secret’. He opens the door for Unique to pass through. The club is busy for a Tuesday night. There are several bachelorette parties and large groups of friends amongst the usual crowd. When Unique talks to the host to try and wrangle a seat, Blaine pulls her back and whispers in her ear.

“I’m not all that bothered about seeing the show. I really came here tonight to thank the queens for the tips they gave me for the diva-off. Do you think we can head backstage?”
Unique nods and pulls him through the crowd until they get to a black unmarked door. The minder takes one glance at them and lets them in. After passing through several corridors, they enter the dressing room.

“If it’s not the Queen Diva himself. You had me gagging during your performance, babe, you were beyond gorgeous,” Mary D. Knight says, then gives Blaine a kiss on the cheek.

“You saw it?” Blaine tentatively asks. He’s a little nervous about their feedback because what he did on the stage was nothing in comparison to their performances.

“We drew straws and Nova China had to go on stage while you were on TV. After we saw you, we had a good ole kiki. You walked the catwalk like your body was for sale and the rent was due that night,” Rhea Listic chuckles. “You’re not here to replace one of us?” she adds with a wink.

Blaine ducks his head and his cheeks redden at the thought of becoming a drag queen. “No, I’m not planning to quit my day job anytime soon. However, I enjoyed being on stage that night more than I thought I would. It wasn’t anything to do with the attention, the applause or winning the competition. It was the feeling of being someone different... Being free of my usual inhibitions. The only other time I feel that way is when I’m songwriting.”

“And now you know the reason why we do this night after night,” Mary D. Knight utters softly.

“Unique, come help me beat my face into submission,” Divine Intervention demands.

Blaine watches as Unique transforms Divine Intervention into a queen of beauty. He wonders why most women don’t use these make-up tricks to enhance their natural looks. At that very moment, Blaine has a brilliant idea.

“How would you all like to be in a Vogue issue?”

Rhea Listic pops a hip to one side and narrows her eyes at Blaine. “You’re not going to put us in women’s clothes. We’re not trying to pass as women – we’re performers! It’s just a character that we play like any actor, but she’s also a version of ourselves.”

“I wasn’t thinking about women’s clothes. I was thinking about an article about beauty tips. There’s a lot that women can learn from you.”

“Wouldn’t that be pushing the boundaries for a magazine like Vogue?” Divine Intervention asks.

“Magazines like Vogue try to present cutting-edge fashion. Why can’t Vogue push boundaries in other ways as well?” Blaine retorts.

Blaine thinks about this new idea and expands upon it. “There could be a whole issue that pushes society’s boundaries within the usual content of the magazine. Off the top of my head, I’m thinking advice to women on how to find the right woman, iconic movies that made us question social norms of which gender wears which clothes, things like that.”

“It sounds interesting…. But are you sure your readers will like it?”

“As long as it’s tastefully done, I don’t see why not.”
Blaine quickly makes his goodbyes because he wants to focus on this new idea. Unique opts to stay longer and help with the queens with their make-up. He rushes out of the club and enters the Mercedes-Benz, which is waiting at the curb.

“You're earlier than I thought you would be tonight,” Bentley comments.

“I just got the most wonderful idea. I want to think it over, expand upon it and make it really special.”

“Thank god for that. I knew you would think of a way to get Kurt back.”

Blaine quickly looks up at the mention of Kurt. “That ship sailed when Kurt moved to Paris. No, it’s work-related.”

“You're not going to headline at Lips NYC!” Bentley exclaims.

“No, my red feather jacket days are over…. At least in public.”

*****

“You must have better things to do on Friday nights than hang out with me,” Wes remarks.

They are at the Bin No. 220 Wine Bar, their hangout place for their regular Friday nights. It’s busy during happy hour, but Wes and Blaine have managed to find two bar stools to claim.

“Hey, I like your company. I can be myself with you.”

“You could be yourself with many people, if only you opened yourself up.”

“Not happening, Wes. I don’t want to trend on Twitter again with another guy. Maybe if it’s Kurt... Any news on how Kurt’s enjoying Paris?”

“He’s settling in nicely and renting a room from an old lady. He starts work next week for a Dior perfume ad campaign. He seems happy in Paris.”

Blaine nods and takes a sip of his wine. Leave it to Wes to not tell him what he really wants to know.

“Has Kurt met anybody special? I can imagine that all the Frenchmen are flocking to him.”

“He’s not dating anyone exclusively, if that’s what you’re asking. Kurt’s mentioned an Antoine, who’s showing him around the Left Bank. Antoine’s the grandson of his landlady, so I’m not sure what’s going on with that. I don’t pry into Kurt’s love life.”

Blaine hangs his head low with the news of Antoine. He knows it’s only a matter of time before Kurt starts dating. How could the Frenchmen Kurt meets not want to be with him? However, even hearing the news of Kurt possibly dating another man is like a stab through Blaine’s heart.

“God, I’ve lost Kurt forever,” Blaine sighs.

“Blaine, you’ve got to find a way to get over Kurt.”

“I'll never get over Kurt! He’s my soulmate and the one true love of my lifetime.”
Wes rolls his eyes at Blaine’s statement.

“Blaine, do you know how overdramatic you’re sounding right now? You’re 28 years old, for god’s sake, and you should know better than to drown in your own sorrow. You need to snap out of it. I see how men look at you…. Take a look around the bar tonight. You have options. Take the risk and start dating other men. It will make you feel better about yourself, and who knows, you might enjoy the other guy’s company.”

Later that night, Blaine crawls into his large empty bed, adding another blanket because he feels so cold. Sure, he’s got new things going on in his life since Kurt left Vogue – photography, the Monarch House, and even his new friends at Lips NYC. He enjoys them, but it doesn’t stop the lonely feeling deep inside. He hugs his pillow, wishing that Kurt was snuggling up to him.

Blaine knows he’s become more reclusive since the Klainegate video went viral. That experience has given him more than enough of the wrong type of publicity to last him a lifetime. Deep down inside, Blaine knows he’s scared to date other men. To lose the hopes and dreams of being with Kurt again.

Blaine knows he needs to do something to get out of this funk. He can’t let the loneliness and heartache consume him, otherwise he’ll spiral into depression, and that never goes well for anybody. Wes was right to call him out on it earlier tonight. Blaine can’t put his life on hold until things are resolved with Kurt. After all, Kurt himself will be living the high life in Paris.

One thing that Kurt has taught him is that he can take the risk and let new people into his life. It might not be the everlasting love he’s always dreamed of, but he can go out and have fun.

*****

Amy walks through the living area with a basket of freshly laundered clothes. She spots Blaine lying on the couch, his eyes firmly gazing at the far corner of the room.

“Blaine! Are you just going to stare at that piano all day?... Or are you going to play it? I miss hearing you tickle the ivories.”

“I miss it too. I haven’t played since Kurt…. Umm… Since last September.”

Amy puts down the laundry basket on the coffee table and sits down next to Blaine on the couch.

“There’s nothing stopping you, Blaine. If you find it hard to start again, why don’t you play some of your favorite songs first? I promise not to complain if you play Billy Joel over and over.”

Blaine chuckles, sits up, and gets off the couch. “Okay. I’ll do it.”

Blaine sits at the piano bench and pulls up the fall board to expose the piano keys. He stretches and loosens up his fingers, and then starts playing simple piano scales. At first, he feels rusty and clumsy. However, after fifteen minutes of warm-ups, his fingers deftly play the keys again. He starts playing and singing ‘The Piano Man’ and repeats the song twice.

When Blaine doesn’t hear a peep out of Amy, he decides to step it up a notch. He clears his throat before singing the next song.
Sadie, the cleaning lady
With trusty scrubbing brush and pail of water
Worked her fingers to the bone, for the life she had at home
Providing at the same time for her daughter

Amy immediately comes out of the back bedrooms with a smile on her face. “Very funny, Blaine. Now go back to Billy Joel.”

*****

Blaine bounces his leg as he waits impatiently in the Sherman and Myers Law Firm’s reception area.

“Blaine Anderson?”

Blaine looks up and sees a young lawyer walk towards him.

“I’m Connor Murphy. Please come this way with me,” the tall man says in a soft Southern drawl.

Connor leads Blaine into a small conference room. As Connor sets out the legal documents for today’s meeting, Blaine takes a closer look at him. Connor is tall - at least six inches taller than him - and judging by his physique, he takes good care of himself. He has straight blond hair that is cut and styled in a slightly edgier way than most lawyers. Blaine knows that Connor’s Brooks Brothers suit was released this season, so he obviously keeps up with fashion. He guesses that Connor is in his early 30s.

“I was expecting to meet with Mr. Sherman today.”

“He’s tied up in court. I’m a junior partner at the firm and I’ve personally looked over all the documents. The property purchase in Westerville is very straightforward, especially since there is no mortgage involved. You have the banker’s draft for the cash balance?”

Blaine takes the check out of his messenger bag and slides it across the table. Connor gives Blaine a thick stack of legal documents, with sticky flags on pages he needs to sign. Blaine soon gets into a rhythm of turning pages, scanning the page, and signing.

“I was so happy when Mr. Sherman asked me to take over this meeting. I wanted to meet you in person, Mr. Anderson.”

Blaine looks up and sees the lawyer’s cheeks tinge pink with his confession.

“Why is that? And please call me Blaine.”

“I really admire you for setting up the Foundation. I could have used somewhere like the Monarch House when I was growing up in Tate, Georgia. Back in high school, I didn’t know anyone else who was gay. I would have killed for a place to meet other teenagers like me.”

Blaine takes care to school his expression. This attractive lawyer has just confirmed two things to him. Blaine was right in detecting his roots in the South, and Connor is gay.

“I wanted someplace like the Monarch House as well. That’s why I’m setting these houses up and using my hometown for the first place.”
“If there is anything I can do to help with the Monarch Foundation, don’t hesitate to ask. I’ll even do the legal work pro bono.”

“I’ll take you up on your offer, Connor. I’d much rather use the money towards building Monarch Houses than paying legal fees. I think I’ve signed everywhere that I need to. Can you check?”

Connor quickly flips through all the pages of the purchase agreement and nods when he reaches the last page. “Congratulations, Blaine. You’ve just successfully bought your first Monarch House.”

“Yes!” Blaine shouts, throwing his fist in the air.

“I won’t keep you any longer. You must have big plans to celebrate tonight.”

Blaine frowns, knowing that there are no big - or even small - plans for tonight. “Not really. I was planning to go home and call my parents to let them know.”

“You can’t stay home tonight, Blaine. This is a cause for celebration! I know this great Italian restaurant in the Upper East Side that would be perfect. Its veal dishes are to die for and it’s pretty low key. So… Umm… Would you let me help you celebrate?”

Blaine looks dumbfounded at being asked out for dinner. His initial reaction is to say no. But spending another lonely night at home by himself is also unthinkable. Connor isn’t like the typical fanboy he meets or someone who has ulterior motives to get ahead. Connor seems like a person genuinely interested in the Foundation. Blaine thinks back to the conversation with Wes last Friday night. Blaine might find he enjoys himself tonight in the company of a new friend, and an attractive one to boot.

“Yes, I’d love to go.”

Chapter End Notes

Don’t worry… this is a Klaine story after all :) I know it's tough with only one update a week, but I want to make sure you get the best chapters I can give you. The review and editing does take some time.

Song Blaine plays on the piano for Amy – ‘Sadie, the Cleaning Lady’ by John Farnham.

In my opinion, this chapter demonstrates how wonderful Lilyvandersteen truly is as a beta. She has lived in Paris and gave me insightful information about the City of Lights. She came up with character of Emmeline - her best dialogue was from Lilyvandersteen; the worst was from me! I don’t speak French and hate it when I can’t follow foreign dialogue in stories. For French phrases that the typical non-speaker would not understand (me!), I placed the English translation in brackets. Please let me know if this worked because Paris will feature in future chapters.

Here is the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics. I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr.

Seeroftodayandtomorrow on this site is posting a new story, Love Lessons.
Blackrose1002 is also posting a new story, *When the Wrong One Loves You Right*. I'm enjoying them a lot and recommend you checking it out.

Next up: Kurt starts work in Paris.
Kurt and Antoine

Chapter Notes

Surprise! I want Kurt and Blaine back together in this story as much as you do! Therefore, you’ll be getting two updates a week until they reunite.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“As a kid I quite fancied the romantic, Bohemian idea of being an artist. I expect I thought I could escape from the difficulties of maths and spelling. Maybe I thought I would avoid the judgment of the establishment.” - Peter Wright

February

“I can’t believe I already have 1,850 followers for Surf’s Up! and every day I get more. I only posted a couple of comics on Tumblr a week ago.”

“I told you the webcomic would be a hit. I’m sure it helped that we blogged about it on our Krian accounts,” Blaine replies.

“I have a few ideas for the story, but nothing has prepared me for the comments. I’m not sure what to do, because everyone wants Biffy and Jamie to get together.”

“It’s way too early, Sam. The guys haven’t even come out of the closet! Don’t you know that the ship gets together at the end?”

“Will readers really want to wait until the end? How do I keep the plot going?”

“Sam, it’s pretty basic. Use the OMENS plan - Obliviousness, Missed chances, External factors beyond their control, No effective communication, and Smut in small doses. That usually works.”

“Cool. I guess it’s the same formula for most Krian fics. It takes a while to create the comics, so I won’t post anything new for another month. Will people wait that long for an update?” Sam asks.

Blaine thinks this question over carefully. He really wants Sam to succeed with his Surfs Up! webcomic.

“It’s hard to say with only a couple of comics posted, but I have an idea. Why don’t you set up some dummy Twitter accounts for the main characters and get them chatting to each other? It would be an easy way of filling people in on their backgrounds and how they think about things. Give links to the Twitter accounts on your Tumblr master post and people will flock over to see what it’s about. You can even have a few scheduled Twitter Q&A sessions to answer questions about ‘Jiffy’.”

“Hey, man. That’s a cool idea. I need to find something to do now that I can’t read KrianFeel’s fics.”
“Did I hear you right?! You’re no longer reading KrianFeel’s fics? I never thought this day would come!”

“Mercedes has banned me from reading them during her pregnancy. Something about not wanting to deal with so much kinky action in the bedroom.”

“Then I’m not going to tell you about yesterday’s update…”

“What happened, Blaine? I need all the deets!”

Blaine laughs at Sam’s commitment to the story. “The chapter starts with Kevin and Brian doing homework together at their apartment in New York City. They both look up at the same time and realize that all their roommates are out… And they are alone for once. Brian waggles his eyebrows and Kevin gives him that smile – the one he uses when he understands what’s going to happen. The next thing you know, Kevin has Brian spread out on the couch, slowly stripping him of his clothes. Kevin starts to blow Brian, but then at the critical moment – at least from Brian’s point of view because he’s about to climax - Stan returns home. What a cock-block! It ends with a scene where Kevin tells Brian that Stan’s got to find his own place to live.”

“Sounds like a filler chapter, so I didn’t miss much,” Sam replies with a deep sigh.

“So, how’s Mercedes doing? Is the pregnancy coming along nicely?”

“That’s why I called you, dude. We went to the doctor’s this morning and Mercedes had a sonogram. I could see the baby! She’s about six inches long, and I could see her head. I could even hear her heartbeat!”

“You know the sex of the baby? I thought that wasn’t possible for another month or so,” Blaine asks.

“Nope, we don’t know for sure, but I’m certain it’s a girl. I want the baby to be a girl like Mercedes.”

“Awww…” Blaine coos.

“So dude, I wanted to ask you something important. Will you be baby Evans’ godfather?”

“Oh my god! Absolutely! I’m so honored that you asked me.”

“Of course I’m asking you. You’re my best bro. Mercedes definitely wants the baby baptized, and I’ll let you know the deets closer to the time. It will probably be after Mercedes’ national tour.”

“Count me in. So how is the country and western singing going? Have you found any regular gigs?”

“It’s hard to get into the country music scene in L.A. I’d be much better off in Nashville, but that isn’t going to happen any time soon. Not with Mercedes recording and going on tour so soon after the baby is born. I’ll need to take care of my baby girl then.”

There’s a pause in the conversation and Blaine can tell that Sam is thinking about how to break into the country music business. However, he waits patiently, because Sam will confide in him when he’s ready.

“So what’s up with you, Blaine? I saw some pictures of you on Instagram with some tall hot dude.”
“Oh… I went out a couple of times with a lawyer I met when I was signing the paperwork for the Westerville Monarch House. Connor is a really great guy, but I’m not sure if I’m going to see him again.”

“Why the hell not?”

“I like Connor a lot, but he’s never going to be the special one in my life, because he’s not…”

“Kurt. Blaine, I know it’s tough but you’ve got to move on. Maybe Connor is your rebound guy.”

“Connor doesn’t deserve to be somebody’s rebound guy. I really don’t feel ready to move on. I don’t think I ever will.”

“Promise me that you’ll give Connor a chance and go on a few more dates. It’s not like you’re doing anything else and it beats staying home by yourself.”

“Maybe,” Blaine sighs. He knows he should give Connor more time to see if things will develop.

“Maybe what you need is a change in scenery. Come visit me in LA. It will be totally awesome! I can teach you how to surf and you can hook up with some of the dudes. They’re pretty buff and I’m sure they wouldn’t mind being your holiday rebound guy.”

“Thanks for the offer, but I don’t want a holiday rebound guy either. I’d love to hang out with you, but I just took some time off in India and went home for Christmas. I’m saving all my vacation time this year for when the Monarch House in Westerville opens.”

“Just remember, you’re always welcome to stay.”

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“Did you see the photos I sent you?” Michael asks.

“Yeah, Dad. Monarch House really looks like a construction site now. I can’t believe the renovations already started this week.”

“Believe it, son. I’ve gone every day after work to see how it’s progressing. Meagan is handling everything well. I think she’s going to make a brilliant director of the Monarch House. She might not have any experience with a project of this scale, but she’s smart, super organized and really committed.”

“I have you and Mom to thank for getting everything sorted out. I could never have done it without you… Both of you. I can’t believe that you got the planning permission through so fast.”

“You can thank Burt Hummel for that. It’s amazing what a call from a Congressman can do.”

“You know Burt Hummel? Do you know he’s my Kurt’s father?”

“I didn’t know Burt before this project. When the press release went out for the purchase of Monarch House, Burt called me. He said he was 100% behind the concept and would help in any way he could. When I mentioned we were waiting for the city council to approve all the plans, Burt said he knew the Westerville mayor very well - something about helping out his teenage daughter when her car broke down one snowy night in Lima. The very next day, the mayor called me and said the plans
had been approved.”

“Wow, I guess it does pay to have friends in high places. You didn’t… umm… discuss us as well?”

“Of course we did, Blaine. How could we not? It was mostly pleasantries about how Kurt is doing in Paris and how you’re doing in New York City. One thing I’ll say is that if Kurt is anything like Burt, you know how to pick them. Burt seems like a decent and honest man.”

“Well, don’t leave me hanging, Dad! What is the news on Kurt?”

“Kurt is settling in nicely and boarding at an old lady’s house in Central Paris. He’s about to start his first modeling job with Dior. I think it’s a perfume ad. He also has a job for the Paris Fashion Week. Kurt is making friends and exploring the city.”

“I wish I was doing that with him.”

“All in good time, Blaine. Don’t lose hope. Kurt is so young. You have to give him some breathing space to experience Paris on his own. But make sure he knows that he’s still very much in your thoughts and heart.”

“I’m not sure how to do that, Dad. Kurt is living on another continent.”

“Tweet him, send him something that has a special meaning for the two of you. You’re a smart man, Blaine. You’ll think of something. Andersons are like the Canadian Mounties – we always get our man. Ha! I never thought I would be using that expression to describe one of our love lives.”

Blaine rolls his eyes as he chuckles. That sounded a bit awkward, but he knows that his father means well.

*****

Blaine has been feeling out of sorts all day. It’s been exactly one year since Isabelle brought one Kurt Hummel to his office as Vogue’s ‘fresh face’. At the time, Blaine had never suspected that his life would be both shaken and stirred. However, life hasn’t been the same since that fateful day. Until September, Blaine has spent most his free time with Kurt and has fallen deeply and irrevocably in love.

Blaine has mixed feelings about the fateful night of the diva-off. He was so happy when Kurt finally kissed him. Sure, things went a little too far, but he was so lost in his emotions that there was no way he could pull back. When they left the theater, Blaine felt optimistic about his and Kurt’s future together.

Then the ‘Klainegate’ video hit the Internet the next day, and nothing has been the same since. In hindsight, Blaine thinks that he should have gone after Kurt as soon as he left Vogue – when he was at Elle and still in New York City. However, at the time, Blaine felt hurt that Kurt had cut him off so completely by accepting the Elle job, moving and changing phone numbers. When Blaine finally decided to seek out Kurt in Ohio and see if things could be mended, he discovered that Kurt had moved to Paris. So exactly one year later, Blaine is just where he was this time last year.

Alone.

Blaine reflects on the telephone conversation he had with his dad a few days ago. As much as he
wants to book a ticket on the next flight to Paris, his dad is right. Kurt is young and should experience Paris on his own for a while. But that doesn’t mean that he can’t let Kurt know that he’s thinking of him… missing him… wanting him. Blaine just needs to find subtle ways of getting that message across.

Thinking that there’s no time like the present, Blaine tweets 

A year ago today, @KurtHummel walked into my office and life hasn’t been the same since. #InstantConnection, #FriendsForever

Connor invited him out to the Comedy Cellar to see Ben Bailey do his standup show, but Blaine declined the invitation, knowing he would be poor company tonight. No-one wants to be with someone feeling blue in a place that’s supposed to make you happy. He had promised Amy he wouldn’t stay home by himself tonight – she emphasized that it wasn’t productive to drown in his sorrow. Blaine knows of only one place where he wouldn’t feel out of place this Saturday night, so he gets ready for a night out.

*****

Blaine enters the Treble Club Jazz Club and takes a seat at the far end of the bar. It’s the perfect place to sit on such a busy night, hidden in the corner, but still able to see the stage.

“Hey, Blaine. What will you have tonight?” the bartender asks, placing a coaster on the bar in front of him.

“Not sure. I’m not in a bourbon and soda mood. Any suggestions?”

The bartender nods and spends a minute or two mixing a cocktail. When he slides the tall glass towards Blaine, he merely says, “The Never-Ending Story.”

Blaine sees a shimmer in the drink and gives the bartender a quizzical look.

“It’s basically a Long Island Iced Tea but with Unicorn Tears gin instead of… well, gin.

Blaine slowly nods, because whoever knew there would be a gin liqueur called Unicorn Tears. However, his attention is soon on Marley Rose, who steps onto the stage. She sings a long set - a mixture of soulful slow love songs and more upbeat country blues ones. Once the set is over and the encore performance has been sung, Marley Rose slowly makes her way over to the corner of the bar.

“Blaine, what are the chances of you coming here three Saturday nights in a row? You’d think that you didn’t have half of New York’s eligible bachelors knocking at your door.”

‘New York Fashion Week is starting soon and so I’ll be out every night. Today’s a special day, and I didn’t want to be with anybody. Besides, I like it here - I like listening to you sing."

Marley Rose smiles at Blaine and takes a sip from her drink. Blaine is relieved that she gets it – she knows that he’s thinking about Kurt but doesn’t want to talk about him.

“How’s the song-writing coming along? I was so excited when you told me before Christmas that you were playing the piano and composing again.”

Blaine bows his head and places his two palms on his forehead.

“I’m enjoying playing the piano, but the song-writing is another matter altogether. I actually
composed a song called ‘I'm Never Saying Goodbye to You’. It is so melancholy that I had even considered submitting it to Adele. Song-writing is unleashing emotions that feel too personal and raw. I’ve got to figure a way out of this funk.”

Marley Rose squeezes his shoulder and gives him an encouraging smile. “Maybe we can both do each other a favor. I’ve written the lyrics to a song called ‘All or Nothing’. I’m thinking that it needs upbeat music to accompany it, but I can’t figure out for the life of me a single musical note. Perhaps you could help me?”

“Why not? E-mail me the lyrics and I’ll see what I can do.”

*****

Blaine wakes up early Sunday morning, thankful that he had only one ‘Never-Ending Story’ drink last night. After a run in Central Park and a shower, he opens his e-mail and notices a new message from Marley Rose. True to her promise, she has sent him the lyrics to her new song. Blaine pours over the lyrics as he eats his breakfast. Then, with a newfound energy, he sits down at the piano. After doing his usual warmup exercises, he starts to compose the music.

I can't stay here
I am not the girl
Who runs and hides
Afraid of what could be

And I will go there
I need time, but know
That things are always closer
Than they seem
Now I'll do more than dream yeah!

The lyrics resonate with him, and he can’t help but wonder if the full story with Kurt has been told, or if there’s a new chapter waiting in the future. He hums out possible music to go with the rest of the song. Once he has an idea of where the composition is going, he switches on the mic and starts recording.

That it's
All or nothing
All or nothing
Cause this is my life
I'm not gonna live it twice
There's no in-between
Take it too extreme

Blaine spends the rest of the day making minor adjustments and re-recording. When he’s satisfied with the end result, he sends Marley a text. Got my muse back and composed the music for the song. Want to meet tomorrow night to hear it? B

Gathering all his courage, Blaine attaches the audio file to an e-mail for Wes with the following message: I’ve been working on my music again. Marley Rose wrote the lyrics and I’ve composed the music. It’s something that I want Kurt to hear. Could you please forward this to him? Thanks – B.
“Prêt sur le plateau,” the photographer calls out when the lighting is ready.

“Ready on set,” Louis, his Parisian agent, whispers to Kurt. “Don’t worry, there are only a dozen or so things that you’ll need to learn in French. You’ll pick those up quickly today.”

Louis and Kurt step out onto the rooftop of a skyscraper, with the cityscape of Paris in the background. Kurt is freezing, as the sun is weak on this winter’s day, but he’s thankful that the wind is blowing only softly. Kurt is wearing a charcoal-gray suit with a simple white shirt. Instead of a tie, the first three buttons are undone, exposing his neck and his upper chest.

Fortunately, it’s slightly warmer with the photography lights beaming at him. Kurt is surprised at the traditional poses he’s asked to take – standing near the guard rail, adjusting his shirt cuffs, lifting up the jacket lapels, and stuff like that. It all seems so easy after posing for Elle on the dance pole.

“I want the faraway look. Like you are thinking about a beautiful femme, or homme. And face the city.”

Kurt turns and leans his upper half on the guard rail, taking in the mix of historic and modern buildings of Paris. There is only one person to think of to give him ‘the faraway look’ – Blaine. He calculates the time in New York City and wonders if Blaine is awake yet. Is he alone in his penthouse or waking up with the new man in his life?

Kurt has seen photos on Instagram and Twitter of Blaine out and about with a tall and good-looking man. They weren’t taken at high-profile events, but rather at coffee shops, the theater and local restaurants. Blaine looks comfortable around this new man, but something’s missing. There’s no hand-holding or shared smiles – nothing to indicate they are lovers… yet. Kurt had zoomed one of the photos and stared at Blaine’s eyes, for they are always so expressive. Blaine’s eyes look warm, but they lack the sparkle – the way they used to sparkle when Kurt and Blaine were together.

“Cut. We’ll take a 30-minute break to warm up. The look was parfait, Kurt.”

Kurt dashes inside and goes down one flight of stairs, where the model prep area has been set up. Louis immediately comes over and throws a wool blanket around his shoulders.

“Kurt, don’t look sad. You were magnificent on set. The Dior manager is very pleased with the shoot,” Louis says.

“I’m not sad about the photo shoot. I was thinking about someone towards the end of the session, and I miss him.”

“The world is a small place. Why don’t you invite him to Paris to visit you? After this photo shoot, you have two weeks before you’re needed for the next job. Paris can be very romantic, even in the winter.”

“I wish that it was that easy, Louis. But the man that I miss has found another.”

“Impossible! There is no such thing as finding another after you.”

“That’s not what the photos on Instagram and Twitter say.”
Louis goes off to get Kurt a hot drink from the canteen. Kurt desperately wishes that Blaine was here in Paris - but Blaine isn’t, and no amount of wishing is going to change that.

Kurt finds his phone and opens Twitter. He’s surprised when he reads the tweet from Blaine, reminding him that they met exactly a year ago. Has it really been that long? Blaine’s message has been retweeted thousands of times, with #klaine tagged. Kurt tosses his phone aside when he reads the retweet, Why aren’t my babies together?

Before reading the tweet, Kurt thought that Blaine had moved on with his life, with brand-new projects and a brand-new man. But maybe the tweet means that Blaine misses him? He picks up his phone and retweets Blaine’s message, And what an amazing year it’s been. #InstantConnection, #BucketLists, #GoodTimes, #FriendsForever

*****

“How did the photo shoot go, Kurt?”

“It went really well, Dad, although it was shot outside and it’s cold here. The ad is going to hit the March issue of the magazines.”

“Let me know which ones so I can go out and buy ‘em.”

“The ad will definitely be in the American issues of Vogue and Elle.”

“Then I’ll buy Vogue next month.”

Kurt laughs when he notices his dad’s earnest expression, obvious even through Skype. “You’re probably Blaine’s number one fan.”

“Of course I am. I really respect what he’s doing in Westerville with that Monarch House project. We had a long chat about it, and I think I might be able to convince him to open the next one in Lima.”

“Wait a minute, when did you have a long chat with Blaine?”

Kurt can see his dad take off his cap and rub his head nervously. “I wasn’t supposed to tell you about that.”

Kurt wraps his arms around his waist and arches one eyebrow. “About what, Dad?”

“After I dropped you off at the airport last month, Blaine came to the house looking for you. When I said that you were on your way to Paris, he looked as if his world was ending. Blaine was a mess. A snow storm started and I couldn’t send him back to Westerville in that state, so he spent the night.”

Kurt shakes his head. He wishes that his dad had told him about this earlier. “And you just talked about his Monarch House project?”

“No, of course not. It was all I could do to convince him not to jump on the first plane to Paris.”

“Blaine wanted to come to Paris?”
“Of course he did. Blaine is crazy about you. However, I convinced him that you need this time to figure out things for yourself.”

Kurt rushes through the rest of the conversation because he wants some time on his own to think about this. When he gets off Skype with his dad, he heads down a floor and runs himself a hot bath. Once he’s soaking in a tub filled with his favorite lavender-scented bath oil, he thinks about what his dad told him.

Kurt wonders what his reaction would have been if his dad had told him that Blaine came over when he had first arrived in Paris. He probably would have taken the first plane back. But his dad was right… He does need this time to experience new things and to gain a perspective on his relationship with Blaine.

Kurt steps out of the tub and gets into his nightwear. After doing the long version of his nightly moisturizing routine, he heads back upstairs and crawls under the warm down duvet on his bed. Not everything his dad said made sense though. If Blaine is so gutted about Kurt moving to Paris, why is he dating another man? Why is it only now that Blaine is tweeting him? Kurt knows that Blaine is sentimental, so he must still like Kurt to remember the day they first met. But does Blaine like him just as a friend or could there be more between them?

*****

“Café au lait et un petit pain au chocolat, s'il vous plaît (A coffee with milk and a chocolate-filled bun, please),” Kurt requests, sitting at the famous Café de Flore on Paris’ Left Bank. Kurt has switched his usual grande non-fat mocha order to something he feels sounds more adult. Besides, the flaky croissant pastry with fine dark chocolate chunks on the inside satisfies his sweet tooth.

“Mon chouchou, I’m sorry I’m late. I was painting François and lost track of time,” Antoine apologizes as he slides into the seat across from Kurt. He snaps his fingers to grab the attention of the garçon and orders a double expresso.

“Of course, I would prefer to paint a portrait of you,” Antoine adds with a wink.

Kurt gives Antoine a tight-lipped smile. This isn’t the first-time Antoine has asked him to pose for one of his paintings. However, Kurt feels uncomfortable posing in the nude. Although Antoine promises he can cover up his ‘bits’, it doesn’t feel right that the first man to see him naked would be like this. Antoine hints at it, but never pushes, and Kurt is grateful for that.

Kurt has met up with Antoine a dozen times since they properly met at the afternoon tea with Emmeline. They’ve played the tourist on the Left Bank and visited the Pantheon, the Sorbonne University and The Invalids. They’ve strolled through the Jardin des Plantes (“we must return in the spring when the first flowers blossom”). They’ve also explored the little shops and boutiques in hidden streets that Antoine knows so well.

They have gone to clubs and bars and met up with Antoine’s friends. Wherever they go, Kurt notices that Antoine always attracts a crowd. His easy-going nature, good looks, and natural charm draw everyone to him like a magnet, women and men alike. Antoine has always been a perfect gentleman towards Kurt and makes sure that he’s included in the conversations, introducing him to his friends, who are artists, writers, musicians, chefs, and professional students. Kurt always enjoys himself with Antoine’s friends and is curious about their lifestyle. They seem to live in the moment, without thinking about the future. This isn’t a bit like he was raised in Lima, Ohio – where commitment and
family are what really matter.

“Mon chouchou, I have an idée magnifique (magnificent idea) for next Saturday if the weather is beautiful. Everyone must experience the Château de Versailles.”

“I’d love to visit the palace where Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette were married. It’s on my bucket list of places to visit in Paris.”

Kurt bites his lip and wishes he’d never mentioned his bucket list – that’s something special between Blaine and himself. However, remembering the photos of Blaine with the new man in his life, Kurt is determined to get past Blaine and his feelings towards him.

*****

Kurt is glad that he downloaded the audio guide app of the Versailles Palace the previous night. Kurt and Antoine have toured all the impressive areas inside the palace - the King’s Apartments, the Hall of Mirrors, the Queen’s Apartments, and the Chapel, but also lesser known areas such as the Gallery of Battles, and the apartments of Louis XV’s daughters.

“This palace is so ornate and over the top. I can’t believe the royal family could live like this for a hundred years.”

“Now you know why the French Revolution happened. Come with me, mon chouchou. We now need to explore les jardins (the gardens).

If Kurt thought the palace itself was over the top and impressive, nothing has prepared him for the gardens. There are meticulous manicured lawns with paved paths creating intricate designs. The flower beds are mainly empty on this winter’s weekend, but the shrubs provide sufficient greenery. There are statues in small pools of water dotted throughout the gardens.

“And I thought the palace was the main attraction. These gardens are something else altogether,” Kurt observes.

“We’ve only seen a small portion of the gardens. There are almost 2,000 acres at the Château de Versailles. We’ve visited the most famous parts.”

Antoine checks his watch and then adds, “Come with me. Let’s grab some lunch.”

They stop in a small café, get ham and cheese baguettes and mineral water to go, and return to the gardens. They sit on a wrought iron bench, which is cold. However, Antoine soon has Kurt laughing with jokes and trivia about Marie Antoinette.

“I had absolutely no idea that the children’s song ‘Jack and Jill’ was about Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette getting beheaded. It certainly puts a different slant to ‘and Jill came tumbling after’.”

Suddenly, classical music is heard from speakers throughout the gardens and the swishing sound of water starts. Kurt looks up and sees the fountains come to life with spouting water.

“You are in luck, mon chouchou. Usually the fountains aren’t switched on until spring.”

Kurt puts the remainder of his baguette into his messenger bag and rushes from fountain to fountain to see the spectacular water shows. He makes sure to see the Latone, Saturn, Apollo and Neptune
fountains. Antoine remains on the bench and laughs at Kurt’s enthusiasm as he takes photo after photo.

The train journey back to Paris takes just over an hour and they arrive at the Left Bank in the late afternoon.

“The day is still young. Come to my studio, Kurt. I’ll cook dinner and show you my artwork.”

Kurt agrees and they wander back to Antoine’s place. After climbing the stairs up to the fourth floor, Antoine quickly opens the door and leads Kurt in. It is a large studio apartment. Half the space is taken by canvases, easels, and paints. The wooden floors are old and unrestored, with oil paint splatters making interesting patterns. There’s an old upholstered couch and a large king-sized bed, which are surrounded by studio lights – Kurt guesses this is also used for the models. There is a small kitchenette along one side and a door leading to the bathroom.

“It’s modest, but it works for me. When I get inspired, I can paint right away. I’m planning to make a cassoulet for dinner. Have you eaten this before?

“No, what is it?”

“I think you Americans would say pork and beans, but it’s a lot more than this. It takes a while to cook, so let me get the casserole prepared and then we can relax.”

Kurt helps Antoine with the prep work by chopping onions, carrots, tomatoes, and garlic. Antoine combines this with cubes of pork, ham, beans, and fresh herbs into a cast iron casserole dish and slides it into the oven. He then pours Campari and mineral water in two glasses to create an aperitif.

“Santé, mon chouchou,” Antoine toasts as he clinks their glasses together.

Antoine takes Kurt by the hand and leads him to the coach. Antoine then heads to the studio’s corner, where there are at least a dozen oil paintings leaning on the wall in the corner. One by one, he takes a painting and places it on the easel for Kurt to view. The first ones are landscapes of the French countryside – mainly fields of poppies and wheat. The next few paintings are classic stills of fruit and flowers. The last ones are portraits of young men in the nude.

“You certainly cover the full range of subjects for your art. Which do you enjoy painting the most?” Kurt asks.

“The landscapes are the best sellers and help pay the rent. I paint the others when I feel inspired, and currently I enjoy painting the portraits. I do charcoal sketches at first and then the oil painting later.”

Kurt can see that Antoine is passionate about his art, as he rants on about the meaning of each painting, with hands waving everywhere and the same look in his eyes as Rachel gets when talking about Broadway. Antoine puts ‘Lucie’ by Pascal Obispo on the sound system and soon they are discussing other things they plan to do in Paris together.

The meal starts with a terrine de campagne (country terrine or pate), served with crusty baguette and red wine. Kurt only nibbles at it because he can smell the rich cassoulet cooking in the oven. The main course is soon served with a simple side salad.

“I can see why this is a popular dinner in France. The tastes go together so well and it’s hearty for a cold winter’s night.”
“I’m glad you like it, mon chouchou. This recipe is from mami Emmeline. Apparently, she got the recipe from the executive chef at the La Fontaine de Mars restaurant decades ago. God knows how she pried it out of Jean-Guy Loustau.”

After the dinner dishes have been cleared, Antoine places an artesian cheese platter and baguette on the coffee table and they relax on the couch.

“I’m afraid that I can’t eat too much cheese if I want to be able to get into the suits that I model. I already broke my diet with the ham and cheese baguette at lunchtime.”

Kurt’s cheeks flush when he sees Antoine’s glance move from his head to his toes.

“I really don’t think you have anything to worry about. You are parfait (perfect) in my eyes. I’ll put this away, but I insist you join me for a digestif. Would you prefer cognac, armagnac or calvados?”

Kurt has never tasted any liquors before, so he asks for the only one he recognizes. “Cognac, s’il te plaît.”

After the drinks have been poured, Kurt takes a sip and finds he can’t stand the taste of cognac. He thinks about how he could get rid of the drink without Antoine noticing. He doesn’t want to appear unsophisticated, but there’s no way he’s finishing this drink.

“So tell me about your life in New York City?” Antoine asks.

Kurt talks about working at the Spotlight Diner and auditioning for roles in the theater without ever getting call-backs. He then goes on to relate the story of his Vogue internship interview and how he became a model that very same day.

“What an incredible story, Kurt. What do you hope for in the future?”

“I’m not entirely sure. I want to continue modeling until I get bored with it or people stop paying me lots of money. I’m thinking of studying musical theater and taking another stab at Broadway. I’m also thinking about studying fashion and get into the designing end of things. But for now, I’m enjoying Paris.”

“Exactement, mon chouchou. You are young and don’t need to weigh yourself down with plans. This is the time you should live for the moment.”

“What do you hope for in the future, Antoine?”

“I hope that I continue to be inspired to paint, and people are inspired to buy my artwork. I want a place to live, good friends, and the freedom to do what I want. Une vie simple (a simple life).”

When Antoine puts it that way, a life free of commitments and society’s pressures sounds ideal. However, Kurt does want to put down roots eventually, and get married and have kids.

“There is one more thing I hope for, and as luck has it, you are here tonight.”

Antoine slowly leans towards Kurt and presses their lips together. Kurt can feel the sensation of Antoine’s soft warm lips and it feels nice and comfortable. Kurt is pleased that he’s wanted by such an attractive and nice guy. But there aren’t any fireworks or butterflies in his stomach like he felt with
his first real kiss. Kurt doesn’t think anything can compare to kissing Blaine. However, for now, it’s a welcome feeling.

“Stay the night, mon chouchou,” Antoine whispers.

Kurt jerks away quickly as if he has been burnt by fire. “I’m not ready for that… for things.”

“Kurt, look at me. I’m not expecting anything. Okay, maybe more of the kissing. We can take this at any speed that you’re comfortable with. I’m very interested in you and enjoy your company. To see Paris through Kurt Hummel’s eyes is quite magical. So please, spend the night. I can always sleep on the couch if you want.”

Kurt likes Antoine. He’s fun to be with, and this would take their relationship - can he call it that? – one step further. Kurt knows Antoine well enough to know he’s not a predator and will honor his word. But something holds him back. He can’t get Blaine out of his mind, and isn’t ready to take things further with Antoine yet.

Kurt slowly shakes his head. “I think I better call it a night.”

Chapter End Notes

Song Marley Rose writes the lyrics and Blaine composes – “All or Nothing” performed by the Glee cast.

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. Special thanks for reviewing last minute changes so quickly.

Here is the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics. I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr.

Next up: Kurt models at the Paris Fashion Week opens and the Westerville Monarch House opens. It will be posted on Saturday.
A New Opportunity

Chapter Notes

In case you missed it, there was a chapter posted on Wednesday. You should read Chapter 30 first.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A career path is rarely a path at all. A more interesting life is usually a more crooked, winding path of missteps, luck and vigorous work. It is almost always a clumsy balance between the things you try to make happen and the things that happen to you.

- Tom Freston

March

Kurt, who’s never participated in a fashion week in New York City, finds the Paris Fashion Week a crazy experience. He has a modeling job on the catwalk with Bellerose, a small but up-and-coming fashion house. It has boutiques all over France offering ready-to-wear clothing aimed at affluent businessmen under the age of 40. The suits are relatively conservative, but the patterned shirts are youthful and quirky. It’s Bellerose’s debut at the Paris Fashion Week, and there’s a sense of excitement in the air.

The models’ dressing room is chaotic, with assistants ironing shirts and making last minute adjustments to the suits worn by the male models. Kurt only has one suit to model, and he’s set to be the third person to hit the catwalk. He is ready to go and is sitting in the corner, trying to keep out of everybody’s way.

“Monsieur Hummel? Des fleurs pour vous (Flowers for you).”

Kurt makes his way to the entry, surprised that Antoine would actually send him flowers. He doesn’t seem to be the kind of man who’d make romantic gestures. However, when he sees the bouquet of red and yellow roses, Kurt knows exactly who sent them. After giving the delivery man a couple of euros, he returns to the corner to read the card.

I’m sure you’ll take Paris by storm. Courage. Blaine x

Kurt hasn’t realized that Blaine follows his career that closely, or even knows that he’s participating in the Paris Fashion Week. When Kurt thinks about it more carefully, of course Vogue’s editor-in-chief would know what’s going on in the Paris fashion world. And just like that first photo shoot for Vogue, Blaine’s words do give him courage. Without giving it a second thought, Kurt takes a photo of the bouquet and tweets it with the caption A friend sent me these flowers and the message came at the right time. Thanks! #FriendsForever, #Courage

Kurt looks at the tweet he just sent out, and sighs. The flowers and the thoughtful message make him miss Blaine even more. He’d do anything to hear Blaine's voice right now. He reads the card again, and the word ‘Courage’ jumps out at him. He steels himself and nods, entering the number he still
knows by heart, though it's no longer in his contacts on his new phone.

“Hey, Blaine.”

“Kurt? Is it really you?”

“Yeah, it’s me. I have to be quick because the runway show is about to start, but I wanted to thank you personally for the flowers. They’re gorgeous. And I really appreciate the message on the card, too. You always seem to know when I need words of courage.”

“I’m glad they arrived in time. And I meant what I said. You’re going to kill it on that runway. Soon, all of Paris will know what a fantastic model you are.”

“I’m not so sure about that. That song that Wes forwarded to me last week was incredible, Blaine. I have it on a constant loop on my phone. I hope you and Marley Rose plan to send it to some music companies.”

“Marley Rose is cutting a demo of the song next week. Look, Kurt, I probably shouldn’t say this, but I miss you… a lot.”

“I miss you too, Blaine. I can’t stand not talking to you, ’cause you’re still my best friend.”

“You’re mine too. I’ve got a lot on my plate right now, but maybe I can visit you in Paris in a few months time… This summer?”

“Yeah, I’d like that. I’d like that a lot.”

“On commence, on commence! Endroits, tout le monde! (It begins, it begins! Places everybody)” Christophe Bellerose, the owner of the fashion house, shouts.
Kurt isn’t exactly sure what Bellerose said, but gathers that the show is about to begin.

“Sorry, I’ve got to go. I’ll be in touch.”

“Break a leg!”

Kurt quickly makes sure his suit is perfectly in place and slips into the lineup to go on stage. Once he steps onto the catwalk, Kurt is blinded by the lights. He concentrates on the music and makes it to the pre-marked positions at exactly the right time. Kurt is quite pleased with how it’s going on the catwalk until he exits the stage to find a huge commotion.

Christophe Bellerose and the head seamstress are having a shouting match, and it’s a good thing that the music on stage is drowning out the noise. They are speaking French so quickly that Kurt can’t tell what they are saying, but it’s obvious to him what is going on. A male model has accidently torn a large rip along the front of the suit jacket, probably on one of the many light fixtures surrounding them. The head seamstress is shaking her head, vehemently pointing to the other models getting ready, and Christophe Bellerose is getting more frustrated.

Kurt moves towards the pair and says, “S’il vous plaît, I can fix this.”

Christophe gives Kurt a quizzical look.

“I know how to sew. I can fix this tear in no time, if you give me a sewing kit.”

Christophe looks relieved and shouts a flurry of commands to the head seamstress. The next thing Kurt knows, he’s sitting at a table and quickly sewing an invisible seam. It’s not absolutely perfect, but someone would have to look very closely to see his handiwork. Christophe examines his work when he’s finished, and then calls the model over, who quickly puts on the jacket and heads towards the catwalk.

“That was very impressive, Monsieur…”

“Hummel. I’m Kurt Hummel.”

“Where did you learn to sew?”

“My mother taught me when I was young, and then I started to make my own clothes. Or I would take clothes from the usual places and repurpose or fix them so that they were more my style.”

“I can see you’re a natural. Have you ever considered designing clothes yourself?”

“Yes, I design all sorts of outfits during my free time.”

Christophe Bellerose hands Kurt a business card and pats his back.

“Come to my office next Monday morning. I think we need to have a little talk.”

Kurt quickly nods and Christophe rushes on stage to close the show.

*****

When Kurt rounds the corner a few streets away from the Avenue George V, he sees the sign for the
Bellerose Boutique. He enters the shop and notices that it’s very busy, with customers wanting the new suits from the spring line. Obviously, the show at the Paris Fashion Week has paid off. When Kurt tells the salesman his name, he’s immediately whisked into an elevator and told to get out on the third floor. When Kurt exits the elevator, he announces himself to the receptionist, and she leads him to Christophe Bellerose’s office.

“Bonjour, Monsieur Hummel,” Christophe greets him. “Please come in and have a seat. I trust you brought your portfolio?”

Kurt hands over his leather portfolio, full of sketches he’s designed from high school to Paris. “I have a blog where you can see the outfits I’ve made for myself. I used to take selfies and post them.”

Christophe carefully examines the portfolio, sometimes frowning and sometimes grinning. He then takes Kurt’s tablet and swipes through the photos.

“How old are you?”

“I’ll be twenty in May, Monsieur.”

“It’s obvious that you have no formal training. However, in spite of that, you have a good eye and a natural talent. Your designs are creative, and with a little guidance, they could really be something.”

“Merci. That means a lot coming from you.”

“Have you ever considered working in fashion behind the scenes? Not as a model?”

“Funny you should ask this question. A year ago, I actually interviewed for a fashion internship at Vogue. However, they had different plans for me, and the next thing I knew, I was at a photo shoot as a model with a six-month contract.”

“Perhaps today will flip things back to a year ago. I’m offering you the position of my personal assistant. There will be phones to answer, meetings to arrange, trips to organize, and the like. However, I promise you that the job will be more than this. Under my wings, you’ll learn about la mode française - about design trends, techniques, materials, and production. You will see first-hand how a collection is pulled together.”

“This sounds like a unique opportunity. But, can I think about it for a couple of days? It’s a big career change, and…”

“And of course you’ll be the lead model for the next collection, including the ad campaign, if that’s what you want. For this modeling work, you would earn your usual fees.”

Kurt leaves the boutique and enters a nearby café. After ordering his usual café au lait and un pain au chocolat, he thinks about Christophe Bellerose’s job offer. It sounds too good to be true. He’ll be working directly for an up-and-coming fashion designer, seeing a collection created from the initial ideas to the clothes on a rack in a boutique. It would be a great chance to see if he is really interested in fashion design. He earns much more money from modeling, but there’s the extra cash for featuring in the Bellerose ad campaign. He’ll make enough money to live comfortably in Paris and save a little for future plans.

As much as he enjoys modeling, Kurt doesn’t like the lifestyle that comes with it. His life is too public, and he’s treated by the media as a commodity. The strict French privacy laws have given him
a low profile in Paris, but it will be an entirely different matter when he moves back to New York City. Modeling doesn’t really fit into his long-term goals – of marrying a man that he loves, whom he can spend his life and raise a family with.

As Kurt always reminds himself, he’s young, and this is the time to take risks and experience new things. He returns to the Bellerose Boutique and heads to the third floor. Upon entering Christophe Bellerose’s office, Kurt smiles and shakes the designer’s hand.

“I accept your job offer. When can I start?”

*****

“Mon petit, why must you move out? You’re my perfect little one, and I want you to stay,” Emmeline pouts when she sees Kurt in the hallway with his suitcases.

“As much as I’ve enjoyed staying here and spending time with you, I want to live closer to my new job. Of course, we’ll still see each other.”

“We cannot leave it to – comment est-ce qu’on dit en anglais (how do you say in English)? – happenstance. Otherwise, you will never come visit me. Why not come over every Friday night for dinner? We can talk about your week at work and your plans pour le week-end.”

“I’d like that, Emmeline. It’s a great idea.”

“You should know by now that I’m full of bonnes idées. You must promise me that you’ll come every Friday.”

“Of course I will.”

Kurt likes the idea of having Friday night dinners with Emmeline. He’s used to this sort of tradition with his dad. Although he enjoys Emmeline’s company and listening to her reminisce about the past, and impart her views on life and love, Kurt feels he needs to live on his own.

A taxi ride later, Kurt is in front of the Petite Patisserie, close to the Galeries Lafayette et Printemps, the heart of Paris’ fashion industry. He looks at the tempting offers on display in the bakery’s window and is glad that he doesn’t need to be as strict about his diet now that he’s not a full-time model. He climbs the stairs to the furnished studio apartment above the patisserie. It’s basic but clean and more than satisfactory for his needs.

Kurt picked this location because it is also close to ESMOD-ISEM Paris, a school that offers courses in fashion design and the fashion business. Kurt has signed up to take two evening courses, starting next week. Between the job at Bellerose Boutique during the day and the classes at night, Kurt will know if he wishes to pursue fashion design.

After unpacking his suitcases, Kurt pulls out his tablet and is relieved that the Wi-Fi is working and is strong. He takes photos of the studio and sends them to his dad, and then goes on Twitter. There’s nothing but the usual news, so he clicks into Blaine’s account.

There are photos of Blaine with his family and a crew painting the outside of an old rambling house. Blaine looks adorable with a dab of paint on his left cheek. He’s wearing jeans and a tight-fitting worn Henley shirt, and his curls are sneaking out of the beanie on top of his head. Kurt chuckles when he notices that Blaine isn’t wearing socks with his converse sneakers, even in March. Some
things never change.

Some photos show Blaine in deep concentration while painting. Others show him goofing around with the others. In every photo, Blaine looks really happy. Kurt can’t see photos of Connor, Blaine’s new boyfriend. Kurt wonders if he just couldn’t make it on the day or whether they’re now broken up. Regardless, Kurt knows he has blown his chance for something really special with Blaine.

After reading about the upcoming opening of Monarch House, Kurt is really impressed with what Blaine is achieving. Kurt rubs his chin, wondering what he should do. The phone conversation they had before Kurt went onto the catwalk during the Paris Fashion went so well, and he wants to keep the lines of communication open.

Kurt surfs to the Monarch Foundation’s website and makes a donation. No matter how good he feels about that decision, it doesn’t feel personal enough to connect with Blaine. He gets a brilliant idea of what to do and quickly writes an e-mail.

_Dear Blaine,_

_I’ve seen the photos of you preparing for the upcoming opening of Monarch House on the Internet. One of the many things I really admire about you is that you stay true to your core beliefs. Monarch House is just a reminder of that. I really wish there was somewhere like that I could have turned to when I was a teenager. I’m sure you’re very busy with last minute preparations, but I’m sending you a link to a video made when I was in high school. It will make for a good laugh when you need one._

_All my best,_

_Kurt x_

*****

“If there’s nothing else, I’m heading to Sam’s old bedroom to get some sleep. I know it’s only eight o’clock, but we have an early flight to catch tomorrow.”

“Good night, Amy. Wake me up if you don’t see me surface by six.”

Blaine walks around the penthouse and turns off the lights. Tomorrow morning, he and Amy are heading to Westerville, a few days before the Monarch House opening. Amy agreed to join him to help with a last-minute cleaning of the Monarch House and to make sure the Anderson household runs smoothly. It’s going to be a busy trip, but it will all be worth it once the opening is over and the house is up and running.

After his nightly routine in the bathroom, Blaine changes into his pajamas and crawls into bed. He’s already made sure that his tablet and Beat headphones are fully charged. He had been pleasantly surprised earlier that day when he received Kurt’s e-mail. He had already received confirmation of Kurt’s $10,000 donation to the Monarch Foundation, but the e-mail felt much more personal. He brings up the email on his tablet and reads it for the hundredth time. Kurt has this way of making him feel special, and he wonders what other things Kurt might admire about him. After putting on the headphones, he clicks on the link. The video starts with a marching band in what looks like a high school gymnasium. He gets a glimpse of a few cheerleaders prancing onto the court. When he hears someone sing, ‘Come on, Kurt Hummel’, Blaine’s mouth drops open as Kurt struts in view and starts singing ‘4 Minutes’.
Oh. My. God. Kurt was a cheerleader back in high school! This is my teenage fantasy come true!

Blaine is mesmerized by Kurt’s showmanship… His voice, his confidence, his moves. The performance only confirms that Kurt Hummel is the sexiest man alive. Once he has watched the video half a dozen times, he notices that it was posted on Rachel Berry’s channel. He clicks on her name and sees hundreds of videos listed. Blaine scrolls down the list until he finds the New Directions videos posted a few years ago.

Blaine can feel his body heat up as Kurt performs ‘Single Ladies’ and wishes the video was longer than 50 seconds. Blaine knows that Kurt’s dream is to be on stage, but nothing prepared him for the ‘Rosie’s Turn’ performance. Kurt’s stage presence, the strength of his voice, and the feeling that Kurt did have a difficult time in high school. Blaine certainly hopes that everything’s coming up Kurt now.

It’s still early, so Blaine makes his way through the New Directions videos. He usually spies Kurt in the background, singing back-ups to Rachel’s solos. He laughs at a young Kurt dressed up for the Rocky Horror Show and Lady Gaga performances. Blaine then discovers a most remarkable video of the New Directions, and it gives him an idea. One that will let Kurt know that he’s watched the performances, and that will hopefully lead to further communication.

*****

“Good luck today, Blaine. I’m sure the opening of the Monarch House will go smoothly.”

“Thanks, Connor. I certainly hope so. I’m really sorry that I didn’t invite you to join me, but it’s sort of a family thing.”

“I get it, Blaine. You’re not ready to introduce me to your parents. I’m okay with that, I guess.”

Blaine can hear a trace of the bitterness in Connor’s voice through the telephone line, and feels guilty. Although they have been going out on dates for the past couple of months, Blaine is unwilling to label their relationship or even move it forward. He likes Connor a lot and enjoys his company, but he isn’t the special somebody he wants in his life. Blaine doesn’t want Connor to be the first man he brings home to meet his family. There’s only one man Blaine wants to bring home.

“It’s not that. My father and I haven’t always had a good relationship because I’m gay. He’s slowly coming around, and he’s been so supportive of the Monarch House. I don’t want to mess things up with him, and certainly not this weekend.”

Blaine can hear Cooper shouting from the bottom of the stairs. “Are you ready, squirt? We’re expected at Monarch House in ten minutes.”

“I gotta go, Connor. I’ll call you when I return to New York City.”

Blaine walks down the stairs and checks his appearance in the entryway mirror. He needs to look smart and professional for the opening day of Monarch House.

“We’re in luck because it’s going to be 64F today and sunny. Are you ready for this?” Pamela asks, as she puts on her lightweight jacket.

“I’m more than ready for the opening. I can’t believe we got the Monarch House ready in just three months. You, dad and Meagan are miracle workers.”
“My contribution was finding Meagan to be its director. The rest is down to her and your dad, who made sure the renovations went to schedule.”

Michael smiles at Blaine as he heads out the door. “Let’s get going. It wouldn’t be right if we’re late.”

Five minutes later, Michael parks the car two blocks from Monarch House. There are so many people attending the opening that they couldn’t find anywhere closer to park.

“Wow, look at the crowd,” Blaine comments when he sees hundreds of well-wishers, media and local dignitaries.

Cooper examines himself in the car’s side mirror and puffs a blast of minty mouth freshener. “I **did** tweet that I’d be coming today. I bet there’s a *The Young and the Restless* fan base in Westerville. I’ve got plenty of pens to sign autographs.”

Michael and Blaine look at each other and start laughing when they realize they are both rolling their eyes. After Blaine has done up his suit jacket, Michael straightens out his tie for him.

“Look what you’ve achieved to help other people. I’m so proud of you, son.”

Blaine gulps slowly and wills away the tears forming in his eyes.

“I want you to be, Dad.”

The first hour of the opening goes to plan. Blaine cuts the ribbon at the entrance of the house, then makes an impassioned speech about the goals of Monarch House and what it will mean to the community. The Westerville mayor then gives a longwinded speech about how the City Council is 100% behind the project.

The local and national media are there to report the event. Blaine and his family split to give one-on-one interviews that will be broadcasted later in the day. Once they’ve had their photos taken and the interviews are over, the crowd thins out to those very people that the Monarch House will serve.

“I think we’re ready for the real open house celebration,” Meagan whispers to Blaine.

Blaine steps up onto the front porch and starts ringing a bell to grab everyone’s attention.

“Don’t leave yet. The real opening for you guys hasn’t started yet. If you head to the backyard, we have food and some activities. On the table next to the food, you’ll find white T-shirts and black sharpies. Write something about yourself and wear the shirt so we can get to know each other better. I’m just going inside for five minutes to change. I don’t want to wear this suit the whole afternoon.”

Pop music starts playing in the backyard to signal people to come. Blaine is relieved to see that no one is leaving and they’re moving towards the backyard. He quickly enters the house and changes from his suit into more casual clothes. He squeezes himself into a pair of tightly-fitting blue jeans. Underneath his red jacket, he’s wearing a white T-shirt that says ‘Likes Boys’ in big black lettering. Blaine hopes that the kids realize he’s someone like them. If Kurt sees a photo of him in the T-shirt, it’s definitely a bonus.

When Blaine exits the house, he can see a few hundred people in white T-shirts. They’re eating and
talking to each other. Meagan, whose shirt reads ‘bi-curious’, is distributing flyers about the events that will be taking place at the Monarch House over the next two months. Most importantly, everyone looks happy. His mother is wearing a shirt with ‘friendly’ marked on the front and she’s talking with a teenage girl whose shirt says ‘shy’. Cooper’s shirt says ‘gorgeous’ and is surrounded by middle-aged women hanging on his every word.

Blaine sees a teenage boy whose shirt says ‘alone’ hanging out by himself in a secluded part of the backyard. Blaine goes to the food table and fills two plates before joining the teenager.

“I’m Blaine. How ya doing? Want some food?”

“Yeah, I’m hungry but I didn’t want to bother anybody. I’m Travis.”

After Blaine has handed over the plate, he asks, “Do you go to Westerville South High?”

“Uh-huh. I’m a sophomore. It totally sucks.”

“I figured that out from your T-shirt.”

“Nothing’s going to change. Gay bashers are always gonna hate. The teachers and principal won’t do anything about it. School’s a hell hole and I can’t wait to get out. You wouldn’t understand. I heard someone say that you went to that posh school – Dalton Academy.”

“I understand more than you think, Travis. When I was a freshman at Westerville South High, I got bullied for being gay too. It was mainly name-calling, threats, tripping me, and stuff like that. But then I went with the only other out guy to the Sadie Hawkins dance, and we got beaten up so badly that we were in the hospital for a few weeks. It was only then that my parents paid attention and decided to transfer me to Dalton.”

“At least your parents cared enough to do that. Mine don’t get it. They’re not exactly homophobic, but they don’t understand the pressure I’m under.”

“Mine didn’t understand either. It took something huge like getting beaten up for them to realize how bad it was. But that doesn’t have to happen to you. Monarch House is just around the corner from Westerville South High, so you can come here after school and hang out. There are things here for parents as well, so they can better understand what it’s like and how to help you.”

“I’m not sure if my parents would do that.”

“Hey, why don’t I have my dad talk to your parents so they can understand things better? In the meantime, there’s somebody at the ping-pong table looking for a game. His shirt says ‘cool guy’, so he can’t be too bad. So, what do you say?”

When Travis nods, Blaine leads him to the ping-pong table and introduces the boys to each other. Blaine then heads over to his dad, whose shirt says ‘closed-minded’. After Blaine relates his conversation with Travis, Michael agrees to find his parents and have a quiet word with them.

Blaine is surprised to see Burt talking to a group of parents. Blaine hadn’t expected him to attend the opening of Monarch House. Even Burt is wearing a white T-shirt, which simply says ‘supportive’. Burt glances up and notices Blaine watching him. He quickly says his goodbyes to the group and walks over towards Blaine.
“Buddy, great to see you,” Burt greets as he squeezes Blaine’s shoulder. “The Monarch House is amazing. Meagan gave me a personal tour inside. You and your family have worked really hard to make this happen in a matter of a few months.”

“I’m so glad you came today. I wasn’t expecting you.”

“No way was I going to miss the opening day. What you’re doing here really matters to me. You are making a real difference to the LGBT community in this town.”

“I know what you mean - that’s why the Monarch House is important to me as well. Thanks for helping out with the City Council and the planning permission. Otherwise, it would have taken months before we could start the renovations.”

“Glad I could help, Blaine. I’m really hoping your next Monarch House will be in Lima. I wish there had been something like this for Kurt when he was growing up. I know the City Council members in Lima. The glee club’s director at McKinley High will help us as well.”

“Do you mean Rachel?”

“Oh, I forgot you know her as well. Yeah, Rachel and her two dads will definitely help out. By the way, I can tell by the T-shirts that you know about that New Directions’ performance. Kurt is gonna love your T-shirt especially,” Burt smirks.

“I hope so,” Blaine replies as he his cheeks redden. “I saw Kurt in the Dior perfume ad. It’s funny, the ad is running in Vogue’s next issue in the US as well.”

“Yeah, Kurt sent me the ad. I gotta say, I was relieved. I almost had my second heart attack when he featured on Elle’s cover on a stripper pole. There was something that bothered me about the Dior ad though – it was that faraway look. It was almost like he was missing home. Or someone.”

“I wouldn’t worry about it, Burt. It’s amazing what photographers can do to get the look they want. I heard about Kurt’s new job at the Bellerose Boutique. Is he enjoying it?”

“I spoke to him last Sunday, and his first couple of weeks were very busy learning new things. He seems to like his new boss and the behind-the-scenes fashion stuff. Two weeks ago, Kurt moved into a studio apartment near the fashion center of Paris. He’s taking a couple of night classes at some fancy design school I can’t pronounce the name of. Kurt is busy, but he’s happy.”

“Any news about when he’s going to return to the US or visit?”

“Kurt promised me he’d come home for Christmas. I don’t think he’ll be home beforehand. Are you two knuckleheads talking again yet? It sure doesn’t sound like it…”

“We have started to talk again. I sent him some flowers for his debut during the Paris Fashion Week and he phoned to thank me. He also sent me an e-mail with a link to his high school glee club performances. He even agreed that I could come to Paris this summer to visit him. I’m still trying to figure out the best way to talk about what happened between us.”

“How about the old-fashioned way? Just pick up the phone or Skype him. Kurt isn’t going to bite you or anything. I think – no, I know – that he misses your friendship a lot.”

Before Blaine can reply, the ‘cool guy’ cranks the music up, and judging by the dancing, it’s
everybody’s favorite song.

_It doesn’t matter if you love him or capital H-I-M_
_Just put your paws up_
’Cause you were born this way, baby

“If only Kurt was here right now. This was like his personal anthem in high school,” Burt remarks.

“Kurt does have a thing for Lady Gaga. If you’ll excuse me, Burt, I’m going to join them.”

Blaine goes over to where the teenagers are dancing. His hips start to sway to the music. He points at Cooper and crooks his index finger to call him over to dance with him.

_No matter gay, straight or bi_
_Lesbian, transgendered life_
_I’m on the right track, baby_
_I was born to survive_

Michael and Pamela join their sons and start to dance as well. Blaine is amazed at how close his family has become as a result of the Monarch House. However, one thing is very wrong and he wants to correct it.

Blaine dashes to the table and collects a black sharpie. He walks over to his dad, who stops dancing to face him. With a swipe of the marker Blaine crosses out ‘closed’ on his father’s T-shirt and then writes ‘open’. When Michael looks down at his shirt that now reads ‘open-minded’, tears start to pool in his eyes. They embrace each other tightly for a minute, basking in each other’s respect and acceptance. However, when the song’s refrain starts, Blaine’s hips can’t stop swaying.

_Don’t hide yourself in regret,_
_Just love yourself and you’re set_
_I’m on the right track, baby_
_I was born this way_

*****

On the first day back at work after the weekend’s opening of the Monarch House, Blaine calls a staff meeting to finalize the ‘pushing boundaries’ issue of Vogue.

“I saw the photos for the article on the drag queens secret guide on make-up. How is the article coming along?” Blaine asks.

“Unique helped me with the interview and the draft article will be ready by the end of the day,” Stephanie reports.

“Make sure that Unique gets a byline for the article. Jackie, what about the article on the ten most ground-breaking movies for their time?”

“It’s drafted and in the system for your approval. Thanks, Blaine, for making the introduction to AO
Scott at the New York Times. He was happy to help.”

“Good. Isabelle, were you able to interview Diane Keaton about the making of Annie Hall?”

“Yes, she’s a fascinating lady. One of my staff researched how her outfit in Annie Hall impacted the fashion industry. The article should be ready for you to review on Wednesday.”

“Liane, how is the art of a girl asking a girl out going?”

“It’s been a tough article to write, Blaine. There are so many ways to go about it. I decided to keep the article lighthearted. I think it would be fun having the art of a man asking a man out included in the article as well.”

“Great idea, Liane. Maybe I could pick up a tip or two myself,” Blaine replies jokingly. “I’ve already approved the photo of Laverne Cox for the cover. We just need to finalize the specific photos to go in the main spread.”

“I’m working on those. I have a meeting set up for tomorrow morning to go through them with you.” Paula replies.

“How about the ‘ten ground-breaking fashion blogs’ article, Chloe?

“Can we rename it to 100 ground-breaking fashion blogs? It is too hard to narrow it down to ten.”

“No can do – there’s not enough space in the issue. Why don’t you go through the list with a couple of other people, say Gabriel and Emily? I’m sure the three of you can whittle down the list to ten. Any other issues or concerns?”

When no-one says anything, Blaine concludes the meeting. “Then, I think we have all the bases covered. We’ll meet again at the end of the week to finalize the issue.”

Blaine pulls Isabelle aside, waiting for the remaining staff to leave. “Isabelle, I’m putting the final touches on my editorial about how men can wear women’s jewelry. Would you mind reviewing it for me? It’s actually proving more difficult to write than I thought.”

“Sure, I can do that. You do know who would be perfect to advise you on the article?”

“I do, but I can’t ask. Kurt is busy with his new job in Paris. The funny thing is that Kurt is the one that inspired me to write the editorial in the first place.”

“Because of the brooches?” Isabelle asks.

“Because of the brooches,” Blaine nods.

“Give Kurt a call. Your editorial is the perfect excuse. I’m sure Kurt would love to help you out. And if you two talk about other things, like getting back together… Well, that’s an added bonus.”

Blaine blushed at Isabelle’s comment. It’s a reminder that he has both friends and family rooting for him to get together with Kurt. “You’re right. I’ve got something planned tonight, but I’ll give him a call over the weekend.”

*****
When Blaine gets to the steps of the New York City library’s main branch in Bryant Park, he eyes the banner with a sketch of the now famous founding father with the words, ‘Alexander Hamilton: Striver, Statesman, Scoundrel. Open June thru December’. Although it’s only late March, special preview events are being held for VIPs and the library’s generous benefactors. Lin-Manuel Miranda personally sent him a coveted invitation for tonight’s event. The cast of Hamilton will be present on their day off from the Broadway musical. The invitation allows for a ‘plus one’, but Blaine couldn’t bear to bring Connor – not when Hamilton means so much to him and Kurt.

After checking in his winter coat and messenger bag, he enters the library’s Wachenheim Gallery, and he accepts a flute of champagne by one of the many servers working around the room. He doesn’t recognize anyone immediately, so he concentrates on the exhibition itself, which presents a selection of the library’s holdings, focusing on Hamilton’s ambitious early life, work as a statesman and creation of the Federalist Papers, as well as the scandals that marred his legacy. No matter how much Blaine tries to concentrate on what is a really interesting exhibition, he looks at the photos and sketches of Alexander Hamilton without really seeing them.

It’s always Kurt that he sees.

Kurt brainstorming ideas with him for Vogue’s Hamilton-inspired spread. Kurt watching Hamilton on Broadway with him. Kurt posing in his outfit at the Hamilton-inspired photo shoot, looking so confident and sexy. The two of them attending the Tony Awards, where Hamilton won eleven awards. And of course, the Tony after-party.

When the dramatic opening flourish of violins, drums and piano starts, followed by the snapping of fingers, Blaine’s attention turns to the seven performers standing on the temporary stage.

*How does a bastard, orphan, son of a whore and a Scotsman, dropped in the middle of a forgotten Spot in the Caribbean by Providence, impoverished, in squalor Grow up to be a hero and a scholar?*

Although Blaine loves this song and the live performance, it’s too much. It makes him feel too much. It evokes too many powerful emotions pent up inside and the bittersweet memories of Kurt. He sets down the now empty champagne flute on a server’s tray and heads out of the museum. He wishes so much that he could have attended the exhibition with Kurt at his side, because what makes an experience like this worthwhile is sharing it with someone you love.

This impossible situation needs to change. Sure, they’ve started talking again, and Kurt has agreed to Blaine visiting him this summer. But that seems so far away, and he wants Kurt now. He has to find a way back to Kurt sooner rather than later.

But how?

Chapter End Notes

Songs used in the chapter:
‘Born This Way’ by Lady Gaga (but you Klainers already knew this).
‘Alexander Hamilton’ from the Hamilton Broadway production (of course, you knew
Cassie at CC-Graphics created the most amazing animated artwork of the telephone conversation. Please go give her feedback here. Cassie also created the the story’s artwork. While you're there, go check out her other artworks. They will blow your mind!

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. Special thanks for the quick review of last-minute changes <3.

Months ago, ‘I hate mosquitos’ sent me a message informing me about the New York City Library’s Alexander Hamilton exhibition which she saw (and opened days before I started posting this story). I couldn’t resist including it in the story. Thanks for the idea!

Special thanks to Fhartz91 who gave me musical advice and wording contained in this chapter. If you haven’t read any of her stories on this site, you’re in for a real treat. Go now! Here is a collection of some of my favorite Klaine stories.

I’m returning to Thailand next week and land on Wednesday morning after a 34-hour journey door to door. I fully intend to post the next chapter on Wednesday, but the timing could be off if there are flight delays.

Next up: A Skype call and Kurt’s new job at Bellerose Boutique.
Kurt wakes up with the late afternoon sunlight streaming across his face. He remembers that he’s in Antoine’s studio, but can’t for the life of him think why he’s in Antoine’s bed. He quickly sits up to assess the situation.

“Non, non, mon chouchou. Don’t move!”

Antoine is standing at the foot of the bed… behind an easel… with a paintbrush in his hand. Kurt quickly pulls the sheet from his waist to the top of his neck. Kurt now remembers that he finally agreed to pose for Antoine for a painting. He must have dozed off during the sitting. Life has been so busy working full-time at Bellerose, taking two fashion courses in the evening and spending time with Antoine on the weekends.

“Why do you cover yourself? All that pale skin is parfait. Those rosy lips and cheeks, mmmm…”

Kurt smiles and slowly lowers the sheets to his bellybutton. Kurt isn’t quite ready to allow Antoine to paint a full nude portrait of him. They’ve become closer over the past month, with a few hot make-out sessions, but Kurt isn’t willing to go further unless he’s in a committed relationship. Kurt doesn’t know what their relationship means to Antoine, and it’s starting to bug him.

When they go out with Antoine’s friends, everyone assumes that they are together in an exclusive relationship. Antoine is attentive, warm and caring, and has eyes for no-one but Kurt. It’s casual and nothing that’s overly complicated – after the situation with Blaine, it had initially seemed ideal. However, Kurt is getting to the point where he wants some sort of commitment. They have never discussed it, and sometimes words speak louder than actions.

“The afternoon sunlight… C’est idéal. T’es si beau comme ça. Je t’aime (It’s ideal. You’re beautiful like that. I love you).”

Kurt freezes for a few moments, hardly believing what he’s just heard. Did Antoine say that he loved him? Did he mean it or was he just caught up in the moment with his painting? One thing Kurt knows for sure is that he has to find out the answer.

“Y-you love me, Antoine?”

“Oui, mon amour. You are perfection on my canvas. You inspire me.”

“So you love me as a model?”

“Bien sûr (Of course). I also love spending time with you. Seeing Paris through your eyes is magical and like a breath of fresh air. It’s like viewing Paris from a new perspective, and that makes me more
creative.”

“D-does this mean we’re boyfriends?”

“Oh, mon chouchou, I’m not into labels. I cannot do relationships.”

“What do you mean by that, exactly? What are you looking for, then?” Kurt asks, sitting up and covering his chest.

“Boyfriends, marriage and children. Pha! So bourgeois. I’m a free spirit and my art is the most important thing in my life. I can’t be creative if I have to worry about a husband and children. I’ve seen it with other artists. They worry about the mortgage, the schools, and other unimportant things in life. Soon their art is nothing but a hobby and they settle for some boring desk job. Non, that is not the life for me.”

“That sounds a little lonely to me,” Kurt replies. He can’t imagine a life without a husband and family, and establishing roots in a community. Kurt is a little nervous asking the next question.

“Where does that leave us, Antoine?”

“I may be a free spirit, but I’m not a philanderer. I enjoy the company of only one man… at a time. However, my art is my mistress and her call is more powerful than any man can be.”

Kurt has had enough of the modeling session. He wraps a bathrobe around himself before getting out of bed to use the bathroom. While Kurt is in the shower, he thinks about Antoine’s philosophy of life. On paper, it sounds ideal – being caught up in the moment with one man without society’s labels. But Kurt’s heart is telling him something different. It’s not something he really wants in the long-term, but can he settle for this type of relationship as long as he’s in Paris?

*****
Kurt adjusts his tablet so that his image fills the little window in Skype. “Blaine, can you see me?”

“I certainly can. You look amazing, Kurt. Can you see me okay?”

Kurt smiles because he has spent a lot of time making sure his hair is perfect before their prearranged Skype call. It’s one thing to tweet, e-mail and talk on the phone, but another thing altogether to see each other on Skype. Kurt’s heart flutters when he sees Blaine fill the screen. He can tell Blaine has taken some time with his hair as well, because the loose curls have a luxurious shine. Blaine is wearing a simple T-shirt, but its snug fit accentuates his biceps, and those distressed jeans he loves so much. However, it’s Blaine’s warm sparkling eyes and smile that capture Kurt’s attention. Blaine looks at him as if he’s the single most important person in his life. After minutes of silence have gone by with nothing more than them staring at each other, Kurt clears his throat.

“Who’s your buddy? I didn’t know that you now have a dog.”

“Oh, Sundance isn’t mine - he’s Bentley’s. I agreed to dog sit for him this week. It’s Bentley and Marge’s 20th wedding anniversary and they went to La Jolla. Marge has a cousin living there and they’ve always wanted to visit California.”

A vision of a house surrounded by a white picket fence, two children and a dog flashes through Kurt’s head. He’ll have to convince Blaine that cats are better than dogs… Kurt quickly shakes these thoughts out of his mind and continues the conversation.

“I read the editorial you did on accessories you sent me, Blaine. It’s really good… Exceptional even. You know my views on fashion having no gender.”

“Yeah, you’ve proved that time and again. Your views certainly influenced the editorial. What do you think, did I go too far with my examples?”

“No, you didn’t. If your readers take on your ideas, the jewelry industry will have a lot to thank you for. Have you picked the photo to go with your editorial?”

“Umm… We’re using the usual headshot of me. Why?”

“As cute as that photo is, it doesn’t push any boundaries. Why don’t you get a special photo taken, wearing some of the accessories you describe in the editorial? I don’t think scarves really suit you, but I bet you could really pull off wearing some bracelets and rings.”

“You think I look cute in that photo?” Blaine asks with a twinkle in his eye.

“Is that all you got from what I said, Mr. Anderson?” Kurt huffs, embarrassed that he let that slip.

“No, of course not. You don’t think I’d look silly? I’m not a model,” Blaine giggles nervously.

“That’s exactly the point! If you really believe that accessories can be worn by everybody, you have to lead by example. Show people that they’re not just meant for supermodels to adorn a magazine spread. It’s a look that a successful businessman can pull off as well.

“You know, Kurt, I think you’re onto something. I will get a new photo taken. I knew you would have a good idea to make the editorial come to life. Thank you.”

“You’re most welcome. Now tell me about the Monarch House. My dad sent me some photos of the
after-party. I loved your T-shirt, by the way. I wonder where you got that idea? Snoopin’ around Rachel’s YouTube channel?”

Blaine throws his head back in laughter and describes his evening of watching New Direction videos on YouTube. He then relates a few stories about the Monarch House opening day and its activities since. The conversation is light and easy, and for the first time, Kurt feels like maybe their friendship survived Klaine-gate…. Maybe there’s even hope for more… Someday…

*****

May

Kurt enters the Bellerose Boutique early on Monday morning, with a café au lait and un pain au chocolat from the Petite Patisserie, below where he lives. He limits himself to one chocolate croissant on work days, and brings two chocolate éclairs to Emmeline’s every Friday night. He climbs up the stairs instead of using the elevator, hoping that he’s working off some of the calories.

Kurt’s workstation is in front of Christophe’s office, and he starts up the computer before taking off his jacket. Springtime has come to Paris and Kurt is thankful for the warmer weather, and the tulips and daffodils in bloom. It looks like the cherry trees will be blossoming by the weekend.

Kurt loves his new job at the Bellerose Boutique – it’s everything he could possibly want. Sure, there are boring administrative duties – answering the phone and organizing Christophe’s diary – but the other aspects of the job more than make up for it. He loves seeing the new designs come together, and he’s even made a few suggestions that have been used. His nighttime courses in fashion design are also helping to formalize his knowledge of good design structure. Christophe reviews all his design coursework and makes useful suggestions. He has even hinted that a couple of Kurt’s designs might be used in the next winter’s collection.

One thing that has surprised Kurt in his new job is how much more he prefers working behind the scenes. He doesn’t miss the spotlight, both on and off the set. He can see how this type of career could blend in so much better with raising a family. While Fashion Weeks and new line debuts are busy times, requiring every waking moment of the day, they are predictable. With good planning, the Hummel family could still work smoothly.

When the computer is ready, Kurt opens Christophe’s diary. The morning is relatively light, but Christophe will be out of the office after lunchtime. Kurt then opens Christophe’s business e-mail, flagging messages that require his boss’ immediate attention. There are one from fabric suppliers in Thailand and one from his ad agency in Paris. Kurt takes a sip of his coffee and nibbles on his chocolate croissant, and continues browsing through the new messages. Kurt’s eyes pop when he reads the subject line ‘Opening of the LA Boutique next month’.

Kurt knows that Christophe plans to open a boutique in LA, the first shop in the US. However, Kurt didn’t realize that it’s happening so soon. He opens the message and reads about the LA Boutique, and the detailed plans for the opening day and its fashion show. Kurt raises an eyebrow when he reads that Sam Evans has been confirmed to be a model on the runway.

“Bonjour, Kurt. I see that you’re up with the birds this morning. Any interesting e-mails today?” Christophe asks as he walks past Kurt into his office.

Kurt makes Christophe a coffee with the shiny new Nespresso machine by his desk. He grabs his tablet and rushes into Christophe’s office.
“I flagged the e-mails that require your attention this morning. The Thai supplier wishes to confirm the amount of silk material you’re ordering. The ad agency wants a meeting to go over the budget for the next collection. And…umm… Jayden Robinson has confirmed the details of the LA boutique opening.”

“*Fantastique!* I need you to book four first class air tickets to LA for next month. There will be myself, my wife, Mademoiselle Monette, and yourself.”

“Me?! I’m going to LA with you?”

“Of course I want you there. I’ll need you more than ever in the days leading up to the opening. When you make the travel arrangements, make sure you book your own flight back to Paris a week or so later.”

“Why is that?”

“You want to see your father, *non*? Perhaps some other family and friends? I know how difficult it can be sometimes to live so far away from your home. So, book yourself the long way back through Ohio and New York City. Consider it a birthday present from me.”

Kurt practically skips out of Christophe’s office. He can’t wait to tell his dad the news that he’ll be home for a visit. And yes, he’ll visit New York City and surprise Blaine. Christophe was amazingly kind with the extra time off work.


*****

“That’s fantastic news, kiddo. I can’t wait to see you. Do you want me to come to LA for the boutique opening?”

“Maybe it’s best if you don’t, Dad. I’m going to be super busy and I won’t have any time to spend with you. Why don’t we wait to see each other the following week in Lima? I’ll be home for my birthday. I’ll then spend a few days in New York City before I return to Paris.”

“Anyone in particular you wish to see there? I hope it’s not that Sebastian fellow from *Elle* magazine. You’ve got your life sorted out now and you don’t need to be partying with him all night.”

Kurt rolls his eyes at his dad through the computer camera and hopes that Skype picks up his expression.

“No, Dad. I won’t see Sebastian. We haven’t talked since I moved to Paris. I want to meet up with Blaine.”

Kurt can see his father’s lips turn into a huge grin and look up as if he’s thanking the gods.

“I know you are Team Blaine’s biggest cheerleader, but I’m not sure what’s going to happen when I see him. I’m hoping that we can be friends. Blaine has a new man in his life now.”

“Come off it, son. I’m Team Kurt all the way. Every. Single. Time. My respect for Blaine has
nothing to do with you. He’s a decent young man and is doing a lot of good for Ohio. The Monarch House in Westerville is a huge success. I’ve been making noises about how the next house should be in Lima, and Blaine is listening."

“And that’s the only reason you like Blaine?”

“Look, buddy, I’m not going to lie. I liked how happy you were when you and Blaine were friends. He really cares about you. I don’t know anything about a new man in Blaine’s life, but he certainly doesn’t come with Blaine to Ohio. All I know is that man is still in love with you. He always asks me about how you’re doing.”

“I miss him a lot, Dad. I know I still want him in my life. We need to meet up and see how that could or might work. This boutique opening is giving me the perfect opportunity to see him.”

“You’ve got a hell of a jet-setting lifestyle, bud - Paris, LA, New York City. I’m glad you can squeeze in Lima, Ohio to see your old man.”

When the Skype call finishes, Kurt makes a list of things he needs to do before flying to LA. There are presents to buy, school to notify of his absence, a wardrobe to be planned, and he needs to contact Rachel so they can meet up in Lima. Kurt looks over his list, wondering what it’s missing. It’s only after dinner that he figures it out – Antoine.

Of course, Kurt needs to tell Antoine that he’s going to the US for a couple of weeks, but Kurt knows that he needs to tell him more than that. Their conversation last Sunday had been a real eye-opener. Kurt had thought they were heading to some sort of commitment, only to find out that Antoine doesn’t ‘do’ relationships.

As much as Kurt enjoys spending time with Antoine, he knows that the relationship will go nowhere. Sooner, rather than later, Kurt will get frustrated with Antoine’s casual and free-spirited philosophy. Kurt really wants to matter in someone’s life. He wants his partner to be so much more than just a friend and a willing body to pass the time with – boyfriends, then husbands, and then fathers. There’s no way that he and Antoine will have a happy ending. If Kurt ends things now, there’s a chance that they can remain friends.

And then of course, there’s Blaine.

Kurt’s thoughts have revolved around Blaine since he heard the news of the trip that morning. His heart flutters in a way that it never has for Antoine. It might be seven months since he’s last seen Blaine, but Kurt knows he’s still deeply in love.

Kurt arranges to see Antoine the following evening for dinner, ensuring that they will be alone to speak. There’s no easy way of doing this, but he’s got to break up with Antoine before he leaves for LA.

*****

“This beef bourguignon is simply delicious. One Friday night, you’ll need to teach me how to make it.”

“Oui, I can do this for you. The way to a man’s heart is through his stomach,” Emmeline cackles.

“Don’t forget that I won’t be here for the next three Friday nights, because I’ll be in LA.”
“Mon petit, you leave so suddenly! Does this have anything to do with Antoine? He told me you agreed to be friends only. I was hoping that your love would blossom, but it wasn’t meant to be.”

“I like Antoine very much and enjoy spending time with him. However, we both have different views about what love is, so what might have blossomed would have died at the first frost.”

“The heart knows what it wants. And I think that you know who you want. That homme américain (American man)?

“I’m not sure, but I haven’t seen him in seven months and I miss him so much. I’m hoping that we can meet up during my visit and then we’ll see what happens.”

“Ack, the affairs of the heart. Si compliqué (So complicated)! If you love him, go after him! And I want to know every single little detail when you get back.”

*****

“I thought you didn’t want to model any more. What made you change your mind, Sam?” Blaine asks. He makes a point to touch base with Sam each week to not only catch up with his news, but to find out how Mercedes and his future godchild are doing.

“Dude, do you know how expensive baby stuff is? Mercedes took me to Babies-R-Us a couple of weekends ago. I can’t believe how much a newborn baby needs. I thought they just slept, ate and pooped. Mercedes says I have a lot to learn. I’m doing just the one modeling job so that we can buy all the crap for the nursery.”

“So tell me more about this modeling gig? Is it for a designer that I know?”

“I’m not sure. It’s some fancy French boutique called Bellerose.”

Blaine has heard rumors through the fashion industry grapevine that Christophe Bellerose plans to open a boutique in LA, however he didn’t realize that a firm date has been set. Blaine isn’t sure whether Kurt will be attending, but if there is any chance, he’s determined to be there.

“Kurt works at Bellerose in Paris. What’s the date of the opening?”

“May 23rd. I know what you’re thinking, Blaine...”

Blaine quickly looks at his calendar and there’s nothing in it than can’t be moved around those dates.

“I’ll be at the opening. I’m going to clear my diary for the next week as well.”

“Yessss! Let’s hope that Kurt will be there as well. Can I ask you a favor, bro?”

“Anything, Sam.”

“Would you mind taking Mercedes to the opening? She’ll be seven months pregnant, and I’d feel a whole lot better if you were looking after her.”

“Absolutely. I haven’t seen Mercedes since you two got married. Besides, it will be a good time for her to whisper the baby wish list to me. Godfathers always give awesome presents.”
Blaine is secretly grateful that he’ll be going to the boutique’s opening with Mercedes. She’ll give him the support he’ll need if Kurt is there.

“So, did you see the amazing reaction to the newest comics in the Surfs Up! series? I now have over 140,000 followers.”

“That’s so cool, Sam. I can’t believe all the fanart that people are making to go with the webcomic as well.”

“It’s not only the fanart, Blaine. There is even fanfic about them. Most of it is the fluffy stuff about making cupcakes together, but there’s one author that’s different. His name is JiffyFeels. You don’t think that it’s KrianFeels writing by another name?”

“Well, tell me something about the story, Sam.”

“It starts like the rest of them, with Biffy and Jamie making cupcakes. But then the whipped cream, cherries and sprinkles don’t end up on the cupcake. Instead, they’re spread along Biffy’s body and Jamie takes his time licking and getting Biffy off. Not sure what’s going to happen in the next update.”

“That sounds like KrianFeels alright. We do know what’s going to go down in the next chapter. Sex on a surfboard? Fucking in the kitchen while the cupcakes are baking? Is Mercedes letting you read this stuff?”

“She only banned KrianFeels. She didn’t specifically mention JiffyFeels. Promise me that you won’t tell her.”

“Your secret’s safe with me. Just don’t go too crazy in the bedroom,” Blaine chuckles.

*****

“So how are the circulation numbers for the ‘pushing boundaries’ issue?” Blaine asks Tina when he enters Vogue’s executive suite.

“They are higher than we expected. I e-mailed you the stats. I think you have a few days before you need to decide if we need another print run. I’ve also sent you links to fashion blogs that have reviewed the ‘pushing boundaries’ issue. Most bloggers are positive about it. Donald Trump of course thinks it’s perverse and things like this shouldn’t be published.”

“If Trump isn’t happy, then I’m ecstatic. Even Trump and his cronies couldn’t possibly change the freedom of speech. Thank god the Supreme Court is there as a check and balance.”

Blaine taps on Tina’s desk nervously and then says, “I’m going to LA in a couple of weeks. I’ll let you know the dates. When you book the flight, can you make sure that the return journey is flexible? I’m not exactly sure when I’ll return.”

“Is this trip business or pleasure?” Tina asks, annoyed that she hasn’t heard about this before.

“A mix. I’ll be going to the opening of the first Bellerose Boutique in the USA. Sam will be working as one of the models.”
“Hey, isn’t that the same fashion house that Kurt works for in Paris?”

“Yeah, it is.”

“Is Kurt going to be in LA? Is that why you don’t know when you’re returning?”

“I don’t know if Kurt will be there, but if he is, I want to see if we can be friends again.”

“I knew that you weren’t over him. Wake up, Blaine! You were never ever just friends. If you do meet again, don’t let him escape. Tell Kurt exactly how you feel. I never, ever want to go through your lovesick pining again. None of your friends do, for that matter.”

“Frankly, I don’t want to go through that again either. However, Kurt is very independent and knows his own mind. There’s no way I can force him to love me.”

“I don’t think you’re going to need to force Kurt - at the least the Kurt that I once knew before he abandoned ship and made your life a living hell. I’m not sure I can forgive him as easily as you do.”

“Then it’s a good thing that you’re not the one after Kurt.”

“Where do you plan to stay in LA? With Cooper or Sam?” Tina asks.

“Neither. I think I’ll stay at a hotel. Can you book one close to the Bellerose Boutique? Sam and Mercedes have a lot going on at the moment, with the baby coming. And as much as I love Cooper, I think I’ll be better off staying by myself.”

Blaine hums as he enters the office. He carefully looks over the stats for this month’s issue, then the links to the influential fashion blogs. Most reviewers like the ‘pushing boundaries’ issue and applaud Vogue for its cutting-edge reporting.

Blaine thinks back to the phone conversation he had with Michael Saiger, the founder and creative director of Miansai, on the way to work. Saiger called to thank him for wearing one of their signature bracelets for the editorial photo. Internet orders have soared as a result, and Saiger offered him a lot of money to model for their next ad campaign. Blaine had politely turned the job down, reciting conflict-of-interest rules, but suggested that he book Kurt for the ad campaign. Although Kurt is now working behind the scenes at Bellerose, he might like the money on offer for this one-off photo shoot. Blaine returns to the issue’s stats, but his concentration is broken when his cell phone starts to ring.

*Her name was Lola, she was a showgirl... With yellow feathers in her hair and a dress cut down to there...*

“Sam! You’re up pretty early given that it’s 9 a.m. in New York.”

“I’m going surfing this morning, dude. When I woke up, I checked my e-mails, and I received one from the Boutique Bellerose.”

“And?”

“Kurt is coming to LA! He’s going to be here a week before the opening to help set up the boutique and fit the clothes on the models before the show. What do I say when I see him? Does he know you’re coming to LA?”
“Sam, that is fantastic news! I wasn’t sure whether Kurt would be in LA or not. No, don’t tell Kurt that I’ll be there. I want to surprise him.”

*****

“So let me get this straight. You’re going to LA for the opening of the Bellerose Boutique, the exact same fashion house that your ex - but not really ex – works in Paris. You don’t want me to join you because you’ll be spending your free time with Sam, and you’ll be too busy taking care of Mercedes at the opening. Kurt will be there and you don’t know when you’re coming back to New York City. You’re going to decide after the opening… After seeing Kurt, I presume.”

Blaine meekly nods and bows his head. It sounds even worse when Connor puts it like that. Blaine isn’t sure what to say. Fortunately, the coffee house is pretty busy and no-one notices them tucked away into the corner.

“Do I factor into any of that? Or your life for that matter?”

Blaine doesn’t dare look up at Connor and see the expression on his face. Blaine can tell by the bitterness in Connor’s tone that he’s not happy.

“Don’t answer that, Blaine. I’m not sure I could handle it. Look, you were honest with me from the start about Kurt. I thought that you were getting over him, but obviously, you’re not.”

“I’m sorry, Connor. It’s not quite like that. Kurt and I were never boyfriends, but he’s very special to me. I haven’t seen him in seven months and I would like to think that we can become friends again.”

Connor picks up his coffee stirrer and starts playing with it.

“Are you really that deep in denial, Blaine? You’re in love with Kurt. Always have been - ever since you first met him - and always will be. Do yourself a favor and admit it to yourself.”

“B-but…”

“But nothing, Blaine. I think we’re done here. We could have been something great, you know?”

“I know, Connor. You’re a pretty terrific guy. I thought I could do this – do us – but I can’t. And you’re right - I’m still in love with Kurt. I need to see if I can make things right between us. I never meant to do this to you. I really, really care about you and I wanted it to work out. The truth is, I don’t know what I’m doing. I’m so sorry. I…”

Connor places his hand over Blaine’s to get his attention.

“Stop rambling, Blaine. It’s adorable but I don’t think I can listen to any more. You go off to LA and see what happens. But don’t call me unless you’re sure you want me. I can’t keep sharing you with Kurt.”

Connor abruptly gets up and gives Blaine a kiss on the cheek, before quickly leaving the coffee house. Blaine feels horrible that things ended like this, that he hurt someone so nice. However, Blaine is relieved that it’s over and that he can concentrate on getting Kurt back.

*****
“Blaine, I can see your body practically humming with excitement. You spent all yesterday planning your LA wardrobe. I’ve never seen you fully packed a week before a trip.”

“I can’t help it, Amy. I’m going to see Kurt again. I’m finding it hard to concentrate on anything else. Friday can’t come soon enough.”

“Why don’t you do something with all that energy? I haven’t heard you play the piano since you found out that Kurt will be in LA.”

Blaine nods and quickly goes to the piano. After doing his warm-up exercises and playing Debussy’s Clair de Lune, he walks over to the floor-to-ceiling windows and looks down onto Central Park. A few raindrops start to fall, but it doesn’t dampen Blaine’s mood. All he can think about is that rainy weekend when he was lying on the couch with Kurt and watching James Bond movies.

He starts humming, and soon the tune becomes a chorus. He rushes back to the piano and plays around with music. He then starts to sing about spring days, falling in love and dreams… And, of course, butterflies. He sets up his mic, and when he’s satisfied with the song, he records it. Records the first song of hope about Kurt.

*****

“I had to call with you with the news. Meagan gave me the forecasted figures for the Monarch House, and it will start breaking even even next month.”

“I wasn’t expecting that to happen so fast, Dad. I had put away cash to support it for the first twelve months. How did that happen?”

“Meagan and I met with the Social Work Department chairperson from Ohio State University. She applauded our efforts and is 100% behind the Foundation. Starting next month, there will be seniors doing their field placement at the Monarch House. Since they will be given course credits for working, the staffing is easier, and they don’t need to be paid. The chairwoman also said that starting next semester, they’ll include a case study of the Monarch House in the junior year coursework to get ideas on how to fundraise and support the community further.”

“But how will we cover other costs like electricity, the Internet and stuff?”

“The grant from the Legacy Fund came through to cover most of the running costs. We also have donations from people and businesses in Westerville. There’s a lot more support for the Monarch House than we had thought there would be. Meagan is looking into what other grants might be available.”

“Wow. I guess we better start thinking about what happens next. I wasn’t expecting to open another Monarch House until I got my next bonus in January. We can use this time to put together a blueprint for future Monarch Houses and do some fundraising.”

“I have news on this front as well. Burt Hummel has contacted me and he is very keen to have a Monarch House open in Lima – something about wishing it had been there for Kurt when he was in high school. Anyways, he’s lined up some donations from local businesses and is making a lot of noise with the Lima City Council.”

“I hope Burt realizes how much money is needed to open a Monarch House,” Blaine comments.
“Burt does know, and the donations so far don’t cover the property purchase. However, I can help as well.”

“What do you mean?”

“I checked with HR at work and the company will match my charitable donations. I’m selling the fund I set up for Cooper’s college education. He’s now in his late 30s and I think we both know he won’t be going to college. With the matching donation, I think we’ll have enough money for a couple of Monarch Houses.”

“You would do that for me?” Blaine whispers, desperately trying to hold back his tears.

“Yes, I would. But it’s not only for you. I can already see how the Monarch House is helping people in Westerville. Besides, I like working with you on the project. It’s a whole lot better than fixing up a car, don’t you think?”

“Yeah, that it is.”

“Great. I’ll fix a time with Burt when we can look at properties for a potential Monarch House in Lima.”

*****

“Don’t just stand there. Come in,” Sebastian barks, after his assistant knocks on his office door.

“I thought you would be interested in this newsfeed. Bellerose Boutique is opening its first store in LA. They are having a high-profile event next Saturday.”

“And why would this interest me? French boutiques are a dime a dozen in the US,” Sebastian retorts.

“Kurt Hummel works at Bellerose Boutique. I phoned the boutique manager in LA, and Kurt will be there. When I asked about the guest list, the manager confirmed that Blaine Anderson will be attending as well.”

“Why didn’t you say so earlier? This reunion looks like it could be interesting. Get me a ticket to the Bellerose Boutique opening.”

Chapter End Notes

Sam’s ringtone – ‘Copacabana’ by Barry Manilow

Cassie at CC-Graphics created the most amazing animated artwork of the Skype call. Please go give her feedback [link to be provided]. Cassie also created the the story’s artwork. While you’re there, go check out her other artworks.

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. Special thanks for the quick review of last-minute changes.
I'm now safely back in Bangkok, although tired and jet lagged. The next chapter will be posted on Saturday, roughly 12 hours earlier than the past couple of months. This will be the posting time for the rest of the story.

Next up: The Bellerose Boutique opening in L.A. Blaine and Kurt see each other for the first time in eight months! I think you will like this chapter :) :)
May

“Can I please speak to Kurt Hummel? I’m a personal friend.”

Kurt is in the Bellerose Boutique’s stockroom in LA, making sure that today’s delivery is accurate. He recognizes the voice, but can’t seem to place it. Curious, Kurt sets down the delivery papers and enters the main area of boutique. He’s surprised when he sees Chandler standing there, practically bouncing on the balls of his feet, with a cup holder and bag from the coffee shop around the corner.

“Kurt! I know you’re busy today, but can you add one more thing to your to-do list? Me.”

Kurt rolls his eyes at the cheesy pick-up line. It’s obvious that Chandler hasn’t changed one little bit. However, he seems as harmless as ever and Kurt could use a break.

“Chandler, what a surprise to see you here. You’re right, I’m pretty busy today, but I can take a short coffee break,” Kurt replies, eyeing the take-away bag.

Kurt leads Chandler to the empty staff break-room. When Kurt is seated, Chandler passes Kurt a coffee and an iced cinnamon bun.

“These buns looked like they were baked to perfection when I saw them at the coffee shop. They reminded me of you in your sweet jeans.”

“Can I be totally honest with you, Chandler?”

Chandler eagerly nods his head.

“Those lines are darn right creepy. They don’t work. I suggest you find another way to capture a man’s interest.”

Chandler drops his head and nods slowly. “It’s just that when I’m around you, I feel so tongue-tied with the awesomeness that is Kurt Hummel, and…”

“So what are you doing in LA?” Kurt interrupts, hoping to get to the reason behind the meeting sooner rather than later.

“I moved here a few months ago, hoping to find a job. It’s been tough since Vogue fired me. With no job reference, no-one will hire me in New York City. I’m hoping that there might be a position for me here – that you would help me,” Chandler admits.
“Vogue fired you?”

“I was damn lucky that Anderson didn’t prosecute me after that video was posted on the Internet. Honestly, Kurt, I had no idea what Smythe was going to do with it.”

“Wait… Slow down. Start from the beginning.”

“You mean Anderson didn’t tell you?” Chandler asks, now white as a sheet, his eyes bulging behind his glasses.

“Tell me what? I haven’t seen him since the diva-off last September. I’ve been living in Paris since the beginning of the year.”

“Never mind, Kurt. It’s nothing. It was just a simple misunderstanding. Let’s talk about the future instead.”

“Chandler, if you want my help, you need to be honest with me. I need to know about why Vogue fired you. There is no way I can recommend you to Bellerose without all the facts.”

Kurt can see Chandler shake with nerves as he takes a large gulp from his coffee.

“You have to understand, Kurt. I was the top stylist for Vogue until you came along. After that ‘floral and pastels’ photo shoot, I thought we really got along. That we were good for each other professionally, and maybe could be something more personal. But then Anderson set his sights on you and wanted you all for himself. He felt so threatened by me that he banned me from any of your photo shoots. I was reduced to styling photo shoots for accessories, Kurt! My career was going nowhere.”

“You being away from the main photo shoot had more to do with those creepy pick-up lines, Chandler. But do go on.”

“Sebastian Smythe contacted me and waved money and a possible job at Elle in front of me. Smythe made me feel important, and the only thing he wanted from me in return was information about you and Blaine. It wasn’t easy to find out anything, since I wasn’t able to see you, but it was obvious to everyone at the Vogue staff party that you two were smitten with each other.”

“I want to hear more about the night of the diva-off, Chandler. You’re holding something back.”

“The diva-off really pissed me off. When I was told that I wasn’t ‘required’ for the event, I knew that my days at Vogue were numbered. After the diva-off, I went backstage, hoping to convince Blaine to keep me. I figured he would be in a good mood after his win. So, anyways, I could hear you two talking in his dressing room, and I opened the door a crack to see and listen to what you were saying. Just by the way you were looking at each other and talking, I could tell something would happen. So, I took out my phone and started recording.”

“You took the video?” Kurt asks with a shaky voice.

Chandler nods his head, shamefully. “Honestly, I wasn’t expecting what did go down. I thought that maybe the video would be another way to convince Anderson to let me stay at Vogue.”

“Did you give the video to Blaine?”
“I wanted to, but when you two left the dressing room, you didn’t even notice me in the hallway. You two made me feel like a nobody. I sent the video to Sebastian Smythe instead.”

“So it was Sebastian that posted the video on the Internet?”

“I had no idea Sebastian would do that. Afterwards, he handed over $5,000 in cash and told me to scram. There was no job for me at Elle. Anderson got wind of what I did and fired me. He said he wouldn’t prosecute me as he didn’t want you exposed to any further media frenzy. Anderson wanted to protect you from the paparazzi and the like.”

Tears form in Kurt’s eyes after hearing all the facts surrounding the video. Kurt isn’t sure whether it’s because he was so easily manipulated by Sebastian or whether it’s because Blaine was trying to protect him when he had thought Blaine was abandoning him.

“What do you know how much damage you caused by that video? How you ruined my life and my relationship with Blaine? And it was all for nothing!”

“Kurt…” Chandler whines.

“No, I can’t help you, Chandler. I can’t even look at you after what you’ve done. Get out of here, now. I don’t ever want to see you again!”

Chandler jumps up, preferring to run out of the staff room than to face Kurt’s wrath. Kurt places his hands over his face and sobs. If only he could go back in time and lock that stupid dressing room door.

*****

When Kurt goes over the VIP guest list, he notices that Blaine Anderson plus one is included. Christophe has starred the name twice and scrawled ‘front row and center’ in the margins. Kurt isn’t really surprised that Blaine is attending. Kurt knows that Blaine has been keeping tabs on his career. The tweets, the flowers at the Paris Fashion Week, the phone conversations with his father, and the Skype call. They all add up to Blaine still wanting him in his life. What Kurt can’t figure out is how, and that’s his sole reason for spending time in New York City next week.

The ‘plus one’ has thrown Kurt for a loop. Would Blaine really bring a date with him? Even worse, would Blaine bring his boyfriend? Or is the ‘plus one’ a colleague from work? It certainly can’t be Sam, because he’s modeling for the show. Speak of the devil… Kurt smiles because the next fitting is with Sam himself.

“Kurt, long time no see. You look great,” Sam says when he sees Kurt, giving him a fist pump.

“You look great as well, Sam. So tanned!”

“I’ve taken up surfing since I moved to LA. It’s been fun in the sun for a while now.”

“I heard that you moved to LA. Blaine must miss you.”

“Blaine misses you more. When are you two going to really talk to each other?”

“I think you know the answer to that. He’s attending the boutique opening on Saturday. Now turn
around, I need to pin the suit from behind.”

Sam turns around as Kurt does the necessary chalk marking and pinning along the back of the jacket.

“I also know that Blaine is coming with someone else. Anybody I know?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Well, then, anybody I should know about beforehand? You got to help me out here, Sam. I need to be prepared if he’s coming with his boyfriend.”

“It’s not a boyfriend, Kurt. I won’t say more, though. You know that Blaine is my best friend, right? I don’t feel comfortable talking about him behind his back. Why don’t you pick up the phone and call him if you really want to know about Blaine’s plans?”

“If only it was that easy. I guess I’ll just have to wait a couple of days to find out.”

*****

Kurt opens the ‘Time Out New York’ app on his tablet to find out what’s happening in the Big Apple next week. He’s hoping to find inspiration on where to meet up with Blaine while he’s in New York. As he scrolls through the list of events, one item catches his eye. ‘Alexander Hamilton: Striver, Statesman, Scoundrel. Open June thru December’.

Kurt sighs as he puts down his tablet. While he bonded over Wicked with Rachel, Hamilton was his and Blaine’s thing. It was what got them spending time together in the first place, and Hamilton seemed to weave its way through their friendship. This morning’s meeting with Chandler has been an eye-opener, as he revealed the details surrounding the Klainegate video. Kurt is already determined to mend the bridges with Blaine. Taking Blaine to the Hamilton exhibit seems like the ideal reconciliatory gesture.

*****

The small theater that shows indie and foreign language movies a few doors down from the Bellerose Boutique has been booked for the fashion show. The backstage area is buzzing with models, clothes racks, and stylists. Kurt’s job is to approve the outfit on each model before they head to the make-up station.

Now that his work is done until the show starts, Kurt examines himself in the full-length mirror, satisfied with his outfit and look. Ever since he’s found out that Blaine will be attending, he has taken even more time than usual making sure that he looks good. Kurt checks the time on his phone and knows he needs to be out front in the entrance hall, greeting the VIPs and leading them to their seats.

Although it’s 30 minutes before the fashion show starts, there are plenty of people milling about with drinks in their hands. Kurt greets people he knows and confirms that he’s no longer a model, preferring to work on designs behind the scenes.

“Hey, killer.”

Kurt turns around and is stunned to see Sebastian walking towards him. “Sebastian, I didn’t see you on the VIP list.”
"It was a last-minute decision to be here. I was in the neighborhood."

"Oh, really?" Kurt asks, arching one eyebrow.

"I couldn’t resist coming and seeing my favorite model."

Kurt sidles up to Sebastian and whispers into his ear in a calm voice, "It’s a good thing that we’re in public. Otherwise, I would punch that smirk off your meerkat face."

Sebastian chuckles, "And why is that, princess?"

"I will never, ever forgive you for posting that video of Blaine and me on the Internet. How could you! And for the record, I’m nobody’s princess."

"I call it like I see it. Come on, Kurt, the video was for the best. It showed you what Blaine’s true colors really are. Besides, you made a ton of dough working at Elle, so it wasn’t all that bad."

"Really, Sebastian? The video showed what your true colors are. It's all fun and games... until it's not. You screwed around with my life – used me for your own personal twisted rivalry with Blaine."

"All’s fair in love and war. You must know that by now, Kurt."

"Get out of my sight before I do something I regret."

"Ooh, the pussycat has claws."

"Is everything here okay?" Christophe Bellerose asks, giving Kurt a questioning look.

"Just peachy. I’m Sebastian Smythe from Elle magazine. I’m looking forward to seeing your summer collection."

"*Enchanté, Monsieur* Smythe. I’m honored that your travel plans allowed you to join us today. Perhaps you will see an outfit that will adorn an upcoming issue, *non*? Elle’s French edition has already used the last suit that you’ll see this afternoon. Let me personally take you to your seat. At such short notice, I could only squeeze you into the third row…"

Kurt closes his eyes as Christophe Bellerose leads Sebastian into the main theater, thankful that his boss saved him from making a scene. Kurt takes a few deep breaths to calm himself down, relieved that he is no longer a pawn in Sebastian’s games. When he opens his eyes, he looks around the lobby and sees Blaine enter from the street. Blaine looks absolutely gorgeous in his Armani suit, tailored to show off his body to perfection.

Kurt’s eyes pop open when he sees who Blaine is with – Mercedes Jones, the new darling on the radio. Kurt loves all her music and even has a playlist of his favorite songs from her two albums. However, nothing has prepared him for seeing Mercedes heavily pregnant. The official photographers flock the couple and they pose for photos. At one point, Blaine leans in and kisses her cheek. Blaine gently guides her to a seat along the wall, and then retrieves a glass of orange juice for her to drink. *What the hell? Are they together? Blaine told me he was a perfect gold-star gay!*

After ensuring that Mercedes is comfortable, Kurt can see Blaine scanning the lobby as if looking for someone. Kurt momentarily forgets how to breathe when their eyes finally meet. Blaine’s eyes are warm and sparkling, and Kurt feels like he could get lost in them forever. Kurt shyly smiles back at
Blaine and slowly walks over, trying to calm down his nerves. He wasn’t expecting to see Blaine with a woman as his date, let alone a heavily pregnant woman.

“Kurt, you look amazing,” Blaine greets him, giving him a brief hug. Kurt can feel Blaine’s fingers tremble and his upper body stiffen. It doesn’t feel like their usual hugs, which always made Kurt feel cherished and safe.

Kurt raises an eyebrow as he looks at Mercedes.

“Kurt, I’d like you to meet Mercedes Jones. Mercedes, this is Kurt Hummel.”

“I’ve heard a lot about you, Kurt. I’m so glad to finally meet you. Sorry, I’m not getting up ‘cause my feet are killing me already,” Mercedes apologizes as she holds out her hand.

“Oh, please stay seated. I’m pleased to meet you as well. I’m a huge fan of your music. Your cover of ‘I’ll Stand by You’ is absolutely amazing. However, my personal favorite is ‘Hell to the No.’”

“I like a man who knows all my songs. I have a feeling we’re going to get along just fine. Maybe you can even give me some fashion advice once this baby has popped out. I’ll need all the help I can get to plan my wardrobe for my upcoming tour,” Mercedes laughs.

Blaine looks at Mercedes fondly, and rubs the top of her arm. It’s as if they are having a secret conversation with just a look or two. Kurt looks away from the intimate moment, thoughts racing through his mind. Oh, so Blaine isn’t gay – he’s bi!

This thought infuriates Kurt. How dare Blaine play with my emotions like that! Blaine has conveniently omitted that he’s attracted to both men and women. Do I really know Blaine at all? And when did this all happen?

Kurt smiles at Mercedes and looks at her baby bump. His eyes narrow as another thought pops up in his head.

“When is the baby due?”

“I’m expecting this baby to pop out in six weeks’ time.”

Kurt looks at Blaine who is smiling back at him, nervously shifting his weight side-to-side.

“Congratulations. You must be very excited for the day to come.” Kurt holds back his tears and quickly looks around, relieved to see Christophe walk toward them.

“Christophe, let me introduce you to Blaine Anderson, from Vogue, and his date, Mercedes Jones. I think they’re ready to take their seats.”

“Monsieur Anderson. I meet you at last! The Vogue issues under your direction are incroyable (incredible). Congratulations on the upcoming birth…”

Kurt quickly leaves the lobby and rushes into the backstage washroom. He turns on the cold tap in the sink and quickly splashes water all over his face. So far, this trip to LA has been an absolute nightmare. It was bad enough when Chandler told him what he’d done. Just when Kurt thought he had his emotions under control, he had to run into Sebastian Smythe. Kurt has never hated anyone quite like that in his life. He could sympathize with Karofsky on a certain level, but Sebastian is just
Then there’s Blaine - his adorable and sweet Blaine. It hadn’t taken Kurt long to do the math and realize that Mercedes fell pregnant last September. It was the exact same time that he and Blaine were working together, hanging out together, and the diva-off took place. Was this what Blaine wanted to tell him on the phone after the diva-off? That he was now in a committed relationship with Mercedes Jones and expecting a baby?

What a fool he’s been. He has meant nothing to Blaine. How could he be with Kurt, Sam and Mercedes all at the same time? Kurt wonders how he could not have known that this was happening at the time. Has he really been that naïve?

Kurt hears the music start up in the theater and quickly dries his face with a paper towel. He’s going to have to put his thoughts on the backburner, at least until he takes the red-eye flight to Lima tomorrow night. He takes one last look in the mirror and gives himself a pep talk. *I can do this. I’m an actor, after all. I’ll put on my game face for the opening.*

*****

Kurt can hear the applause from the audience as the models walk out onto the stage. So far, the show has gone without a single glitch, and it’s coming to its end. The caterer texted him minutes ago to say that everything is set up for the reception at the Bellerose Boutique afterwards.

“Kurt! I need your help. Mercedes is unwell. I’ve called her doctor and she’s going to meet us here backstage. Where can I get her some water?”

Kurt looks up to see a very distressed Blaine, and Mercedes sitting in a chair, clutching her belly.

“Sam… I want Sam now,” Mercedes moans.

Kurt hands over a bottle of water. “Have you called 911, Blaine? Is Mercedes in labor?”

“She thinks that it might be Braxton Hicks contractions. The doctor is coming to confirm.”

“What are those?”

“I think it’s false labor pains. How the hell would I know, Kurt? I’m not an expert.”

“SAMMMM! I want Sam now! So help me god, Blaine…” Mercedes screams.

“What’s going on, angel? Are you okay? Is the baby all right?” Sam asks, after rushing into the room and sliding down to the ground next to Mercedes in the chair.

“I think I’m fine, babe. I felt a little bit off when I sat down in the theater. Once the show started, I started to feel contractions. It was like the ones last night. Blaine saw me squirm in my seat and asked me what was wrong. When I told him it was a contraction, Blaine went into full-on emergency mode. He brought me backstage, called the doctor and insisted that she come immediately, and got me some water. I feel much better now.”

Sam hugs Mercedes and gives her a long kiss on the lips. Sam then gets up and fist-bumps Blaine. “Thanks, bro. I owe you for this. Mercedes is way too relaxed about these damn contractions.”
Sam turns to Kurt and asks, “Kurt, I finished my part on the catwalk. Is it okay if I miss the reception? After the doctor has checked on Mercedes, I want to take my wife home.”

“Your wife!? I didn’t know you were married! When Blaine and Mercedes came in together tonight, I thought they were a couple,” Kurt huffs.

“Blaine, you idiot! You didn’t tell him?” Sam shouts, slapping Blaine’s shoulder.

“I-I wanted to…. I tried to… But… things happened, and everything spiraled out of control.”

“You’re both idiots then,” Mercedes sighs.

“Kurt, since Blaine seems incapable of talking to you, I’m going tell you like it is. I’m straight and not even bi-curious. I’m in love with my wife, Mercedes. We’re about to start a family. Blaine is definitely gay, and not dating either of us.”

"I thought you used to be Blaine's boyfriend,” Kurt admits meekly.

Sam sniggers and says, “You and every other crazy Blam fan. Blaine wants to do me, but we’re just friends.”

“Sam, I can’t believe you just said that. It was so long ago,” Blaine groans.

“Whatever - it doesn’t matter. Kurt, Blaine only has eyes for you. It’s been that way since he saw you on that first photo shoot and the heart-eyes have only gotten bigger. Blaine is most definitely in love with you.”

Kurt turns to look at Blaine, his heart beating double time. “You’re in love with me?” he asks in a soft breathy voice.

Blaine walks over to Kurt and takes his hand. “This wasn’t exactly how I planned to tell you. I was hoping for a more romantic setting than backstage, and certainly not with an audience. But… Yes, I’m in love with you. Always have been and always will be.”

“I’m in love with you too,” Kurt sniffs.

Blaine tentatively moves forward and Kurt automatically opens up his arms. When Kurt closes his arms around Blaine, he feels the love and warmth radiating from Blaine’s body. It feels even more magical than their past hugs. Kurt squeezes Blaine tightly, as if he’ll never let him go. Blaine relaxes into the hug and leans his head against Kurt’s neck and kisses under his chin. Kurt feels puffs of warm air as Blaine’s breathing syncs with his own.

Kurt gets concerned when he starts to feel Blaine’s body trembling and pulls back to take a look at Blaine’s face. Blaine’s eyes are closed, and Kurt gently kisses each eyelid. When Kurt feels Blaine’s eyelashes give him butterfly kisses, he pulls back his head to allow Blaine to open his eyes. Kurt sees that Blaine’s beautiful eyes are brimming with tears, but are sparkling and full of hope.

When Kurt realizes that Blaine is looking at his lips, he closes the space between them. Their kiss is so sweet, so tender and so loving that Kurt feels as if he might cry. The kiss is like a promise to each other – a promise of love, commitment and good times ahead.

Kurt is reminded that they have an audience when he hears the applauding and hooting nearby. Kurt
looks up and sees smiles from those gathered around them, and Sam with his phone up towards his face.

“Sam, I can’t believe you’re videoing this. We’ve had enough problems with videos already,” Blaine whispers.

“Relax, dude. This one is definitely not for the Internet, although I might show it to your children when I become their godfather.”

Blaine pushes his body back into Kurt, squeezing his waist even tighter. Kurt can feel Blaine’s chuckle reverberate against his body, but it’s soon replaced with sobs. Concerned, Kurt whispers in Blaine’s ear, “What’s the matter? Is this too much? What do you want me to do?”

“It’s too much in all the right ways, Kurt. I never allowed myself to imagine being in your arms again like this. It’s where I belong.”

“Votre attention, s’il vous plait (Attention, please), Christophe shouts, entering the backstage area. “The show is over and it’s has been a huge success. I need everyone over at the boutique for the reception. The audience is about to leave. There is also a doctor at the backstage door. Is someone ill?”

“The doctor’s here for my wife. She feels fine, now but I want to get her checked out,” Sam replies.

“Of course, use the manager’s office. Ah, Monsieur Anderson. You are with my assistant extraordinaire. Did you see the show?”

“I was in the audience until Sam’s wife felt ill. From what I’ve seen, your summer line is going to be a hit in LA. It’s the perfect blend of business casual chic. I’m on holiday next week, but can I call you the week after about how some of the pieces could be included in Vogue?”

“Oui, I can see that you’ll be busy next week with Monsieur Hummel, while he’s in the States. I look forward to hearing from you soon. I’ll see you at la réception?”

“We’ll be there in fifteen minutes,” Kurt replies.

Kurt and Blaine are too busy gazing into each other’s eyes to notice that the backstage is now empty of people. They are startled when they hear a crew of cleaners and the vacuum cleaner roar to life.

“I guess it’s time to go to the reception. I can’t blow it off,” Kurt murmurs.

“I’m not expecting you to, Kurt. Is it really true what Bellerose said – that you’re in the US for another week?”

“I’m taking the red-eye flight from LA to Lima tomorrow night. After a few days at home with my dad, I’m off to New York City for five days.”

“More business?”

“No, silly. The whole point of my trip to New York was to find my way back to you… To see if we could re-establish our friendship. I’ve missed you so much, Blaine. You have no idea.”

“I think I do, Kurt, because I’ve missed you too… Probably more.”
“No way, Jose. You’ve been gallivanting around India and setting up that foundation. Seriously, Blaine – did you name Monarch House after…”

“A butterfly? Yeah, I’m glad you got that.”

Kurt giggles as they walk out of the theater arm in arm. “Of course I did. I know you, Blaine. It’s sentimental and cheesy and I love it.”

“You always get me, Kurt. We’re like puzzle pieces that fit together perfectly.”

*****

Sebastian eyes Kurt and Blaine walking into the Bellerose Boutique together, with kiss-swollen lips, rumpled suits and smiles so broad it looks like that they should hurt. They’ve obviously gotten their act together and are now BlaineandKurt. He takes two flutes of champagne and walks over to greet them.

“Congratulations, Anderson. You two look like you’re together, ready to ride on a rainbow off into the sunset.”

“No thanks to you, Sebastian. Now leave us alone,” Blaine snarls.

“Hey, if I can be a gracious loser, the least you can do is be a gracious winner. I’ve got something for you.”

Blaine gives Sebastian a puzzled look when he hands over an envelope. Blaine opens it and sees that there is a check made out to the Monarch Foundation. He raises his eyebrows when he sees all the zeros.

“I don’t understand, Sebastian. I mean, thank you, but… why?”

“You’re not the only person who had a difficult time growing up in Hicksville, USA. Why do you think my father took that two-year contract in Paris? We might not see eye-to-eye in most areas, but this is one thing we agree on. LBGT teenagers do need better support in small towns. Now make sure that some of that money is used for sex education. We can’t have the Midwest produce more uptight baby penguins like you two. Call it a truce, but a temporary one.”

Sebastian winks at Jayden, the LA boutique manager, before leaving. They have already arranged a rendez-vous for later that evening.

Kurt and Blaine watch him go, stunned.

“I don’t understand how he could do all sorts of horrible things to us, yet have the heart to make such a sizable donation,” Kurt comments as Sebastian leaves the boutique.

“I don’t get him either, and I’ve known him since I was 16 years old. However, I’m going to use this donation as a way of maybe getting that truce to be more permanent. I don’t think I can put up with another scheme of his, particularly when it comes to you.”

Blaine smiles fondly at Kurt, before giving him a hip check. Kurt responds by giving Blaine a gentle kiss on the lips. Kurt is amazed at how natural it feels to really be with Blaine.
“I’m sorry, but I’ve got to start working. I can see that Christophe and Jayden are busy with so many people.”

Kurt starts working the reception, introducing himself to guests and taking business cards from interested buyers. Kurt is always aware that Blaine is never far from his side, talking up the new line. At times, Blaine hands him a glass of water, and at other times, Blaine simply gives his shoulder a squeeze. It’s a welcome reminder that Blaine is still there and taking care of his needs.

A few hours later, the crowd disappears and the staff at Bellerose are left discussing the event. The consensus is that it went much better than expected and they’ll be busy taking orders next week. Meanwhile, many of the suits have been preordered by men in the LA area – men who can influence style in this big city. Blaine gently pulls Kurt away from the crowd and gives him a one-armed hug.

“Sam rang and everything is fine with Mercedes. It was Braxton Hicks contractions after all. He’s taken her home and she’s settled in bed.”

“I’m glad that she’s okay. Mercedes seems very nice. I hope that she meant it when she said she wanted me to help her with a wardrobe for her next tour. That’s a project I could really sink my teeth into.”

“I’m sure she meant it. On to more important matters. Do you have any plans in LA before you go to Lima?”

“I have one huge plan that’s going to keep me busy until I catch my flight tomorrow night.”

“I should have known you would be busy. Can you text me your flight details for New York City?”

Kurt smiles softly at Blaine, whose body has slumped and who has a very disappointed look on his face. “Aren’t you going to ask me what my plan is?”

“I’m sure it has to do with the Bellerose Boutique.”

Kurt shakes his head. “No, I’m officially on holiday for the next nine days. My huge plan has to do with the man in front of me. The man I’m not going to let out of my sight for a single second.”

Blaine looks up with sparkling eyes.

“It’s called ‘Operation Woo Blaine’. I’m going to use every trick up my sleeve. I’m going to dine him, cherish him and love him. And that’s just the beginning.”

Blaine giggles and Kurt can see that he looks dreamy. “Sounds perfect to me.”

“So, are you staying with Sam or Cooper? I’m afraid that they’ll cramp my style. I want you all to myself.”

“No, I’m staying at the Beverly Wilshire, a few blocks away.”

“That sounds perfect. I’ve never stayed at a five-star hotel before. Lead the way.”

“Are you sure? I don’t want to rush you into anything…”
“Blaine, I’ve never been surer of anything – or anybody - in my life. I mean it when I say I love you. Now I have the next 24 hours to prove it.”

Chapter End Notes

It took 33 chapters and roughly 160k words but they’re finally together! And there are nine more chapters of Klaine goodness to go.

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. Here is the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics.

I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr.

I will continue to update twice a week until the end of the story. I’m traveling on two separate occasions in February during the week and will not have my computer or reliable Internet access. I’ll warn you ahead of time, but the Wednesday update might be late.

Next up: Blaine and Kurt have just declared their love to each other. They’re both in love, single and will be together for the next 24 hours. They’re headed to a five-star luxury hotel. They are most definitely not going to watch Disney movies. Yes, it time for the story’s rating to kick in.
May

As they walk arm and arm from the Bellerose Boutique to his hotel, Blaine stops every ten steps to kiss Kurt. Now that he can do it, Blaine can’t keep away from those irresistible lips. Of course, after each kiss, he presses into Kurt for another one of his incredible signature hugs.

“Honey, it’s going to take us all night to walk to your hotel if we keep going on like this. I have plans for the next 24 hours with a capital P.”

Blaine’s cheeks tinge pink hearing Kurt call him by a term of endearment. “I can’t help myself. I need a reminder that this – us - is for real.”

Kurt stops them in front of the CVS pharmacy. “It’s real all right, and I have 24 hours to prove it. Wait here - I have a few things I need to buy.”

Blaine gulps and nods, knowing that Kurt is buying the supplies for tonight. He tries to relax against the store window and breathes in the warm spring air. The late afternoon sun is sinking below the buildings, casting long shadows along the streets. Seeing Kurt again at the boutique opening went far better than he had ever expected. After declaring their love to each other, it seems that he and Kurt are finally on the same wavelength. Nothing can stop them now.

Blaine makes a mental note to send Sam a gift basket of the latest Xbox games and flavored lip balm. Left to his own devices, there would have been awkward moments, pregnant pauses (no pun intended) and these next 24 hours would have been spent gathering his courage to ask Kurt out for coffee. Yeah, he owed Sam a lot.

Blaine waits patiently at the front of the store, wondering why it’s taking Kurt more than five minutes inside. He momentarily panics at the thought that Kurt has fled from the CVS back door. However, his fears are calmed when he looks into the store window and sees Kurt moving to the next aisle with a shopping basket.

Blaine pulls out his phone from his jacket pocket and texts his brother. *I can’t make it for brunch tomorrow. How about Monday lunch instead? I’ll come to the studio. B-

“Darken the city, night is a wire… Steam in the subway, earth is afire…Do do do do do do dododo dodo,” blasts from Blaine’s phone.
“Hey, Coop.”

“Take it that you can’t meet me for breakfast because you’re with Kurt?”

“Yeah, we pretty much cleared everything up. I love Kurt and Kurt loves me. We’re together.”

Blaine can’t help but let out a deep content sigh.

“I’m so happy for you, squirt. I can practically see those heart-eyes over the phone. Before you have crazy sex all night, can you do me a favor?”

Blaine rolls his eyes fondly, but he’s secretly pleased, because for once, he is planning on having crazy sex all night. “Maybe - depends what it is.”

“Can you remind Kurt about our last conversation? Kurt made me a promise. Tell him that I fully expect him to keep it.”

“I don’t understand, Coop. When did you talk to Kurt?”

“At the Whitney Museum Art Party. You don’t need to know the details, but Kurt will understand what I mean.”

“Okay, if you say so. I’ll see you at CBS Television City at noon on Monday.”

As Blaine returns the phone to his jacket pocket, he hears Kurt calling his name. Blaine’s eyebrows shoot up when he sees Kurt with two heavily laden shopping bags. How many condoms and tubes of lube does Kurt think that they’ll need?

“Who were you talking to on the phone?” Kurt asks.

“That was Cooper. I postponed our meeting up until Monday. He asked me to remind you about a promise?”

“Text Cooper back and tell him that I’m keeping it.”

“Sure, but are you going to tell me what it’s all about?” Blaine asks as he shoots off the text.

“It’s sort of a long story. Can I tell you later?” Kurt steps forward so that his chest bumps against Blaine’s and whispers, “I have other more important things on my mind at the moment, and they certainly do not include Cooper.”

Kurt sets down the CVS bags and wraps his arms around Blaine’s body and presses their lips together. Every thought escapes Blaine’s head as he tastes Kurt’s warm lips. Kurt pulls away far too soon for Blaine’s liking, and picks up the CVS bags again.

“Let me carry them for you.”

“Uh, uh. I’m not going to let you peak inside. All in good time, my good sir.”

Blaine feels his body thrumming. He loves surprises, but most of all, he loves Kurt’s special surprises. They’re always simple and thoughtful, but unique.

As they walk the last two blocks to the hotel, Kurt asks lots of questions about India, the Monarch
Foundation and Vogue. Blaine can’t believe how much Kurt actually knows about what has been going on in his life. He didn’t really go into much detail in the texts, phone calls and Skype sessions. Although they haven’t seen each other in eight months, the conversation is easy-flowing and it feels as if they were together only yesterday.

When they cross the street and Blaine sees the imposing Beverly Wilshire Hotel up ahead, he stops Kurt on the corner. Blaine doesn’t want to break the mood, but he needs to know what these 24 hours mean to Kurt. “Uh… Kurt. Before we enter the hotel, we need to talk about… umm… something. I have always loved you and I always will. You’re it for me. I don’t want this evening – this 24 hours – to be about fun or sex…”

Kurt smirks as he arches one eyebrow.

Blaine quietly chuckles. “Okay, I do want it to be about fun and sex, but not only that. I want it to be about connecting with each other. I don’t just let guys into my life like this on a whim and umm…”

“Oh, Blaine. I want it to be special too. How about fun and sex and really talking? Talking about where we went wrong and how we see our future? I’m in this 100%. If truth be known, I’m a little nervous too. I feel just as vulnerable as you do.”

Blaine cups Kurt’s face with his hand and gently strokes his cheek. “It’s just you and me here – Kurt and Blaine. We can do whatever we want. We can order room service and have a movie marathon, talk, and you can head back to your hotel…”

“Blaine, as sweet as that sentiment is, that won’t be happening. A movie marathon is not part of my plans.”

They clasp hands once again and start giggling as they enter the Beverly Wilshire Hotel. Kurt stops to take a look around the opulent lobby. “This reminds me of the Hôtel Meurice in Paris with the marble flooring and chandeliers.”

“You’re going to have to tell me all about your life in Paris. It sounds so exciting.”

“Sure, but for now, let’s head to your room.”

When they enter the elevator, Blaine’s heart flutters with anticipation and nerves. He’s waited so long to be with Kurt like this, but he can’t help but be nervous. He doesn’t want to mess anything up and have Kurt leave him. After exiting the elevator, Blaine leads the way to door 206. Blaine’s hands are shaking and he can’t get the hotel room keycard to work. Kurt takes the keycard from his hand and easily opens the door. Kurt pulls him into the suite by his tie and Blaine thinks that Kurt is the sexiest man alive.

Kurt slowly walks around to inspect the suite. There’s a living room with a comfortable couch, chairs and TV. A balcony stretches across one glassed wall offering views of the Hollywood Hills. The bedroom has a super king size bed with fluffy pillows and leading off it is the bathroom with a whirlpool tub to die for.

“Oh my god, Blaine. You’re in a suite. This must cost a bomb!”

“Not really. I booked a standard room since I’m on my own dime this trip. The hotel manager upgraded me.”
"The perks of the job - you deserve them," Kurt murmurs, then gives Blaine a lingering kiss on the lips.

When they pull apart, Blaine asks, "So what can I get you to drink? There’s beer, wine, spirits or… Is it too early to order a bottle of champagne?"

“I’ve learnt to enjoy wine in Paris, but I don’t want to drink – at least not yet.”

Blaine rummages around the suite’s mini-fridge in the bar area and smiles when he finds the silver can with black and red lettering. “Diet Coke?”

“Sounds perfect.”

Blaine grabs himself a bottle of mineral water, his fingers trembling slightly as he pours the contents into a glass. Where do they start? What should he say? What should he do? He needs something – anything - to calm down his nerves. Blaine pulls the phone out of his jacket and hooks it up to the audio system. Soon the piano notes of Debussy’s Clair de Lune waft through the air. Blaine hangs up his jacket and joins Kurt on the couch with the drinks.

“You have this classical piece on your phone.”

“I love it. I can even play it on the piano. It reminds me of you and that day we spent at the Brooklyn Flea Market. That was one of the best days of my life. My only regret was that I fell asleep when you were giving me that foot massage and we didn’t have a good night kiss.”

“I think we can make up for that now, don’t you think?”

Kurt scooches across the couch and leans in and gives Blaine a kiss. Blaine can feel Kurt grab his bicep tightly and wrap one hand around the nape of his neck. Blaine is starting to feel dizzy, because the kiss went from 0 to 200 mph in less than ten seconds. Blaine pulls back and sees Kurt with sparkling eyes and kiss-swollen lips, and god, he looks so hot.

“We’re pretty good at this…”

“I would say we’re excellent, stupendous… Olympic champions even,” Kurt interrupts.

Blaine shakes his head, trying to calm his body down. “But we’re not so good at really communicating. I don’t want what happened last time at the diva-off. We need to talk first.”

Kurt sits up and smooths down his shirt. “Okay, I agree. Let’s start with Sam, because that’s been really bugging me for a long time.”

“Well, as you know, Sam is my best friend and I met him during my first year in college. He was the local pizzeria delivery boy…”

“I know all that. I want to know if you were in a relationship with Sam.”

“God, no, Kurt. Sam’s straight and not even bi-curious.”

Kurt slaps Blaine’s shoulder, hard.

“Ouch! Why did you do that?” Blaine cries out, rubbing his shoulder.
“For all those months, you let me think that Blam was real! Do you know how many nights I cried wishing you loved me and not him? Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I’d better start at the beginning….”

When Kurt nods, he continues, “When I started my ‘Bowties and Suspenders’ blog in college, I had absolutely no idea that it would become so popular. Soon, there were discussions about my ass and wherever I went in Cambridge, people would whip out their cell phones to take photos. I felt so objectified. It only got worse when I was rising up the ranks of Vogue. So many people, both men and women, were throwing themselves at me. You can’t believe the number of naked photos and phone numbers that were slipped into my pocket. The male models at Vogue photo shoots were fawning over me as well. I can’t count the number of times when I was put in compromising and really awkward situations. When The New Yorker dubbed me the most eligible gay hot dude, it got even crazier.”

Kurt pulls Blaine into his side and rubs Blaine’s arm. “I can appreciate how awful that must have been for you. My experience with the media after becoming a model has taught me that being in the limelight and being fawned over isn’t what it’s cracked up to be.”

Blaine nuzzles into Kurt’s chest, feeling so safe and understood. Not many people realize how stressful fame can be. After a few minutes, Blaine pulls away and continues.

“Sam was my best friend, and when I had to attend high-profile events for Vogue, Sam suggested that he be my plus-one to help me out. It turned out to be a lifesaver – the proposals and leering remarks were still there, but fans weren’t so aggressive.”

“What I don’t understand is why Sam would agree to be your beard? Hag? Pretend boyfriend? Didn’t he want his own love life with a woman? With Mercedes?”

“Sam and Mercedes have had an on-again, off-again relationship since high school. Mercedes was on tour, and it seemed to make sense for Sam to stay in New York City with a stable job. He would meet up with her on the weekends, wherever she was. Mercedes wanted to wait to have sex until they were married. Sam respected that, but felt temptation all around him. By going out with me in public, women assumed he was gay and left him alone. Sam was never tempted by the gay men that flocked around him.”

“Blaine, you were giving me so many mixed signals, but somehow I knew that you liked me. I thought you and Sam had an open relationship.”

“What!” Blaine bursts out, vehemently shaking his head. “You really thought I was the type of guy that would mess around like that? Don’t you know that I’m a one-man guy?”

“I didn’t think you were that type of guy, but what was I supposed to think? I was so confused and I felt so out of my depth. There I was, the 18-year-old virgin… And there you were, a 28-year-old man who was the most eligible gay bachelor in all of New York City.”

“Kurt, you know that title is just there to sell magazines, right? It has nothing to do with the reality of who I am - the real me. You were giving me mixed messages too, Kurt. I thought that you had a crush on Sam.”

“What! How could you possibly think that?” Kurt cries out.
“You always asked about Sam – how he was, what he was doing - stuff like that. You always hung out with Sam when we were in a group. When we made arrangements to spend time together, you’d always ask me to invite Sam along.”

“Blaine, you took everything the wrong way. I was trying to figure out how Sam fitted into your life. I never wanted Sam to join us, but I’d invite him to make sure that you would still spend time with me.”

“We were both idiots,” Blaine sighs.

“What I still don’t understand is why you didn’t tell me? I even asked you straight out last summer if you were with Sam!”

“Sam begged me not to tell you. Mercedes was renegotiating her recording contract and she didn’t want anything to mess it up. She was concerned about the morality clause included in the contract. If it leaked out that she was in a relationship with Sam, who was presumed gay and in a relationship with me by the media, it could have really screwed things up. You were living with Rachel Berry at the time, and we all know that she can’t keep a secret. I wanted to tell you so badly, but I had given my word to Sam that I wouldn’t. We agreed that I could tell you the night of the diva-off. Sam and Mercedes got married in Vegas that very same day.”

“So that’s why Sam wasn’t at the diva-off. I’ve always wondered,” Kurt mutters. There’s a pause in the conversation and both of them recall times together, what they know now shedding a new light on the events.

“Is this is what you wanted to tell me so desperately after the video went viral? That you weren’t with Sam, who got married that weekend?”

Blaine nods his head, tears forming in his eyes. “I’m so sorry,” Blaine sobs, throwing himself into Kurt’s arms. “I screwed everything up. After the video was posted, there was an awful lot of attention on ‘Blam’. Sam had always planned to move to LA once they were married, but he also decided to quit his modeling career because of the media attention.”

Kurt starts to rub gentle circles along Blaine’s back. “Hey, no crying. Things are starting to make sense now. It must have been really hard for you to keep this secret for so long, and knowing when and how much to tell me.”

Blaine feels soothed by Kurt’s touch and soft words. His body starts to relax with the weight of the secret lifted. Kurt kisses the top of his head, and Blaine feels so safe and connected.

“I know this is really difficult to talk about, but I have one more question about Sam. Why did Sam say that you want ‘to do’ him, this afternoon?”

Blaine pulls away from Kurt and throws his head against the back of the sofa, wiping the tears from his eyes.

“God, I can’t believe he even mentioned that. When I first met Sam, I honestly thought he was gay. He dyed his hair blond and he was always complimenting me on my outfits. What straight guy does that, right? I was studying really hard at Harvard and felt very lonely. We both were in the Star Wars fandom, enjoyed playing Xbox and he was so nice to me. And you’ve seen those abs … and his lips. I developed a crush on Sam.”
“Oh, dear lord. Is that why you look at Sam’s lips all the time?” Kurt asks.

“Do I? I mean… I used to, but I didn’t realize I still did that,” Blaine replies, blushing. “Hey, I’ve caught you staring at Sam’s lips too, Kurt.”

“I would look at Sam’s lips to see what you could possibly find sexy about them. I think they’re way too big and makes Sam look like a trouty mouth! So anyways, I take it that Sam found out about your crush?”

“Yeah, Sam figured it out, but he was totally cool about it. Sam said he was actually flattered, but he wasn’t gay. We managed to push past it and became best friends – platonic best friends. After living with Sam for a few weeks, any feelings like that totally disappeared. Do you know what a slob Sam can be? Thank god my penthouse has two bathrooms!”

Kurt chuckles. “I can just imagine – I’ve seen him in the models’ dressing room.” Kurt takes Blaine’s hand and adds, “You’ll need to stop that old habit of looking at Sam’s lips. I want your eyes only on mine.”

Blaine stares at Kurt’s lips, which look so soft with the promise of sweetness to come. Blaine feels butterflies in his stomach as Kurt slowly licks his lips.

“I love you, Blaine. Now kiss me...”

Blaine stares into Kurt’s eyes with awe. He cups Kurt’s face with both hands and slowly pulls Kurt towards him, not taking his eyes off of Kurt’s lips for one single second. When Blaine can feel Kurt’s warm breath on his own face, he closes his eyes.

“I love you too.”

Their lips meet softly and it feels so perfect, so right. As he moves his lips against Kurt’s, Blaine tries to convey all the warmth and the love he feels. Their kiss is like a symphony playing the perfect classical piece à deux. They aren’t in any rush to do more, preferring to revel in the special and loving moment. Blaine gently presses his body against Kurt’s, pushing him down along the couch. The little sighs and noises Kurt makes go straight to Blaine’s cock, but he wants to take things slowly and savor every moment.

Kurt’s hand moves from the nape of Blaine’s neck to his scalp. Blaine loves the feeling of the long fingers tangling and twisting in his curls. Kurt’s tongue licks over his lips for permission to enter, and Blaine quickly opens his mouth to let Kurt in. Blaine tries to stifle a groan when he gets the first taste of sweet Kurt. It’s like vanilla, lemon and mint all rolled into one. Their tongues slowly move in sync, and Blaine feels intoxicated. When Kurt grabs his shirt, and pulls it out of his trousers, Blaine can’t hold in his groan any more.

Kurt moves his mouth to the side and catches his breath. “God, you sound so sexy. I’d do anything to hear more. Let’s lose the shirts.”

Blaine pulls back and sits on Kurt, straddling his thighs. Blaine slowly undoes each button of his dress shirt, carefully watching Kurt’s expression. Blaine loves that Kurt looks like he wants to rip off his shirt and devour him. When Blaine finally takes off the shirt, he can see the disappointment on Kurt’s face that he’s wearing an undershirt.
“Too many layers,” Kurt moans, pulling the bottom of the undershirt from Blaine’s trousers. Kurt’s hand sneaks underneath the undershirt and he gently brushes his fingers from Blaine’s pelvis to his nipples.

Blaine throws his head back and groans loudly at how fantastic Kurt’s fingers feel. Blaine grabs the hem of his undershirt and pauses before taking it off, suddenly feeling insecure. Kurt is so gorgeous and Blaine doesn’t feel as if he’s in the same league. Kurt’s always surrounded by gorgeous tall and slender models, parading around in all states of undress. And here he is – ten years older, shorter and not remotely model worthy. Blaine takes pride in his body and has kept up with the boxing and yoga since the diva-off. However, he wonders if his little belly is returning. *God, why did I eat two cronuts and a bag of Cheetos last week!*

What happens if Kurt doesn’t like what he sees? Will it all be over before it started? Even worse, what happens if Kurt says the right things, but Blaine *knows* from Kurt’s eyes that he doesn’t mean them? Blaine has never felt more vulnerable in his entire life. Before Blaine’s thoughts can spiral more out of control, though, he feels Kurt’s hand rubbing his right thigh.

“Talk to me, Blaine. What’s wrong? It’s perfectly okay if you want to keep your undershirt on. As you said earlier, it’s just us – Kurt and Blaine – and we can go at the pace that we both want to.”

Blaine lifts his head and sharply inhales when he looks at Kurt, whose face is full of concern. “I… I’m afraid that you won’t like what you see. I’m not a model… and I’m not as gorgeous as you… and I’m older… and I ate an entire bag of Cheetos in one sitting last week… So, yeah.”

“Do you know what I see, Blaine? I see a stunningly beautiful man whom I’m in love with. You take my breath away. I have a little confession that might ease your mind.”

“Do tell. I really need something to help me right now.”

“Remember that day when I met you at the Vogue gym when you were working out with the punching bag?”

Blaine nods. “God, I was so embarrassed that you saw me all sweaty.”

“Blaine, believe me - I *liked* what I saw. It took every bit of willpower not to go over and lick off the sweat dripping down your neck and chest. When Sam came in and checked out your abs with his hands, I wanted to scratch his eyes out and claim you right then and there as mine.”

“Really?”

“Blaine, I was so turned on. When I left the gym, I rushed to the closest washroom to take care of myself.”

“You… umm… masturbated thinking of me?”

“Duh, of course I did… I still do. Seeing you topless at the gym filled my wank bank for months.”

Blaine giggles, and all of a sudden he isn’t so worried any more. The mood feels lighter and he wants… Oh, he wants. Blaine quickly pulls off his undershirt, and he can see Kurt’s eyes darken with desire.

“Me too.”
Kurt gives Blaine a questioning look.

“I masturbate thinking of you as well. So off with your shirt before I rip it off… with my teeth,”
Blaine growls.

Kurt takes significantly less time taking off his shirt, hurling it far away from the couch. Blaine’s mouth waters when he sees Kurt’s long neck and the expanse of creamy pale skin on display. It looks so soft, and Blaine can’t wait to touch and explore with his fingers and mouth. Blaine has seen Kurt shirtless at photo shoots, but he notices well-defined muscles that weren’t there before.


Kurt chuckles with sparkling eyes. “When I was at Elle, I had to learn how to use the dancing pole. I got along with the trainer and kept up with it later. I thought I was done with puberty, but my body has changed over the past year.”

“I always thought you were hot, but Kurt, you’re now on a whole new level.”

Blaine leans in and kisses Kurt passionately on the lips. Blaine whimpers when he feels Kurt’s smooth skin against his. Blaine moves his kisses across Kurt’s face and down his neck. Kurt’s soft moans are turning him on. Blaine can feel Kurt’s skin heat up and he can’t get enough of Kurt’s scent, his taste, his whimpering, his feel…. his everything.

When Blaine kisses that little spot between Kurt’s shoulder and neck, Kurt gasps and his hips thrust forward. Blaine can feel Kurt’s erection hit his thigh. Blaine’s secretly proud that he can get this reaction from Kurt simply by kissing him.

“Oh Blaine, that feels so good. I’m so turned on right now. Tell me what you think about when you’re masturbating. Do you really think of me?”

“Of course I do. Sometimes I think about the little things, the way you look at me, the way you hug me, the way we woke up entangled in each other when we had movie marathons. Since the diva-off, I’ve been thinking about us making out and how you were all over me. I think it’s my confession time.”

“I’m not stopping you,” Kurt moans, thrusting his hips.

“I think about when you pushed into me against the wall in the dressing room and kissed me like there was no tomorrow. You were so hot, going after what you wanted. I was so turned on. I could barely stand up. It took all my willpower not to drop down on my knees, open your trousers and take you in my mouth. God, I wanted to touch you and taste you – make you feel good.”

Kurt squeezes Blaine’s ass hard as he continues thrusting. Blaine keeps his cock away from Kurt, worried that he’ll climax before they even get started. Blaine returns his attention to that part of Kurt’s body that keeps him gasping.

“Tell me more,” Kurt whines, clawing at Blaine’s back.

“My biggest fantasy when I masturbate is that you fuck me. That you love me enough to want to be close to me in that way. Your body and soul wrap around mine and you take care of me, making me feel your love. You know how to move your cock in all the right ways - right places – as you bring
us higher and higher. Then you wrap your hand around my cock and work me over. I always let go and lose it there. When I jerk off, that’s what I think about the most. God, I want you so badly…”

Blaine can feel Kurt’s body tense and his cock throb. Blaine looks up and sees the most beautiful vision he has ever seen in his entire life. Kurt’s eyes are squeezed shut and his mouth is slightly open, moaning his name. His complexion has slightly paled and Kurt looks as if he’s in ecstasy as he slowly moves his head side-to-side. Eventually, Blaine can hear Kurt’s breathing level out and smiles at him when Kurt opens his eyes.

“Holy hell. Look what you do to me. I just came in my pants way too fast. Do you have any more doubts that you turn me on?”

Blaine giggles and shakes his head.

“It’s not funny, Blaine. The only underpants CVS had in stock were incontinence briefs, and no way was I buying those. I’ve got to clean myself before it seeps into my trousers,” Kurt huffs, standing up.

“I’ve got a spare pair you can borrow,” Blaine replies, walking towards his suitcase. He takes out a pair and hands them over to Kurt with a kiss and a sweet smile. The thought of Kurt wearing his underpants turns Blaine on more than he’ll let on.

Kurt picks up the CVS bags and heads towards the bedroom. Before entering, he turns his head and says in a breathy voice, “Give me ten minutes, then come join me.”

Chapter End Notes

Cooper’s ringtone: ‘Rio’ by Duran, Duran

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. Here is the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics.

I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr.

Next up: Yes, exactly what you expect… smuff!
And I tell you how easy it feels to be with you
And how right your arms feel around me
But I, I rehearsed those lines just late last night
When I was thinkin' about how right tonight might be

Anticipation by Carly Simon

May

I've got love on my mind
I've got love on my mind

When Blaine hears the first notes of the song, he tentatively opens the bedroom door and palms his cock over his trousers when he sees the vision in front of him. There is Kurt, lying on the bed in nothing but a pair of red bikini pants — not any pants but his red bikini pants. Blaine mentally gives himself a high five for lending Kurt the tiniest pair of underpants that he has with him. Blaine drags his eyes over Kurt's long lean legs that seemed to go on forever. Blaine thinks about how they would feel wrapped around him, and closes his eyes, trying to calm himself down.

“I think you’re overdressed for the party,” Kurt smirks.

Blaine shyly smiles and looks directly into Kurt’s glasz-colored eyes, which are warm and inviting. Blaine slowly undoes his belt and pulls it away from his trousers, placing it on top of the dresser. Blaine then carefully undoes the top button of his trousers and drags down the zipper, licking his lips. He turns to give Kurt a side profile and pulls his trousers down, wiggling his ass.

“You tease… That ass looks even better than I’ve ever imagined, and trust me, I’ve imagined it a lot. Get that ass over here before I get up and ravish you on the floor.”

When Blaine’s eyes return to Kurt’s body, he almost cums right there and then, watching Kurt slowly but rhythmically palming his cock over the red briefs. Blaine runs and dives onto the bed, giggling, positioning himself next to Kurt. Kurt gently brushes a few curls off his face and softly kisses him. Even though the kiss is slow and unhurried, Blaine’s heart is beating in time to the music.

In your arms I like to be
Caressing you gently and passionately
From sunrise to sunset and all through the day
I've been waiting for your return
And you know this is where I'll be
I can say to the world I learned
Only you can satisfy me, satisfy me

Kurt gently pushes Blaine onto his back and continues kissing his lips and slowly works down his neck. Blaine is thankful that Kurt is taking control, since he’s not sure what sexual experience Kurt has. Blaine’s ready for everything, but he doesn’t want to push Kurt into anything that he’s not ready for.
Kurt establishes a rhythm of kissing, sucking, licking, biting, and blowing warm air along Blaine’s neck and upper chest. Kurt intersperses his ministrations with comforting words, “I love you Blaine… *kiss*… You’re incredible… *lick*… The way you taste… *moan*… I can’t get enough of you.”

When Blaine feels Kurt’s lips and hands caressing his body and hears the loving words, he’s overcome with emotions and physical pleasure. He has never felt this loved before.

Kurt returns his attention to Blaine’s lips, combing his fingers through his lover’s thick locks. Kurt dips his tongue inside Blaine’s mouth, first probing everywhere and then sucking his tongue. When Blaine finds it difficult to breathe, Kurt intuitively knows to pull back and gently nibbles on Blaine’s lower lip. It takes all of Blaine’s strength to stay silent and relaxed.

Kurt pulls Blaine to his side once again, so that they are facing each other.

“Tell me what you want, Blaine.”

Kurt says this so sincerely and with such love in his voice that Blaine’s eyes start to well with tears. “I want you… Anything and everything. I love you so much.”

Blaine closes his eyes and Kurt moves forward and kisses each eyelid. When Kurt gently cups his face with one hand, Blaine gazes up as Kurt gently swipes a tear from his face with his thumb.

“I want anything and everything too. But you have to be a little bit more specific, sweetheart. I want to make you feel good.”

“Make love to me, Kurt, in any way you feel comfortable. And if we get that far, I want you inside me, to feel you all over. Is that too much?”

Kurt’s hand moves down and squeezes Blaine’s ass.

“I want that too. I’ve never done it before, so you’re going to have to tell me what feels good and what doesn’t. And don’t hold back. Those sounds you make are like my kryptonite.”

“Baby, what you’ve been doing so far feels so damn good.”

Kurt smiles and leans in to capture Blaine’s lips in another kiss. He then pushes Blaine onto his back and resumes his ministrations of kissing, sucking and licking, and working down Blaine’s chest. When Kurt reaches a nipple, he places his teeth on the nub and gently tugs. When Blaine lets out a whimper, Kurt swirls his tongue around and gently sucks. Blaine can’t help but groan. No-one has ever spent the time to figure out what turns him on – and this definitely does. Blaine feels his cock throb now that it’s fully erect.

“Fuck, Kurt! That feels so damn amazing. The things you can do with your tongue. Don’t stop… Don’t ever stop.”

Blaine can feel Kurt smile into his chest before he continues exploring. Blaine thinks that Kurt is playing him like a finely-tuned instrument, knowing exactly what rhythm to set. Kurt murmurs, “I want you to feel my love all over your body… one inch at a time.”

Blaine’s heart soars at Kurt’s words, because yes, he feels so cherished by Kurt. Blaine has never
known that simple touches and kisses could feel this amazingly good. No-one has ever made him feel so loved before, taken care of.

By the time Kurt’s mouth arrives at his hips, Blaine feels as if every single nerve in his body is on edge. Kurt dips his tongue just below the band of his boxer briefs, and Blaine can’t help but wiggle his ass.

Kurt gets the obvious message and pulls back and kneels, straddling Blaine. Kurt slowly takes off the boxer briefs, and Blaine’s hard thick cock bounces up and starts bobbing. A bead of pre-cum forms and dribbles down. Blaine feels Kurt’s weight on his thighs, but the silence and inactivity goes on for longer than he expects. When Blaine opens his eyes, he sees Kurt staring at his cock with lust-blown eyes.

“Oh, babe, I’ve always fantasized what your cock might look like. But wow, nothing’s prepared me for actually seeing it. It’s so thick… and gorgeous…and perfect. I can’t believe that you’re all mine.”

Blaine preens at the compliments, loving the pet name Kurt calls him. When Kurt scoots down his body, Blaine quickly opens his legs, his heart now pounding even faster. To his surprise, Kurt wraps his hands beneath Blaine’s ass and gives it a firm squeeze.

“Baby, you can’t believe how many times I jerked off thinking about your ass. I can’t wait to fuck it.”

Blaine moans at the thought of having Kurt inside him. He growls, “God, Kurt. I want you to fuck me so badly.”

Kurt starts nipping at his upper thighs, and Blaine’s cock is desperate for any attention. Blaine’s hand automatically goes down to give it a stroke, but Kurt slaps it away before Blaine can get any relief. His cock is now leaking and throbbing.

“That’s my job,” Kurt growls in a husky voice.

“Kurt, I want … I need something… I feel so worked up… I’m going out of my mind… I need more… Just take me…”

Kurt’s fingers wrap around the base of Blaine’s cock and slowly stroke up to the tip. Kurt’s fingers capture the pre-cum and then Blaine feels nothing. Blaine quickly opens his eyes and gawks when he sees Kurt licking his fingers.

“You taste delicious.”

Blaine’s head falls back onto the pillow, willing himself not to orgasm right there and then at the sight of Kurt tasting his pre-cum. “You’re so unbelievably sexy, Kurt. You’re killing me here. I need you…”

Blaine’s body trembles when he feels Kurt’s lips kiss the head of his cock. Kurt then flattens his tongue at the base of his cock and firmly licks the thick vein on the underside to the top. Blaine moans at how fantastic it feels and his hips involuntarily buck up to get more of Kurt’s mouth. Kurt lays one arm over Blaine and firmly holds down his hips as he starts sucking at the tip. Kurt alternates between swirling his tongue around the head and sucking.

“Oh my god, Kurt! Your mouth’s so hot and wet. I feel as if I’m on fire.”
Kurt places his other hand firmly at the base of Blaine’s cock. With each stroke, Kurt takes another inch of Blaine’s cock into his mouth. Blaine’s hands automatically move to Kurt’s head and he starts pulling at his hair. Blaine’s heart sinks when Kurt pulls off his cock with a loud pop and wipes his mouth.

“That hair pulling is distracting me, Blaine. It’s turning me on too much. If you keep doing it, I’m going to rut into the mattress and lose it. Can you place them somewhere else? Maybe over your head?”

Blaine’s hands immediately shoot over his head and he thrusts his hips up to show that his cock is still demanding attention.

Kurt smiles at a writhing Blaine and whispers, “Look at you, all spread out before me. Now, where was I?”

Blaine lets out a loud moan when Kurt takes his cock even deeper into his mouth than before. His hands grip the bed’s headboard rails as he holds on for dear life, pleasure coursing through his body. Blaine’s breath becomes more ragged as he moans, “Kurt, stop. I’m too close.”

Kurt immediately removes his mouth from Blaine’s cock. Kurt moves his head down and starts kissing Blaine’s inner thigh, gently stroking down his leg. Blaine calms down but his head feels fuzzy, as if all his blood has left his body and moved lower, to his cock. Blaine can hear Kurt’s quiet sighs and kisses and in this moment, his love for Kurt feels as if it will burst out of his body.

Kurt gently fondles one of Blaine’s balls as his mouth licks the other. No-one has ever done this to Blaine before, and it makes his stomach twist up hotly.

“Fuck, that’s feels incredible. I’m going up the rollercoaster again.”

“You taste and smell so good. I can’t get enough of you.”

“Oh god, Kurt. You can’t say things like that – not when I feel so desperate. I need…”

Kurt returns his attention to Blaine’s cock, setting a pattern of slowly swirling his tongue over the head in his mouth and then sucking. When Blaine’s hips thrust up a little, Kurt moans, sending tingling vibrations throughout Blaine’s body. Blaine grasps the bed’s headboard rails even more tightly, thrashing his head from side to side on the pillow. Blaine moans as the ecstasy builds even higher.

“Oh my fucking god! It feels unbelievably amazing! I love you… Don’t stop… Faster… Oh god, I’m going to cum soon…”

When Kurt hears the warning, he increases his tempo. It all seems so wet, and Blaine can feel the saliva dripping down to his balls. Blaine’s shallow thrusts speed up, causing Kurt to moan. Blaine can feel the tug of his orgasm building as his balls tighten.

“Oh! Oh! Kurt, don’t stop… I love you… Ugh… I can control myself any longer… I… I… Aaah!”

Blaine clenches his ass when he feels his cock pulsating as it shoots out steady streams of cum. His mind blanks and he sees nothing but white light beneath his eyelids as Kurt works him through it, swallowing as much as he can. Blaine can’t control what’s coming out of his mouth, as if there is no
connection with his brain. There’s just a babbling of words and moaning.

The next thing Blaine feels is the gentle strokes of Kurt’s hand up and down his chest. Once his breathing is calmed down enough, Blaine cracks open an eye to see Kurt smiling back at him. Kurt tugs him in for a kiss, which is soft and loving. The urgency Blaine felt earlier has faded to a gentler pace.

“Can I take care of you, Kurt?”

Kurt blushes and shakes his head. “No need. I might have been rutting against the mattress towards the end, so I’m good.”

Blaine gives Kurt a tight-lipped smile before staring up at the ceiling. Blaine had wanted so badly to climax with Kurt, and not separately. He feels as if he has let Kurt down by leaving him to take care of himself.

“What’s wrong, Blaine? I can see the cogs in your brain working.”

Blaine rolls to his side and holds Kurt’s hand. “I’ve never felt that loved before. I really wanted to make you feel as good as you made me feel.”

“Trust me, you did make me feel good. Do you know how worked up I got exploring your body? And the noises you made were positively sinful.”

“But I wanted… urr…”

“I know exactly what you wanted, and it will happen.”

Blaine gives Kurt a quizzical look.

“You told me what you wanted when you were climaxing.”

Blaine searches his brain to remember what he had said, but comes up with nothing. His eyes are glued to Kurt, as he gets out of the bed. Kurt walks slowly towards the bathroom, gently swaying his hips. Before entering the bathroom, Kurt turns his face towards Blaine and adds, “According to my calculations, we still have 20 hours before I need to leave. Give me ten minutes, and then come join me.”

With ten minutes to wait – wait for what? – Blaine’s at a loss what to do. He climbs out of the bed and then heads towards the living area. He picks up the room service menu and takes his time looking at the menu. He orders a light dinner and champagne to arrive in another hour. After straightening out the sheets, Blaine checks his phone and is relieved that ten minutes has already passed. He heads towards the bathroom and gently knocks on the door.

“Can I come in?” Blaine asks tentatively.

“The door’s unlocked.”

Blaine’s eyes need to adjust to the darkened bathroom, lit by a dozen or so tea candles placed strategically around the room. Blaine closes his eyes and breathes in the scent of vanilla and lavender. It’s as if Kurt’s signature scent is enveloping him. He then hears music start playing in the room.
It’s truly the most inviting room Blaine has ever entered. He slowly opens his eyes and discovers Kurt… in the large whirlpool bathtub… covered in bubbles.

“Oh, my love. I think I’ve just entered nirvana. Did you pick up these things from CVS?”

Kurt chuckles as he replies, “It’s amazing what you can find there if you hunt around. Now come here, gorgeous. I’m lonely in this huge bathtub by myself.”

Blaine looks at himself in the full-length mirror to make sure he looks okay. He gasps at what he sees. His body is covered with red hickeys of varying sizes. He touches the large one on his neck and can feel a slight soreness. He brushes his fingers along his chest, trying to touch each one, and finishes his discovery at the massive hickey on his hip.

His heart swells with even more love for Kurt. Blaine feels as if Kurt left reminders that he’s loved and cherished. A little bit of him swoons at the thought that he’s taken and marked as such. It will be a constant reminder when Kurt leaves the next day – and the thought of Kurt leaving him in less than 24 hours makes him frown.

“I might have gotten a little carried away. I’m really sorry…. I just couldn’t help myself with all that luscious olive-toned skin beneath me.”

Blaine grins at Kurt. “Don’t apologize. I love them.”

Blaine carefully climbs into the bubble bath. When Kurt opens his arms, Blaine scoots towards him and leans his back against Kurt’s chest. Kurt envelopes Blaine in his arms and gives him a gentle squeeze.

“This is like the best hug ever,” Blaine sighs.

“I want it to be. Now lean forward so I can get your hair wet.”

Blaine eyes a pink sippy cup with a Disney princess printed on the front and bursts out into laughter.

“Hey, I had to work with what was in stock at CVS! If I had a choice, I would have picked out a sippy cup with a Disney Prince.”

Kurt starts scooping water into the cup and pouring it over Blaine’s head, gently combing his fingers through his hair to ensure that it’s completely wet.

“God, I love you. I can’t believe that you thought about how to wash my hair while you were in CVS.”

“Blaine, I love you too. I don’t want you to slip out of my life again. I’d do much more for you than buy a pink princess sippy cup at CVS. Okay, you can now sit up.”

Blaine promptly sits up and feels Kurt’s fingers on his scalp. Kurt is adeptly working shampoo into his hair.
“Another CVS buy?”

“Thank god they had salon brand shampoos in stock because I don’t think that your hair could cope with Herbal Essence. Now lean forward again.”

Kurt uses the sippy cup to rinse out his hair. Then Blaine feels a new product being worked into his hair. Kurt’s fingers massage his scalp, working the conditioner through the curls. Blaine moans at the feeling and concentrates on the music.

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*If God one day struck me, struck me blind*

*Your beauty I’d still see*

*Love is too weak to define*

*Just what you mean to me*

---

Blaine turns his head and captures Kurt’s lips in an urgent kiss.

“I’m so in love with you, Kurt Hummel. You can’t imagine how happy you make me. You are the most beautiful person that I’ve ever met, both inside and out. I want to spend my entire life proving that to you.”

Blaine hears Kurt’s nervous laugh and wonders if he went too far.

“It’s a good thing that I love you too, then. Now lean forward and let me rinse the conditioner from your hair.”

Kurt uses the sippy cup for the last time, scooping water and pouring water over Blaine’s head, running his fingers around the curls. He then lifts up the plug to let some of the water escape before refilling the tub with hot water. Blaine leans back into Kurt’s arms and turns his head to kiss his chin.

“Now that we’re relaxed and clean, maybe it’s time to talk more,” Kurt says softly.

“I’d like that. After all we’ve been through, I want to be totally honest with you.”

“About everything?”

“No more secrets,” Blaine confirms.

“So, sex…”

“Okaaay. We can talk about that. What do you want to know?”

“Do you only top?” Kurt timidly asks.

“No. I’d like to try bottoming too. Why do you ask?”

“It’s just… When you were climaxing…. Umm… You were asking me to fuck you to take the memory away. To be that one special person.”

Blaine sags into Kurt’s chest, his mind reeling as he realizes what he actually said.

“Hey, honey. It’s only me – Kurt. You can tell me anything. I love you. That’s never going to
When Kurt kisses his shoulder, Blaine relaxes and feels like he can tell his story.

“After I found out that Sam was straight, I was full of self-doubt. Sure, I had made out with some guys in high school and messed around a little, but nothing went too far. I was the president of Harvard’s LBGT club and after meetings, we would go out to the Paradise Club. It wasn’t usually a problem because Sam was my wingman.”

“Sam went to gay clubs with you?”

“Sam was an honorary member of the LBGT club, even though he didn’t attend Harvard. Everyone loved him. Sam got us and was 100% behind our rights.”

“I’m impressed. I didn’t think Sam was like that.”

“Well, he was… And still is. Anyways, Sam always knew when to let me loose or when to intervene and take me home. Every gay guy assumed I was a top. Until…”

“Something happened?” Kurt whispers.

“When I was re-elected as president of the LBGT club in my senior year, we all went out to celebrate. A grad student, who was the TA for one of my classes, joined us. I was having so much fun at the club, dancing and accepting everybody’s drinks. When I get drunk, I get a little flirty and handsy, and the TA was my target. Unfortunately, Sam had left earlier. The next thing I knew, I woke up in room I hadn’t been in before. My ass was sore and my head was pounding. The TA then walked out of the bathroom, slipped back into bed, and told me I could find my own way out.”

Kurt presses a kiss to Blaine’s shoulder, and it gives Blaine the courage to continue.

“I had never felt so humiliated – so used. And I had thrown away one of my firsts. I vowed to myself that the next time I bottomed it would matter – that it would be with someone very special in my life. Someone whom I love. It’s more about letting myself go completely loose and just feel.”

Blaine turns his head and gazes into Kurt’s eyes.

“I want that next time to be with you.”

Kurt captures Blaine’s lips in a soft kiss, full of love and what feels like a promise.

“I’m honored, Blaine. I want my first time to be with you for all the same reasons.”

Blaine leans back into Kurt’s chest and rests his head on Kurt’s shoulder, nuzzling into the warm and soft neck. Blaine can hear Kurt’s strong heartbeat and feels cocooned in his loving embrace. Just as Blaine closes his eyes, he hears the doorbell reverberate throughout the suite.

“Ughhh. I forgot all about that. I ordered dinner when you were setting up the bathroom.”

Blaine gets out of the bath and quickly towels himself dry before grabbing a robe and heading towards the suite’s main door. After the meal has been set up and the delivery boy tipped, Blaine walks over to his phone and selects a smooth jazz playlist. When he turns around, his breath hitches at the angel in front of him.
Kurt looks adorable in the white fluffy robe that shows off his skin, which is tinged pink from the hot bath. Kurt has combed his hair, but it’s still wet and not in the usual quiff.

“Here you are, looking like a vision from heaven. My hair must be out of control. I’m going to fix it…”

Kurt grabs his wrist before Blaine can walk past.

“You look gorgeous, Blaine. I love these messy curls.”

As if to prove a point, Kurt weaves his fingers through Blaine’s hair. He tugs down on the locks to position Blaine’s head up and gives him a searing kiss. Blaine feels the insides of his belly twisting, opening his mouth to let Kurt’s tongue in. He loves this dominant side of Kurt. When Kurt pulls away, Blaine chases those lips he can’t seem to get enough of.

“I’m so glad you ordered food, ‘cause I’m starving. I was so busy at the boutique’s reception earlier that I didn’t get a chance to eat. You are always so good at figuring out my every need. It’s like we’re in sync.”

Blaine preens at the praise. It makes him want to do even more things for Kurt in the future. Blaine goes to the table and starts taking the silver domes off the plates. There’s a mezze platter filled with crudités, hummus, and other assorted dips. Other plates contain dim sum and sushi. When Blaine pulls of the last silver dome, Kurt bursts out in laughter.

“French fries and mini burgers, Blaine?”

Blaine sheepishly looks at Kurt. “They’re really good here. Besides, I think we’ll be working off the calories.”

Blaine pulls out a chair and Kurt gracefully sits down. Blaine rushes to the other side of the table and smiles up at Kurt. However, his heart stops when he sees Kurt’s frown.

“What’s the matter, babe? Don’t you like this food? You can order anything else that you want.”

“The food isn’t the problem. It’s you sitting so far away from me. I can’t feel you. Come here,” Kurt replies, signaling with a closed fist and an index finger waggling.

Blaine rises out of his chair and slowly walks over, not once taking his glance away from Kurt’s lips. Blaine tentatively sits down on Kurt’s lap and gives him a lingering kiss. Kurt breaks away and picks up a long slender French fry, dips it in tomato ketchup and feeds it to Blaine.

“Mmmm, yummy.”

Blaine picks up the chopsticks and adeptly selects a piece of raw tuna, dips it into soy sauce and feeds Kurt. They take turns feeding each other, interspersed with slow kisses. When Blaine feeds a pita wedge with hummus to Kurt, he can feel his fingers being licked by Kurt’s tongue. It swirls around his index finger before Blaine can feel the sucking.

“Kurrrt,” Blaine moans. “You even make eating sexy.”

When they’ve had their fill, Kurt wanders to the couch while Blaine consolidates the leftovers onto
one dish and sticks it in the mini-fridge. He’s planning on pulling an all-nighter – no way is he going to miss out on one single second of their 24 hours together – and he suspects that they might need refueling. Blaine opens the thermal carafe and pours the hot chocolate into two mugs, before joining Kurt on the sofa.

“You read my mind, Blaine. How did you know I wanted hot chocolate?”

“When I saw it on the menu, this warm, sweet, rich-tasting drink reminded me of you.”

“You know, I love those cheesy lines of yours.”

After taking a sip of hot chocolate, Kurt places the mug on the side table. He pulls Blaine’s hands into his and asks, “What are we?”

“I’d like to think… I mean I really hope you’ll be… I want you to be my boyfriend,” Blaine blurts out.

“What about Connor? We haven’t discussed him yet.”

“What? He’s not my boyfriend!”

“Blaine, I’ve seen the photos on the Internet. There were even pictures of you two having coffee a few days ago. I need to you to be honest with me and tell me everything.”

Blaine sits up straight and nods. “Okay. Connor works for the law firm that does the legal work for the Monarch Foundation. I was feeling so desperately lonely with you out of my life and in Paris, and Sam moving to LA. We went out on a few dates, but honestly, Kurt, he’s not my boyfriend.”

Kurt arches one eyebrow and asks, “Does Connor know that?”

“I told Connor all about you on our first date. Told him that I was secretly in love with you, but you weren’t interested. I made it perfectly clear that I wasn’t ready for romance.”

“So Connor is someone that you fooled around with?”

“No! Nothing more happened than a quick hug and a kiss on the cheek. I haven’t - as you say - ‘fooled around’ with anybody since the day I first met you.”

“Really?” Kurt squeaks.

“Kurt, you captured my heart with that first hug you gave me. I couldn’t possibly have kissed anyone else. I haven’t wanted to.”

Kurt leans in for a gentle kiss. “So what will happen with Connor?”

“Those photos you saw of us at the coffee house? That was us agreeing not to see each other anymore.”

Blaine sees tears form in Kurt’s eyes and hears sniffling. He pulls Kurt into his arms and whispers, “What’s wrong, my love?”

“I dated a man when I was in Paris.”
Blaine rubs gentle circles along Kurt’s back, trying to process the information.

“Antoine is an artist and waits tables at my local bistro. That’s where we first met. He’s a very nice guy and he went out of his way to show me Paris – a Paris that most tourists don’t see. I’m not in love with him, but we did mess around a little bit, and... I don’t know....”

Blaine pulls Kurt up so that he can gaze into his eyes. “Is Antoine your boyfriend?”

Kurt firmly shakes his head, drying his eyes with the back of his hand. “Antoine is a free spirit and doesn’t like to put a label on anything, including his relationships. I really liked that at the beginning, but I ended it because ultimately, it wasn’t what I wanted. I spent more time thinking about you than about him. I wanted to be free before I met up with you on this trip.”

“And Sebastian?” Blaine asks with a shaky voice. “Did you and Sebastian ever… you know? I tortured myself thinking of it when you switched to Elle.”

“Blaine, I never did anything with Sebastian!” Kurt cries out.

“Thank god for that. I didn’t think anything happened, because if it did, Sebastian would have gloated about it to me. However, the thought of Sebastian even touching your body was my worst nightmare.”

“Sebastian figured out pretty quickly that there was no way I was going to be another notch on his bedpost. He then stopped the leering and the sleazy lines and tried to be my friend.”

Blaine’s relieved that there is no-one special in Kurt’s life. Blaine gets off the couch and down on his knees. His heart is pounding so fast that it feels as if it’s going to burst out of his body.

“Kurt Hummel, my true love, will you do me the honor of being my boyfriend?”

“Yes!” Kurt shouts, who then jumps off the couch and dashes to the bedroom.

“Kurt? What are you doing?”

Kurt races back to the living area, with his hands behind his back.

“I have something for you… Well, something for us. I wanted you to have a reminder of our 24 hours together when I leave for Lima tomorrow. I saw these at the CVS checkout counter and couldn’t resist.”

Kurt moves his arms to his front and slowly opens his fisted hands. In each palm is a silicone rainbow-colored wristband, stamped with love is love is love is love in black letters.

Blaine is so moved by the sentiment that he’s at a loss for words. He smiles broadly as he holds out his right arm. Kurt places the wristband on him, and then Blaine does the same for Kurt as well. Blaine admires the wristband on his arm and has no plans to take it off ever.

Blaine hears the opening notes for a song on his playlist and can’t believe how perfect it is for them. Blaine rises and offers Kurt his hand.

“May I have this dance?”
“Yes. Yes, you may,” Kurt replies.

What a diff'rence a day made
Twenty-four little hours
Brought the sun and the flowers
Where there used to be rain
My yesterday was blue, dear
Today I'm part of you, dear

Blaine nuzzles into Kurt’s neck, savoring the scent of the lavender bath oil and something that is uniquely Kurt. He sighs when he feels Kurt’s cheek rest against his shoulder and embraces him even tighter.

What a diff'rence a day made
And the difference is you

“Hey, Blaine. The song’s over. You’re falling asleep standing up. Let’s head to bed.”

“Don’t wanna,” Blaine moans. “Wanna stay up all night. Wanna make love, kiss, eat, kiss, dance, kiss, make love again…”

“That’s a pretty ambitious plan, Mr. Anderson. I’m exhausted after working at the Bellerose Boutique opening today. Can we take time out for some snuggling? I promise there’ll be kissing involved,” Kurt sing-songs.

“I think that can be arranged,” Blaine giggles.
They enter the bathroom and Kurt whips out two Disney princess electric toothbrushes from a CVS bag. Kurt squeezes a dollop of toothpaste on both and hands one over to Blaine.

“Don’t judge me. I decided to stick with the princess theme. It was either that or Sponge Bob.”

As they both brush their teeth, Blaine loves the domesticity of it all. It feels so natural to be with Kurt, getting ready for bed. Blaine daydreams about this being a daily occurrence and how even the most mundane routines can feel special with Kurt. He picks up the shaving cream can and is startled when Kurt pulls it away.

“Don’t shave. I love your stubble. It makes you look incredibly sexy.”

Blaine blushes at the compliment. “I usually shave every other night. Otherwise, this turns into an overgrown mess of a beard.”

“Shave when I leave. But for tonight, leave your stubble.”

Blaine gawps when he sees that Kurt pulls out three pots of moisturizers and starts dabbing and blending. When Kurt sees Blaine’s reflection staring in the mirror, he smiles.

“How do you think models keep their complexion for the cameras? This is my quick version of what I do each night. Here, let me put some on you.”

Blaine closes his eyes as Kurt gently dabs the perfumed lotion onto his face, gently massaging it in with his fingers. It feels so soothing that Blaine wants Kurt to do it every night for him.

They return to the bedroom, automatically going to the correct sides of the beds. Blaine lets the robe fall off him and climbs in under the sheets. They feel cool against his naked body and his head feels like it’s in heaven when it hits the soft feather down pillow. Blaine soon feels a warmth beside him and he snuggles into Kurt’s chest. Blaine lets out a yawn and kisses Kurt’s skin that he can reach with his lips. When Kurt’s arms go around him, Blaine closes his eyes, lost in the feel and smell of his love by his side. Blaine can feel the silicone bracelet along his back, as Kurt caresses him softly. Blaine’s last thought before he drifts off to sleep is that he’ll never let Kurt out of his life again.

Chapter End Notes

Song playing in the bedroom – ‘I’ve Got Love on my Mind’ by Natalie Cole
Song playing in the bathroom – ‘Adore’ by Prince
Song they dance to – ‘What a Difference a Day Made’. There are many covers of this song but my favorite is by Jamie Cullum.

Cassie at CC-Graphics has done it again. Her automated gif has really brought this chapter to life. Please leave her love and feedback here. You can see all the fic art she created for this story here.

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr.

I will be traveling to Laos next week and will not have Internet access. A further trip is planned in Asia mid-February. I’ll struggle to post two updates per week and have the
best chapters I can produce. Therefore, I’m going to revert to posting one update a week until further notice.

Next up: The next day. Kurt is still in LA. The smuff feast continues! This chapter will be posted next Saturday.
And tomorrow we might not be together
I'm no prophet and I don't know nature's ways
So I'll try and see into your eyes right now
And stay right here 'cause these are the good old days
Anticipation by Carly Simon

Blaine feels the pressure of Kurt’s body against his back. He burrows his head further into his pillow, reveling in the feeling of being spooned by Kurt. He looks at the clock on the nightstand and is relieved that it’s only 7:42 a.m.

Yesterday had been the best day of Blaine’s entire life. Blaine didn’t think a day could be more perfect. He saw Kurt again, found out that Kurt loved him, and spent the most magical evening with him. Blaine hadn’t realized how much he had missed Kurt until they were together again. It wasn’t necessarily the sex – although that was unbelievably amazing. It was more about how they connected in little ways. His favorite part was actually taking a bubble bath together – being held, being take care of, silly conversation – everything that was special between them.

Blaine slowly gets up, trying not to wake Kurt up. He knows how hard Kurt worked at the boutique opening yesterday. He creeps into the bathroom to do the necessaries. When Blaine dries his face, he looks into the mirror and can barely recognize himself. His hair is going this way and that, so he fingers his curls to get them in some sort of order. He smiles as he looks at the hickeys covering his upper body, pressing the larger ones and reeling at the sensation. However, what strikes Blaine most is his face, which is positively glowing.

Blaine looks like he’s in love and the happiest man alive… because he is.

Blaine returns to the bedroom and slowly slips back into bed. He feels Kurt immediately pull him close to his chest and returns to spooning him. Blaine is contemplating when and how to wake Kurt up when he feels a long hard cock push against his ass. Kurt’s making little breathy sighs as he rubs his cock against him. Blaine can’t resist wiggling his ass just a little as his own cock perks up to attention. Kurt’s embrace gets even tighter as he continues his gentle thrusting. Blaine turns his head into the pillow to deafen the groans slipping out of his mouth. Blaine opens his eyes when Kurt rolls away. This is not what Blaine wants to happen.

“Mmm…orning. I was having the most delicious dream.”

Blaine rolls over to face Kurt, who looks adorable with a sleepy expression.

“I was dreaming that I was in a desert - lost and desperately thirsty. I saw a pool of water, so I crawled over to it. There you were, looking more gorgeous than I remembered. You handed me a pitcher of water and I drank it until I stopped being thirsty. You told me that you loved me and that I was your forever. You held me, and suddenly I was fueled with new energy. You slowly took off my clothes, kissing each new piece of skin revealed. You then took off your clothes, and god,
Blaine, you looked delicious enough to eat.”

Blaine is totally enraptured by this dream. “So what happened next?”

“I woke up. God, I need to pee. Give me a few minutes.”

Blaine chuckles as Kurt makes his way to the bathroom. Even watching a sleepy Kurt wake up is special. Blaine wraps his hand around his cock, slowly stroking, thinking about what might be up ahead. He’s hoping, wishing, wanting…

Kurt returns to the bed and lies on his side, facing Blaine. Blaine takes Kurt’s hand in his and pulls it towards his chest. He wants Kurt to feel how his heart is racing just by being next to him. Blaine leans towards Kurt and then starts kissing every inch of his face.

“I love you, Blaine,” Kurt murmurs.

Blaine looks down at their intertwined hands, with rainbow bands on their wrists. He’s never been anybody’s boyfriend before, and he loves that he’s now Kurt’s.

“I love you too, boyfriend.”

Their lips forge together as they spend time really learning what the other one likes. Kurt moans when Blaine’s tongue encircles his and then gently sucks. Blaine scooches closer and slowly kisses along Kurt’s neck, making his way to that spot he discovered yesterday. When he gets there and starts sucking gently, Kurt gasps and thrusts his hips up.

“Don’t leave a mark! I’m going home tonight, and if my dad sees it, he’ll give me another embarrassing sex talk. Once in a lifetime is enough.”

Blaine positions his body over Kurt’s, loving the feel of their body heat together. He captures Kurt’s lips once again, trying to convey all his love with the kiss. Kurt rocks his body up, and sparks fly when their cocks brush against each other. Blaine thrusts back to Kurt’s rhythm, feeling himself getting higher. Blaine knows his body very well, and if they don’t stop it will all be over in record time. He rolls off Kurt and slows down his breathing.

“I’ve got to cool down. You’re too sexy for your own damn good.”

Kurt glows at the praise.

“Tell me what you want, Blaine. Do you still want to… you know?”

“God, yes. I want you inside me. Do you want it too? I don’t want to pressure you or anything.”

“We’re on the same wavelength, Blaine. I want it too. I’m just nervous that I won’t be good enough. I want it to be really special for you.”

“Oh, babe, it will be special, because it’s you,” Blaine assures.

“Keep those cheesy lines coming. You’ll tell me what to do?”

“Sure, I’ll help you out with some of the logistics. But the most important thing is to do what comes naturally and what feels good for you too. Everything we’ve done so far has been fantastic. You
make me feel things I’ve never felt before. You drive me crazy.”

“So, in your fantasies, do you, umm… imagine a specific position?”

“Oh, sweetheart, you don’t have to live up to my fantasies. You are so much better in real life. The only thing that matters to me is that I want to be able to see your face.”

“And you’ll let me know if anything hurts? I want to make sure that you’re comfortable… So I can be comfortable.”

“Yes, I’ll do that.”

Kurt reaches out and grabs a CVS bag from underneath the bed. Blaine’s eyes bug out when he sees three different tubes of lubes and a half-dozen boxes of condoms.

“I wasn’t sure what to buy. There’s silicone, oil- and water-based lubes.”

“We should go with silicone. Super Slyde was a perfect choice.”

Kurt starts giggling. “I might have been googling lube reviews when I was in CVS. Now the condoms - there’s ribbed, lubricated, and extra strength. I kept away from the ones that were flavored. I just bought the regular size.”

Blaine picks a box from the pile.

Kurt hurriedly returns the other boxes into the bag and tosses it onto the floor. He lies back down and stares at the ceiling.

“Well, that was a mood killer. I wasn’t expecting this – us – to happen in LA. I wish I wasn’t such a baby penguin. I…”

“Hey, come here,” Blaine whispers, holding his arms out. When Kurt enters Blaine’s warm embrace, Blaine continues, “It wasn’t a mood killer for me. Do you know how incredible it feels to know that I’ll be your first? If I play my cards right, I’ll be your one and only.”

“I want that too.”

“When your naked body is pressing against mine, it does things to me,” Blaine takes Kurt’s hand and leads it to his cock, thick and hard. Kurt takes the hint and slowly strokes it, twisting just right at the top. Kurt uses his other hand to rub circles around Blaine’s right nipple and gives it a pinch.

Blaine gasps and moans softly. “Mmm, Kurt, the things you do to me. The way you make me feel. I need you now… I want to feel your fingers inside me.”

When Kurt turns and retrieves the bottle of lube, Blaine takes a pillow and positions it under his ass. He places his feet flat on the bed, knees up, and spreads his legs as far as they will go. His cock starts throbbing when he hears the click of the lube bottle cap.

“Look at you, Blaine. I could write a dozen sonnets about that ass. You’re gorgeous.”

Blaine can feel Kurt’s finger circling his hole as he kisses each ass cheek. Blaine tries to relax his body to make it easier for Kurt. He can feel one hand massaging a ball while a finger slowly enters
“Does it hurt? Am I going too fast?”

“It feels perfect.”

Kurt moves his finger in and out slowly as his hand moves to his other ball. Blaine feels heat spread through his body. “Baby, I need more.”

Kurt removes his finger and soon replaces it with two. Blaine can feel the stretch, and it feels so damn good. Kurt is moving his fingers in and out, and twisting, trying to stretch him further.

“Okay?”

“Blaine, you are so hot and tight. I don’t know how I’m going to fit in there.”

“Move your fingers like scissors to stretch me.”

Kurt scissors his fingers and moves them around, kissing Blaine’s balls at the same time. A jolt of pleasure shoots through Blaine’s body as Kurt’s fingers brush against his prostrate.

“Kurrrt… Right there… Your fingers feel so amazing.”

As Kurt massages his prostrate, Blaine can’t help but push back onto Kurt’s fingers. Liquid lava is flowing through his veins. “Another… I need another finger…”

Kurt pushes another finger inside him and starts twisting them around, opening him up. Blaine pushes against them, trying to get more.

“I’m ready… I want you… I want you to be inside me… I can’t wait any longer… Do it now,” Blaine moans.

Blaine feels so empty when Kurt pulls out his fingers and cleans them with a wet wipe – what the hell? Where did those come from? Blaine opens his eyes and sees Kurt kneeling in between his legs, stroking his cock and then rolling the condom along its length. After slathering his cock with lube, Kurt slides his long lithe body along Blaine and gives him a kiss that’s like a promise of good things to come.

“I love you so much. I can’t wait to be inside you.”

Kurt aims the head of his cock towards Blaine’s entrance and pushes in at an excruciatingly slow pace. When Kurt stops halfway, Blaine looks at Kurt and sees that his eyes are scrunched up and he’s biting his lower lip.

“I’m good… So good, Kurt. You can go on.”

“No, I can’t, Blaine, otherwise I’ll cum. You feel so hot and tight.”

Thirty seconds go by before Kurt continues and Blaine can tell when Kurt has bottomed out. Blaine takes deep breaths, trying to get used to the feeling. He feels so full and ready for more.

“When you’re ready, move.”
Kurt starts thrusting gently, letting out little gasps and moans. When Kurt starts to speed up, Blaine wraps his legs around Kurt’s waist. Kurt switches it up – long slow thrusts, short quick thrusts, long quick thrusts – that keeps Blaine in a fuzzy euphoric state. He never knew that anything could feel so good. Kurt comes to a stop down deep inside Blaine.

“Your legs – they’re so powerful. I think you’re going to crush me.”

Blaine immediately drops his legs and thrusts up to get Kurt moving again. Blaine quickly figures out that Kurt has other plans when Kurt pulls up his legs and pushes his upper thighs towards his chest.

“Is that okay for you?”

“It’s fine. Now fuck me hard.”

Kurt starts pistoning his hips forward, adjusting the angle with each thrust. Blaine feels his body temperature rise. In this position, Blaine is completely under Kurt’s control. Blaine sees stars when Kurt’s cock hits his prostrate.

“Fuck… Right there…Don’t stop…Oh, Kurt… It feels so good… Harder…”

Kurt keeps the pace fast and powerfully thrusts inside him, hitting his prostrate every few times. Kurt wraps his fingers around Blaine’s cock and strokes to the rhythm. Blaine thrashes his head from side to side.

“Gggh… I’m getting closer… Keep going… I’m gonna… I love you… Kurt…Kurt… KURT!”

Blaine shoots out stream after stream of thick white cum, and can hear Kurt moaning his name. He can feel Kurt slow down the pace, working them both through their orgasms. Kurt slowly pulls out, lowers Blaine’s legs and collapses onto his messy chest. Blaine immediately wraps his arms around Kurt and starts caressing his hair.

Blaine feels overwhelmed by his emotions. He has never experienced such an intense orgasm before. Kurt – his Kurt – is a natural at making him feel so good and truly loved.

“That was amazing. I felt myself explode watching you climax. I’ve never seen anyone more beautiful than you were in that moment. Thank you,” Kurt says.

Blaine rolls them over onto their sides and takes the used condom off Kurt, tying it and tossing it on the pile of used wipes. He smiles affectionately at Kurt.

“You were pretty amazing yourself. You’re a natural, Kurt. You certainly know how to play my body. I’ve never felt anything like it. So thank you,” Blaine replies, giving Kurt a bop on the nose.

“Gggh. I feel so sweaty. What do you say we shower and then grab a bite to eat?”

“We could always order room service,” Blaine suggests.

“This suite reeks of sex. I think we should go out so that the maid service can clean.”

“Shall I book a table downstairs at the restaurant?”
Kurt shakes his head, snuggling closer into Blaine. “I’m sure that the Beverly Wilshire serves a very fancy Sunday breakfast, but five-star places aren’t really our style. I’ll take the first shower and then sort it out.”

Kurt heads toward the bathroom and Blaine stares at his long slender body, which has just given him so much pleasure. Kurt closes the bathroom door, but then immediately opens it again and peeps out. “Did I mention today that I love you?”

Blaine chuckles and replies, “I love you too, baby.”

Blaine stays in bed, his mind drifting back to everything that’s taken place since they left the Bellerose Boutique. He tries to forget that Kurt is leaving at 4 p.m. for the airport. Blaine gets up and rummages around his suitcase, looking for some underpants, socks and a shirt for Kurt to wear. He feels Kurt’s warm hands wrap around him.

“You always think of everything, my love. I so didn’t want to put on my old clothes. Now it’s your turn in the shower.”

Blaine races through his shower routine, wanting to spend every moment left with Kurt. When he opens the bathroom door and starts to dress, he can hear Kurt on the phone in the living area.

“I wasn’t expecting this to happen.”

“Do you need me?”

“Thank you for being so understanding, Christophe.”

“Look, I need to go before Blaine comes in. Can I call you when I get to Lima tomorrow?”

“Au revoir.”

Blaine’s insides twist at this small dose of reality. Kurt lives and works in Paris. Even though Kurt will have five days at the end of the week in New York City, he’s still going to end up leaving and returning to Paris. Blaine puts on his game face and walks to the living area.

“I hope there’s nothing wrong at work.”

Kurt turns around and looks startled – like a deer caught in the headlights.

“No, there’s nothing wrong at work. I needed a quick word with Christophe before he boarded his flight.”

Kurt looks down at his phone and taps on it with his finger. “I’ve figured out where to have breakfast. It’s a short taxi ride away.”

“Do tell, Kurt.”

“Nah-uh. I know how you love little surprises.”

Blaine chuckles and gives Kurt a peck on the lips.

“I love your little surprises.”
Fifteen minutes later, they’re getting out of the taxi at Sunset Strip. Blaine looks around at the rather ordinary street, wondering where they’re going to eat.

“Umm… Kurt, there’s only a closed cheese shop here.”

Kurt looks down at his phone. “Oh, ye of little faith. Give it another few minutes and you’ll see.”

Kurt takes Blaine by the hand and leads him to the small queue forming a few steps away. Blaine watches Kurt examine his phone, look around, then smile as if he sees something he’s expecting.

“No hints?”

“None needed.”

Kurt turns Blaine around to see a large food truck pull up in front of them. Blaine laughs when he sees the truck’s thick black lettering: Yeasty Boys Bagels… *Bagels * Lox * Schmear * Other shit.

Blaine gently checks his hip against Kurt’s. “You’re really something else. Only you would turn down breakfast at a five-star hotel to eat bagels from a food truck.”

“Don’t judge me, okay? I haven’t had a decent bagel since I left New York City six months ago.”

The queue moves quickly, and soon they have freshly squeezed orange juice, large coffees and bagels to go. Kurt ordered the lox special, while Blaine opted for the all breakfast, with eggs, bacon, cheese, and tomato. Kurt sighs when the vendors can’t make change for his 50-dollar bill. Blaine quickly whips out his wallet and pays.

“Hey, this is on me. Cheapest. Date. Ever.”

Kurt leads them to the elementary school around the corner, where there are picnic tables set up near the playground. Blaine tries to walk without limping because he still feels Kurt inside him. He secretly hopes that it lasts until Kurt joins him in New York City later in the week. He gingerly sits down on the picnic bench, trying to school his expression. When Blaine looks up, he can see that Kurt looks concerned.

“I’m sorry. I hurt you.”

“I’m not sorry one little bit. I like how it reminds me that this is real.”

“Well, you did keep telling me to go faster and harder.”

“And god, did you ever.”

Soon their breakfast is laid out and they silently start eating.

“Mmmm. This is wonderful. I’ve missed eating bagels like this.”

“Paris must have other tasty things in their bakeries.”

“The chocolate croissants are to die for, but I still miss bagels… and cheesecake.”
“What do you do in your free time in Paris?”

“I’ve ticked off a lot of the tourist sites, museums and stuff like that. For the first three months, I lived with this old lady who’s like the grand dame of Paris. She took me to the opera and ballet. Mostly, I like to explore different neighborhoods and see how people live.”

“Did you move out so that you could be with Antoine?” Blaine asks tentatively, not really wanting to hear the reply.

“No, Antoine lives in his art studio. I wanted to be closer to the Bellerose Boutique and the place where I’m taking two fashion courses.”

“You’re studying fashion? I did not know that.”

“The job at Bellerose Boutique fell into my lap after I did a modeling gig for them at the Paris Fashion Week. It has been so exciting to see a fashion line go from a kernel of an idea to outfits on the shop’s racks. Besides, I don’t think I’m cut out to be in the limelight. I mean, I love being the center of attention during an assignment, but I hate all the media attention that comes with it. It’s like your life isn’t your own anymore.”

“You can say that again,” Blaine remarks, grimacing in sympathy because he knows that feeling all too well.

“I think that if I’m going to focus on fashion design, I need some formal training. If I take courses at night, I’ll get my degree in five years. I won’t be working for Bellerose Boutique all my life, so I’ll need the qualification as well.”

Blaine’s heart sinks when he hears that Kurt will be in Paris for at least another five years. There is no way he can move to Paris. His job is New York City based and he doesn’t speak a word of French. Besides, the Monarch Foundation was only established earlier this year, and he has so many plans for it.

Sure, there’s Skype, messaging, phone calls, and trips during vacations. But could they really last five years living on two different continents? Would another Frenchman lure Kurt away from him without him even knowing? Blaine takes a deep breath before speaking again. They’ve had a lot of difficult discussions over the past 24 hours, but this one will be the hardest yet.

“So where do you see me fitting into your plans?”

“Blaine, you’re left, right and center in my plans. Now that I’ve got you, I’m never going to let you go.”

Blaine looks away at the children playing at the nearby playground. This is what he wants - a husband, children and grandchildren. A life filled with laughter and love, through good times and bad. Helping other people through the Monarch Foundation. These are things that matter to him. It seems so real that Blaine can almost taste it.

“I want kids too, just for the record,” Kurt comments.

Blaine startles at hearing Kurt’s words. Was it so obvious that he was daydreaming about their future? Blaine’s gaze returns to Kurt, who is giving him a shy smile.
“For as long as I can remember, I’ve wanted to marry the prince. I used to hold tea parties in the backyard with my dad, hoping I’d be perfect by the time my prince became the king. We would then have lots of babies, that looked remarkably like the Power Rangers.”

Blaine chuckles at the image of Burt sitting down in a plastic children’s chair, daintily sipping a cup of tea with a young Kurt.

“I’m not sure how any of this is going to happen with us living on two different continents. Five years seems like an awfully long time. I’d wait a lifetime to be with you, Kurt, but…”

“Who said anything about me being in Paris for another five years?”

“Your courses. You said it would take five years to get your fashion degree.”

“Blaine! Have you ever considered the fact that I can get a fashion degree anywhere? I hear there are some excellent colleges right in New York City.”

Blaine perks up at that news. Could Kurt be saying what he thinks he’s saying?

“You’d consider moving back to New York City?”

Kurt pulls Blaine’s hands on top of the picnic table towards him, and covers them with his own. Kurt’s thumb gently rubs over the top, and Blaine finds it soothing. He can barely wait to hear Kurt’s answer.

“What part of ‘I love you’ didn’t you understand? I want us to be together, Blaine. If you think for one moment that I would stay in Paris, then maybe you don’t know me as well as you think. So, let me make it perfectly clear to you. I love you, Blaine. I’ve loved you since the first day I met you. I want us to be together, now and always. This morning, I told Christophe Bellerose that I want to move back to New York City.”

“You quit your job?” Blaine squeaks. He had heard snippets of Kurt’s phone conversation earlier that morning, but he hadn’t realized what Kurt was telling the boutique owner.

“I know it seems rash, but when I was taking a shower this morning, I was dreading having to return to Paris. Then I realized that I didn’t have to. I could resign and return to New York City. I phoned Christophe Bellerose so that my notice period would go into immediate effect.”

“What was Christophe’s reaction?”

“I was surprised by what he said. Christophe said that when he saw us together at the boutique’s reception yesterday afternoon, he knew that my heart belonged in New York City. He was just surprised I didn’t tell him once the reception was over. And then Christophe made all the right noises about how I’m an important part of the team and everyone will miss me.”

“How long is your notice period?”

“My employment contract says I must give one month’s notice, but I told Christophe I would stay as long as it takes to hire and train a new intern. However, Christophe insisted it isn’t necessary. He has already arranged for others to cover my duties for next week and they can continue to do so until he finds a replacement. So, I think I’m a free agent.”
Blaine races to the other side of the picnic table, pulls up Kurt and gives him a searing kiss. Kurt holds Blaine in his arms tightly. Blaine nuzzles in as close as he can get, and feels as if his heart has just grown three sizes. For once in his life, all stars have aligned and he’s getting what he wants, what he was too scared to possibly hope for. To have a man who loves him for who he really is inside. To have a special connection with someone who shares the same life dreams. To have a man who is his best friend and fun to spend time with. Blaine’s body trembles and tears form in his eyes. Blaine can’t believe that this is all happening with Kurt, the one true love of his life. When Blaine starts crying, Kurt gently places a finger beneath his chin and raises his head. Blaine can see that Kurt has a tear running down his face as well.

“God, I love you so much. Live with me, Kurt. Marry me.”

Kurt smiles back at Blaine. “Considering we haven’t even been together for 24 hours, don’t you think that’s a little too fast? I mean, I want that too, eventually, but I’m only turning 20 years old next week. Let’s talk about it when I’m next in New York City.”

Blaine lets out a deep sigh. He knows that Kurt is right. It might be too soon for them to live together, let alone marry. But damn it, he wants Kurt and their future right now.

“I might have gotten a bit carried away. When did you become the wise one, Kurt?”

“I’ve always been the wise one, Blaine. Did you only just figure that out?” Kurt teases.

Blaine fondly rolls his eyes. “Let’s head back to the Beverly Wilshire Hotel. As much as I like children, I want to spend my last afternoon with you, doing things that they shouldn’t see.”

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When they enter the hotel suite, Blaine notices that housekeeping has serviced the rooms. The sheets have been changed and there is a strong smell of air freshener wafting through the suite. Blaine’s a little disappointed, because despite of what Kurt thought, he had personally loved that the rooms reeked of sex.

Blaine empties his pockets and looks at the time on his phone. They only have four hours before Kurt needs to leave for his flight. As much as he wants to make love to Kurt right now, his body is still aching from that morning.

“I don’t know about you, Blaine, but I’m feeling pretty wiped out.”

“Thank god for that. I’m exhausted as well, and maybe a little bit sore.”

Kurt puts one hand on his hip and arches one eyebrow.

“Okay, I’m feeling really, really sore. The things you can do with your hips and cock will have me feeling it for days. I love it.”

“Maybe a massage might help? I bought some special oil at CVS that we haven’t used.”

Blaine walks over to Kurt, places a hand on each side of his face and kisses him. It’s sloppy and messy, but it feels perfect.

“I’ve always thought that you have the best ideas. I’m going to order some coffee and light snacks to
be delivered in three hours, in case we fall asleep. I want to make sure that you make your flight. The sooner you leave, the sooner you’ll be back in my arms. You’ll need to send me your flight details so that I can pick you up from the airport in New York.”

Kurt sighs and pulls out of Blaine’s arms. “About that, Blaine. I might spend a little bit longer in Lima than I originally planned. There are so many things I need to sort out. I need to talk things through with Christophe Bellerose to make sure I’m not leaving him in the lurch, arrange for my things to be sent from Paris to the US, look into fashion programs in New York City, tell Emmeline and Antoine that I’m moving…”

“Hey, Kurt. I get it, but if you come to New York on Friday, I can help you out.”

“Blaine, as lovely as that thought is, you’ll be a distraction. How could I resist spending all my time with you? No, I’ve got to have a clear head to wrap up things in Paris and plan what I’m going to do in New York City.”

“You won’t take too long, will you? Now that we’re together, I can’t bear the idea of being apart.”

“I might have a special incentive to return to New York City super-fast.” Kurt moves his mouth towards Blaine’s ear and whispers, “After seeing you this morning so needy and wanting, I can’t wait to do it all over again. Maybe switch things up a bit?”

Blaine whimpers at the thought of pounding his cock into Kurt, of Kurt pounding his cock into him, and of all the other things they can explore together.

Kurt leads Blaine into the bedroom. Whilst Kurt strips the bedspread off and gets out the massage oil, Blaine orders room service to be delivered at 3 p.m. They both take off their clothes and spend a few minutes staring at each other’s bodies…because they can. Blaine dives face first into the bed, wiggling his sore ass.

“I think I was promised a massage,” Blaine sing-songs.

Kurt straddles Blaine’s body, sitting on his upper thighs. Kurt pours some massage oil into his palm, then works his hands together to warm it up. He starts massaging Blaine’s lower back and makes his way up, working out little knots he finds along the way. Blaine can’t help but let out breathy sighs because it feels so freaking good. When Kurt gets to his shoulders, Blaine can feel Kurt’s erection brush along his ass. When Kurt starts peppering his neck with soft warm kisses, Blaine’s cock becomes very interested.

Kurt scoots down a little bit more along Blaine’s legs and positions a pillow underneath Blaine’s hips. Kurt pours more massage oil into his hands. He then firmly massages Blaine’s ass, and every few strokes, he brushes his fingers in between the crevice.

“Oh, Kurt. Those magic hands – they’re taking me to my happy place. But I don’t think I could handle you fucking me again.”

“That’s not what I had in mind… I have another idea. Let me know if it hurts or you don’t like it, and I’ll stop.”

Blaine eagerly nods, wondering what Kurt’s idea is. If it’s anything like he’s done over the past 20 hours, he’s all for it. He feels Kurt’s fingers return to massaging his ass. When one finger presses against his perineum and starts stroking, Blaine can feel his entire body relax.
“This feels incredible. No-one’s done that to me before. I can feel all the tension release in my body…mmm…”

“I want you to feel good.”

Kurt fingers move downwards and start fondling his balls, whilst the other hand is massaging his ass. Blaine’s cock is now definitely interested in where this plan is going. Blaine can feel the length of Kurt’s cock slide between his ass cheeks - it’s hard, long and throbbing. Kurt must have poured massage oil over his cock because everything feels so slippery. Blaine ruts against the mattress to get some friction that he needs.

Soon Blaine can feel Kurt’s entire body on top of him, grunting and panting as he continues to slide his cock between his ass. Each stroke pushes Blaine further into the mattress and he thrusts his cock against the sheets.

“Ggh. I feel you all over…. Push me harder… Your cock is like magic… Ohhh…. Don’t stop… Feels good…. Use my ass… Ohhh… Fuck… KURT!”

Kurt bites his shoulder and the next thing Blaine feels is warm cum squirting all over his back. Blaine thrusts one last time into the sheets and climaxes, chanting Kurt’s name like it’s his personal mantra.

Blaine’s head feels so foggy, so he focuses on the weight of Kurt’s body on top of him. He feels enveloped in love and so warm. He closes his eyes and drifts off to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. Please check out here all the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics.

I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr.

Next up: Nah-uh. Not telling this time.
When Kurt hears gentle snoring, he slowly rolls off Blaine’s body and heads towards the bathroom. He dampens a facecloth with hot water and wipes the streaks of cum off his chest. He quickly dresses, because he’s not sure if he can control himself around Blaine with both of them fully naked. Although he’s still a teenager, Kurt knows that climaxing three times in six hours is impossible.

Kurt prepares a second facecloth and returns to the bedroom to clean up Blaine’s back. Kurt gasps when he sees the bite mark he made on Blaine’s shoulder. He hadn’t realized he had bitten Blaine so hard while having such an intense orgasm. He gently wipes the cum and massage oil off Blaine’s body, careful not to wake him up. Then he lies back down and faces Blaine, who must be having a good dream, judging by the smile on his face.

The last 24 hours have been life-changing for Kurt. So much has happened that his brain is having a hard time keeping up. There’s a whole different version of events that took place while he worked at Vogue and spent most of his free time with Blaine.

Kurt is still feeling a little bit angry with Blaine for not telling him everything about Sam all those months ago. Although he understands why Blaine did it, it still hurts that Blaine didn’t trust him enough to tell him their secret. But Kurt knows that he’s got to let those feelings go. What happened in the past can’t be changed, and there is so much more in their future to focus on.

They’ve talked about important stuff over the past 24 hours, and sometimes it had been hard to say, and other times it had been hard to hear. Most importantly, they really listened to each other, and were able to push past the issues they had in the past. They still need to talk about that ‘Klainegate’ video and why Kurt joined Elle, but Kurt is confident that they’ll work through these things as well.

When Blaine told him that he loved him at the Bellerose Boutique fashion show, it seemed as if time stood still. Judging by how closely Blaine stuck to him during the boutique’s reception, Kurt knew Blaine needed special TLC. With only 24 hours left in LA, Kurt wanted to make them memorable and god, they certainly were.

Kurt thinks back to earlier that morning, when he lost his virginity fucking Blaine. Blaine made him feel so safe and connected, not laughing at his silly questions. Blaine certainly rambles when he’s feeling good, and Kurt secretly loves this. It spurs him on to make Blaine feel even better and holy shit, was that was the best orgasm of his life or what? His father was right in one respect – once you start doing it, you’ll never want to stop. Kurt can’t wait to find further ways to turn Blaine into a babbling mess again.

Kurt looks at Blaine’s wrist, with the rainbow bracelet. He moves his arm so that he can see both bracelets together. It gives Kurt a warm and fuzzy feeling that they have something to symbolize that they’re together. Blaine was so sweet and excited about wearing it. He couldn’t have picked a better
first boyfriend. Kurt was rather surprised that Blaine confessed to not having a boyfriend before either. How was that possible with someone as wonderful as Blaine?

Boyfriends.

That one word means a lot to Kurt. It means being together, through thick and thin, and being an important part of each other’s lives. When Blaine held him this morning after their amazing sex, Kurt had realized where he belonged. It certainly wasn’t an ocean away in Paris. Although he loves living in Paris, it no longer holds the attraction it once did. It would never be home, not when Blaine is living in New York City. It was in that moment that Kurt had decided to quit his job at the Bellerose Boutique. Christophe had been very understanding about everything. It seems that this is the start of everything clicking into place for him and Blaine.

When Blaine had asked him to marry him, Kurt desperately wanted to shout ‘yes’ at the top of his lungs. But deep down, Kurt knew that Blaine was caught up in the moment, and that’s not how they should be making decisions about their future together.

Kurt looks at every dip and curve of Blaine’s body and wills his cock not to respond. Kurt knows he’ll always have this reaction every time he sees his sexy and beautiful Blaine naked. His mind drifts to living with Blaine someday, and then marrying him, and having kids. Kurt wants them to be that elderly couple everyone coos at because they still look and act so in love. When his mind wanders to think about the family home they’ll eventually set up, he’s startled by the sound of the hotel suite’s doorbell.

Kurt quietly gets up to open the suite’s door and sees the room service waiter with a cart full of plates and a carafe of coffee. Kurt puts his finger to lips to indicate to the man that he should be quiet. Kurt closes the bedroom door, and while the waiter is setting up the snacks, he heads to the bar area for a few dollars as a tip. When Kurt remembers that he only has a 50-dollar bill in his wallet, he grabs Blaine’s. In his haste, some photographs and receipts fall out of the wallet to the floor. Kurt takes out a few dollars and tips the waiter.

Once Kurt has closed the suite’s door, he gets on his hands and knees to retrieve the fallen papers. When he glances at a photograph he’s just picked up, he freezes and just sits there open-mouthed. It’s a photo of Blaine and Sebastian, smiling, with Sebastian’s arm around Blaine. It looks like it was taken a while ago, but they look so happy together. Kurt’s head spins as he tries to make sense of this.

What if Blaine and Sebastian aren’t really rivals? What if they are something more than meets the eye? Why were both men so interested in getting him to sign a contract for their respective magazine last September? Why did Sebastian give a substantial donation to the Monarch Foundation only yesterday?

Oh. My. God. I was part of a bet!

Kurt doesn’t doubt for one moment that Blaine loves him – his heart-eyes don’t lie. But to what lengths would Blaine go to win a bet with Sebastian? Kurt finds it difficult to breathe. The suite feels like it’s closing in on him. He tears the photo in half and leaves it on the bar counter, then quickly writes a small note on the pad of paper next to the phone, before he rushes out of the suite. What the hell!!! How could you use me in your and Sebastian’s twisted games?

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Blaine rolls over and reaches out to hold Kurt, opening his eyes when he can’t find in him bed. He glances over at the clock on the night table and realizes that it’s 5 p.m. He’s angry at himself that he hasn’t woken up in time to say goodbye to Kurt before he left. He had planned to have one last dance with Kurt, then kiss him senseless before sending him on his way.

Blaine rubs his chest and realizes that it’s caked with remnants of his dried cum, and it feels itchy and horrible. He heads to the bathroom and takes a shower. When the hot water pours over his body, Blaine wishes that Kurt was there with him. Kurt had promised him a memorable 24 hours and he certainly delivered. Blaine hopes that Kurt will join him in New York City sooner rather than later. He wants to reciprocate with another special day… Maybe a weekend… Maybe a long vacation…

Blaine dries off and puts on the fluffy bathrobe Kurt has been wearing – it makes him feel as if Kurt is still wrapped around him. He walks into the living area to grab a mineral water, thinking about what he can buy Kurt for his birthday in a few days’ time. He stops in his tracks when he sees the torn picture of Sebastian and himself, with a note from a very angry Kurt.

Blaine isn’t exactly sure what Kurt thought when he saw the photo, but it obviously wasn’t good things. Exactly what kind of games did Kurt think that he and Sebastian were playing? Blaine figures out that Kurt must be waiting at the airport departure gate and grabs his phone to call him.

“How could you!” Kurt cries out when he answers the phone.

“I’m not sure what you mean.”

“You promised me you would be honest about everything with me. How could you not tell me about Sebastian?”

“There’s nothing to tell, Kurt. Honestly, that photo was taken back in high school. It…”

“Stop right there,” Kurt interrupts. “I hope you’re happy with Sebastian’s donation to the Monarch Foundation. When he handed you the check, I couldn’t believe that Sebastian would donate such a large amount of money to your pet project. But now I know that it was only because he lost the bet. When did you two decide to bet about me? The only loser in this is me!”

“We didn’t bet about you, Kurt. You’ve got to believe me.”

“Look, I’ve got to go. The gate is about to close. I love you, Blaine, but nothing makes sense anymore.”

When Blaine hears the line go dead, he drops to the floor, holds his knees and rocks gently back and forth, tears streaming down his face. He can sort of understand how Kurt thought that he and Sebastian and he made a bet about which magazine would get him. Sebastian’s donation to the Monarch Foundation only added fuel to the fire. But why didn’t Kurt wake him up and ask him about it? Why did Kurt jump to his own conclusions? Did Kurt think so little of him and his love? His body racks with sobs at the thought of losing Kurt after only 24 hours.

*****

“Happy birthday, kiddo,” Burt says when he sees Kurt stumble into the kitchen.

Kurt smiles when his dad hands him a cup of coffee. It’s been three nights since he’s slept well –
three nights since he slept holding Blaine tightly. Kurt hasn’t accepted any of Blaine’s calls or listened to the countless voicemails he’s left. He wants to calm down before they talk again. He can’t let his fiery temper loose on Blaine and lose him for good.

“So when are we leaving for the garage, Dad? It’ll only take me ten minutes to get ready.”

Burt puts down his newspaper and stares at Kurt for a few moments. “When are we gonna talk about this? I like the extra help around the garage, but I can’t help feeling that it’s you avoiding what’s really going on in your life.”

Kurt lets out a deep sigh. His dad’s right. He’s been avoiding thinking about Blaine, figuring out what direction he wants his life to go, and wondering how this mess will ever be resolved.

“It’s about Blaine.”

“I thought it might be. Timmy’s opening the garage today. I’ve got time, so tell me what’s going on.”

Kurt talks and talks and talks. He tells his dad about his thoughts before leaving Paris, the LA boutique opening and seeing Blaine again. He relates all but the most intimate moments of their 24 hours together. Kurt tells his dad about quitting his job and his plans to return to New York City, and how he wants to get into fashion design but isn’t exactly sure how. He then relates discovering the photo of Blaine and Sebastian, and his theory that he was part of a bet. After 30 minutes, Kurt stops talking, feeling absolutely exhausted.

“Wow, seems like a lot happened there in LA.”

“You’re telling me.”

“I don’t believe for a single second that Blaine would make a bet with Sebastian about you. That doesn’t sound like the Blaine I know.”

“Now that I’ve thought about it, I can’t believe it either. I’m sure there is a perfectly logical explanation for the photo. And I know he loves me. That’s not fake.”

“What did Blaine have to say about it?”

“He said that there was no bet and that the photo is from when they were in high school. I don’t know much more. I… umm … I haven’t spoken to him about it,” Kurt admits.

“You mean you didn’t ask Blaine about it before you left LA?” Burt asks with disbelief in his voice. When Kurt shakes his head, Burt huffs in frustration. “How could you not ask Blaine? You just thought the worst about what could have happened and made up a bet theory in your head? Kurt, a relationship is about asking those tough questions and really listening to the answers. You just told me that you and Blaine had plenty of heart-to-heart talks in LA. Why was this different?”

“I don’t know. I guess you’re right - I should have woken up Blaine and asked him about the photo so it wouldn’t have come to this – me in Lima wondering what had really happened.”

“That’s only half the story, Kurt. How do you think Blaine’s feeling alone in New York City with you not accepting his calls and not answering his texts? Pretty miserable, that’s how.”

Kurt drops his head in shame. He hasn’t really considered Blaine’s feelings the past couple of days.
“So what are you going to do, Kurt?”

“Everything feels so overwhelming. I’m not sure where to start sorting things out – with Blaine and what I’m going to do with my life.”

“When I get a car at the shop that needs a complete overhaul, I like to break the job down into manageable pieces. Once I work on one thing – say the engine – then I can set my mind to other bits, like the panel work or the interior. What I’m saying is: break down everything that’s going on in your life into pieces and work them out one by one.”

“Like what career I want and Blaine?”

“You got it. Can I suggest something else?”

When Kurt nods, Burt continues.

“Go call Blaine and apologize for jumping to conclusions without listening to him first. You’ll feel better about things with him and stop rehashing events in your mind. Then you can focus on figuring out what you want to do. Once you know who you want to be, you can talk further with Blaine and work out how your lives will fit together. It might be better if you have your priorities sorted out beforehand.”

“I know that I want to return to New York City and pursue fashion behind the scenes. I can’t stay in Paris – not when Blaine is here. I wouldn’t be happy.”

“What about the Broadway dream?” Burt asks.

“Oh, I’m totally over that dream. Being in the limelight isn’t all that it’s cracked up to be. It’s hard work, and the downtime is lonely. You’re scared of doing what you really want to because the media is always trying to find ways to exploit your fame. And look what happened to Rachel Berry – her star soared then was destroyed by one wrong decision.”

“Don’t write Rachel off just yet. Did ya know that she’s taking the McKinley glee club to Nationals next month?”

Kurt shakes his head sheepishly. He hasn’t called once since he arrived in Lima – what a bad friend he’s turned out to be.

“I know I want to study fashion design and really learn the tools of the trade.”

“So maybe instead of doing lube jobs at the garage, you should be researching fashion programs and applying?”

“Yeah, you’re right.”

“I’m going to head into the shop now, bud. Take the day off and do something you enjoy. Buy some fashion magazines, reorganize your closet or do some of that research stuff we were talking about.”

Once Burt heads off, Kurt takes a shower and gets ready for the day. He slips on the shirt that he had borrowed from Blaine in LA. It’s all wrinkly but he loves the smell of Blaine that still lingers. He sits down at the computer and starts researching fashion design programs in New York City. After a
couple of hours, he looks out the window and decides that it’s much too nice out to spend the whole day indoors. Besides, it’s his birthday after all.

After eating a salad for lunch, Kurt grabs a sketchpad and drawing pencils and heads to the backyard. After popping earbuds in to listen to his favorite Broadway tunes playlist, he starts drawing designs. Kurt sees two butterflies chasing each other, flying separately but then always reconnecting. He rushes inside to get his watercolor paints. The butterflies have flown away, but Kurt takes inspiration from the colors in the flower bed and starts to paint.

*****

“Kurt, there’s a delivery boy here for you,” Burt shouts when he enters the house after work.

Kurt drops his sketch book and rushes inside, where he sees a bouquet of red and yellow roses and a huge box.

“I’ll put the flowers in the kitchen for you to sort out later. Is this Blaine’s doing?”

Kurt nods and rushes into the living room, trying to open the box. He laughs when his father joins him with a Swiss army knife in his hand. Kurt slows down for a moment and carefully opens the box and takes out the items one by one.

There’s a cheesecake from Eileen’s, a half-dozen bagels from Black Seed Bagels and his favorite cronuts from the Dominque Ansel Bakery. There’s an I Love New York mug and a bag of hot chocolate mix from Madison & Vine. Kurt then discovers VIP tickets for two to see Waitress in June, The Color Purple in July, and School of Rock in August. There’s a gift certificate for a day at the M-Star Spa. The last item Kurt pulls out is a Ty plush dog with huge golden eyes, wearing a handwritten sign that says I miss you.

“Blaine seems to know all your favorite things in New York City,” Burt comments as he eyes the loot.

“Yeah, he does. I think this is his way to lure me back there.”

“Is it working?”

“Yes? Maybe? I don’t know. Blaine makes me feel so safe, connected and loved. I’m ready to commit to him. But like we said this morning, I’ve got to figure out what I’m doing first.”

Burt gets up from his favorite armchair. “When you call to thank him for all this stuff, maybe you should tell him that as well. I’m going to shower and change clothes. I’ve booked a table at Breadsticks for your birthday dinner for 7 p.m.”

Kurt watches his dad climb the stairs. His dad’s gentle prompting was exactly the push he needed to phone Blaine. Kurt spends the next five minutes running through what he’s going to say to Blaine. He takes a deep breath and dials Blaine’s number.

“Hello? Is that you, Kurt?”

“Hey… I got your package. Thanks for all the presents. Every item was so thoughtful.”

“Happy birthday, Kurt. I’m glad you liked them.”
“I know that I snapped at you when you called me at the airport a few days ago. I’m not sure how Sebastian fits into your life…”

“He doesn’t!” Blaine interrupts. “There was no bet involving you. You’ve got to believe me, Kurt, I just want you to know….”

“Look, I’ve gone through this in my head a million times. I believe you – I really do.”

Kurt can hear Blaine sniffling on the phone. God, he doesn’t want him to be upset, but it’s important that Blaine to understand what he needs.

“I feel as if my life is at a crossroads, with so many different directions I could choose to go in. I need to have a clear idea of what I want to do before I see you again. I need to figure out what I want and then go after it. Come to you as my own independent man.”

“You will. Kurt, you’re the strongest person I know.”

“And I want to be strong for you, but I have to be strong for me first. I’m just not there yet. Even though I have to sort myself out, I miss you like crazy and … I want to be with you. You’re still my best friend,” Kurt says quietly into the phone.

“You’re mine too,” Blaine replies. “Can you come visit me in New York? I need you.”

“Who else would I take to those Broadway shows? Just don’t get tickets for Funny Girl. I’ve heard that Rachel’s replacement is rubbish, and every Fanny Brice song and piece of dialogue are stamped inside my brain forever.”

Blaine chuckles. “So we’re really going to see each other next month?”

“Yes. I’ll be in New York City before the Waitress tickets. Look, I’ve got to go. My father’s taking me to Breadsticks for dinner.”

“Kurt, I love you so much,” Blaine whispers.

“I love you too. And please believe me when I say that every version of my future includes you.”

When Kurt gets off the phone, he sees his father waiting for him in the dining room. Burt walks over to him and gives him a big hug. It’s comforting, and Kurt smiles, hoping that everything will work out in the end.

*****

At 10 a.m. on Saturday morning, Kurt hears the doorbell ring. His dad is upstairs, getting ready for the day, so he gets up to answer the door. Kurt finds himself standing face-to-face with an older man with thick silvery hair. He looks a little familiar, but Kurt knows he’s never seen the man before.

“Kurt, at last we meet! I’m Michael Anderson.”

The penny drops when he sees the huge smile and the triangular eyebrows. This is Blaine’s father.

“Mr. Anderson, it’s a pleasure to meet you. Won’t you come in?”
Michael strides into the house and stands there, staring at Kurt.

“Can I get you a coffee or something to drink? I’m not sure why you’re here… I wasn’t expecting you.”

“Burt and I are going property hunting in Lima today for the next Monarch House.”

“Oh, yeah. Dad has mentioned the project loads of times. I’ll go get him.”

Kurt dashes to the bottom of the stairs and calls out to his dad that Mr. Anderson is there.

“Tell him I’ll be down in fifteen minutes,” Burt hollers back.

Kurt pours two coffees before joining Mr. Anderson in the living room.

“I didn’t realize that the Monarch Foundation is ready to open a house in Lima,” Kurt says as he sits down on a chair.

“Your father and I have been busy getting grants and donations. Your father is very special… and so are you.”

Kurt is shocked that Mr. Anderson has even heard about him.

“You must be very special if Blaine has fallen in love with you,” Michael adds.

Kurt clears his throat because he wasn’t expecting Blaine’s father to raise the subject. Kurt can see the sparkle in Mr. Anderson’s eyes.

“The real question is whether you love Blaine too?”

Kurt feels totally unprepared for having this discussion with Blaine’s father. He decides the best thing is to speak honestly from his heart.

“Yes… Yes, I do. I might be young, but I know what my heart feels. Blaine is the most special, amazing, smart, and caring man I’ve ever met. I feel so safe and connected when I’m with Blaine. I love Blaine very much.”

Kurt feels self-conscious as Mr. Anderson mulls over his response. Did he say the right thing? Was it too much?

“So what are you doing in Lima? Why aren’t you in New York City doing whatever you two do together?”

“I might know what my heart wants, but it’s the rest of my life that’s a confusing mess right now. I’ve enjoyed my time as a model, but the fame and media attention aren’t right for me. Frankly, I hate that aspect of the job, Mr. Anderson.”

“Call me Michael. I have a feeling we’re going to know each other for a very long time. Sorry, please continue.”

“I need to figure things out on my own before I go back to Blaine. I want to find a career that will
blend in with my future dreams.”

“And what are those, Kurt?”

Kurt takes a few moments to think about his reply. “I see a husband and children in my future. I want a family that I love and can grow old with. Any career that I decide upon would have to fit in with this, because family really matters to me.”

Michael throws back his head with laughter.

“God, you and Blaine were made for each other. Last Christmas, Blaine told me the exact same thing. But, Kurt, I have some advice.”

Kurt eagerly nods, curious as to what it might be.

“Don’t wait too long. Wanting to approach your relationship with a firm plan shows strength of character, and I admire that in you. The thing is, though, I’ve learnt that plans don’t always work out when you make them all by yourself, without making them with your partner. Besides, Blaine is a mess right now, worried that he’s lost you for good. Come up with your dream, but remember that the best dreams are built up with the person you love.”

“I don’t want Blaine doubting my love or that we’ll be together.”

“Then talk to him, Kurt. Let him know what you’re thinking. I know my son. He’ll give you all the time in the world to sort out your professional plans if you tell him that you’ll be together in the end.”

Before Kurt can think of a reply, his dad walks into the room.

“Sorry to keep you waiting, Michael. Let’s get this show on the road.”

Michael stands up and firmly shakes Burt’s hand.

“The real estate agent is going to meet us at the first property.”

Michael turns towards Kurt. “I’m glad that we finally met. I’m going to give you one last piece of advice. Before answering the door, look through the peephole. Cooper is very angry with you. Something about a promise broken?”

*****

Burt gets a light beer out of the fridge and heads to his bedroom. There’s a phone call he needs to make, and he doesn’t want Kurt to overhear him. He and Michael looked at a dozen properties today and two looked very promising if the sellers accept the right price. Burt wishes that Lizzie was still alive to advise whether he’s making the right decision about what he’s about to do, but he needs to trust his instincts. When the phone connects, Burt starts to speak.

“Hi, Blaine. It’s Burt Hummel here.”

“Is Kurt alright? Has anything happened…”

“Kurt is just fine,” Burt reassures him, touched by Blaine’s obvious concern. “I hope I haven’t interrupted anything.”
“No, I’m just going through next month’s Vogue issue, trying to figure out how to liven it up. My mind has been on other things and I let this one slip.”

“I spent the day with your father and there’s a couple of properties you should see.”

Burt can hear the deep sigh across the telephone line.

“You know I can’t come to Lima right now. Kurt would hate it. He’s asked me for time and I’m going to respect that… as hard as that is. So, how’s Kurt? Does he ever mention me?”

“Kurt is doing okay. He’s spending every morning on the computer researching fashion design schools. In the afternoon, he heads to the backyard with his watercolors and paints butterflies.”

“‘Butterflies?’”

“‘Butterflies. Go figure! God knows what goes through Kurt’s head sometimes. And just so you know, Kurt talks about you all the time. He’s in love, for god’s sake. Look, buddy, the reason I’m calling you is because Kurt seems like he’s in limbo, afraid to make the wrong decision. I think you need to do something to tip him over to your side and make him go to New York. Kurt is a boy – no, a man – who likes to be wooed.’”

“I’m the best wooer the likes of Wooville has ever seen.”

Burt chuckles at how earnestly Blaine replies. After talking to Michael, he has no doubt that Blaine could knock the bobby socks off anyone if he puts his mind to it.

“Well, it’s just a suggestion. Now, don’t you dare tell Kurt that I called you. He already thinks I’m the biggest team Blaine fan.”

Blaine roars with laughter. “I’m personally on team Burt. You’re the most awesome dad ever.”

*****

Blaine puts down the phone and kicks his feet excitedly. Burt has confirmed that Kurt thinks of him… loves him. Now the biggest question is how he should woo Kurt. Blaine discounts a huge neon sign in Times Square – after all, Kurt is still in Lima. He also discounts the Goodyear Blimp, a presidential tweet, and serenading him with a full-piece orchestra outside the Hummel house. God knows what the homophobic assholes in Lima would do. He’s even thinking about calling Ellen DeGeneres and getting a guest slot on her show.

“Mr. A, what time do you want dinner?” Amy asks as she enters Blaine’s study.

“I don’t care. I’m not feeling very hungry, there’s too much on my mind.”

“A problem shared is a problem halved.”

Blaine takes off his glasses and pinches the bridge of his nose. Maybe if he discusses his ideas with Amy, he can figure out the perfect plan.

“Okay, but let’s go into the main room.”
They sit down on the couch and Blaine kicks up his feet and lies down. There’s no need for being formal with Amy.

“I just got off the phone with Kurt’s dad. He suggested that I do something to woo Kurt back to New York City and me. I’ve got lots of ideas but for the life of me, I can’t figure out what the best – no, perfect – thing will be. I feel as if I only get one shot at this, so I don’t want to screw it up.”

“So what ideas do you have?”

Blaine relates his ideas to Amy and why he’s rejected them. She keeps silent throughout.

“You didn’t look happy all afternoon. Is that the only thing troubling you?”

“I’ve been focusing so much on Kurt and the Monarch House, that I didn’t get involved as I should have with Vogue’s June issue. I’ve been looking at the articles, which focus on a summer cruise theme. Frankly, it’s boring and not what our readers expect. The cover photo is awful, and I wouldn’t buy the issue myself. The problem is that I don’t know how to fix it, seeing as it’s going to hit the newsstands in ten days’ time.”

“Have you considered killing two birds with one stone?”

“I don’t understand.”

“From what you’ve told me, you want to make a public statement about your feelings for Kurt. But your ideas are too New York City based or really difficult to set in motion. The June Vogue issue is humdrum and you want to perk it up. Why not use that issue in some way to let Kurt know how you feel?”

“How could I do that?”

“You know that the issue would sell like hotcakes if it contained an exclusive interview with its editor-in-chief. I’m sure you can work in secret messages to Kurt.”

“Hey, you’re on to something! Maybe the main article could be an interview with me?”

“Don’t limit it to the main article, Blaine. You’ve got the right look to be on the cover.”

Blaine giggles and replies, “I am so not a model.”

Amy joins in the giggling. “Oh, yes, you are. I can’t believe that you’re saying that after the diva-off! You were so hot that you single-handedly raised an enormous amount for charity. And I saw the effect it had on Kurt.”

“I can’t believe you thought I was hot!”

“Why not? I’m a woman who appreciates a hot guy like anyone else. That doesn’t mean that I want you like that. I know that you’ve got the right look and as they say, sex sells.”

Blaine tickles Amy, who shrieks and pulls away.

“I’m going to add one more thing. Don’t discount The Ellen Show – I’m sure that Kurt watches it. Doesn’t she owe you a favor or two?”
“Yeah, she does.”

*****

“That’s a wrap,” says Frankie, the sound technician.

Blaine is at Smash Studios, having hired the music recording studio for the morning for Marley to cut a demo version of ‘All or Nothing’. Blaine and Marley hold hands as they listen to the playback of the song.

“You sound absolutely brilliant, Marley. Now you can send this demo to the music labels to see if you can get a deal for an album.”

“I can’t believe this is all happening! Thank you, Blaine, for organizing this and paying for the studio time.”

“I’ve got an interest in this too. After all, I composed the music to the song.”

“You still have an hour or so of recording time left. Any other song you wish to record?” Frankie asks.

“I think we’re good,” Blaine replies.

“No, we’re not!” Marley exclaims. “I love that song you wrote about Kurt recently. Why don’t we use the remaining time to record it?”

Blaine shakes his head.

“Come on, Blaine! What do you have to lose? It’ll be fun and I’ll sing back-up for you.”

Blaine thinks about it some more. Marley has already heard the song and has given useful feedback. He’s had so much fun today recording at the studio. It has awakened dreams he had as a teenager -of becoming a professional songwriter. Could he really make a go of it? Could he balance songwriting with his work at Vogue? Blaine is aware that the clock is ticking and he needs to make his mind up fast about the rest of the recording time. He smiles at Marley and replies, “Okay, let’s do it!”

*****

Blaine takes his usual Saturday late afternoon run in Central Park. His legs are on autopilot as he mulls over Amy’s idea. It’s scary, planning to confess feelings for Kurt in such a public way, but hopefully Kurt will appreciate it. However, the idea still leaves Blaine feeling emotionally vulnerable. Blaine thinks that there is only one person who can understand and advise him.

When Blaine returns home, he quickly showers and puts on his PJ bottoms. He then slides on Kurt’s shirt that he left behind at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel. Sure, the shirt is crumpled, but it still smells like Kurt. Blaine lies on his bed and hits #3 on his phone’s speed dial.

“Blaine, I wasn’t expecting a call from you until tomorrow. Burt and I went out viewing properties in Lima. There are a couple of potential places for the next Monarch House.”
“That’s great news, but that isn’t what I’m calling about. I really need your advice about Kurt.”

“I met Kurt this morning when I picked up Burt. He’s a fine young man.”

“Y-y-you met Kurt?”

“Don’t worry, Blaine, I behaved myself. I have to say, though, he’s hurting the same way as you. So, when are you going to do something about it?”

“Well, that’s why I’m calling you.”

Blaine talks through his plans to woo Kurt with his father, leaving no detail untouched. He’s even taking notes of ideas he thinks of on the fly. When he finishes his ten-minute speech, Blaine asks his father what he thinks.

“I like it – it’s got the Anderson flair. Can I make a few suggestions?”

Blaine nods and then realizes that his father can’t see that.

“Yeah, I really value your opinion.”

“Why’s that?”

“Ever since you’ve told me how you wooed mom in university, I consider you the expert.”

Blaine can hear his father roar with laughter.

“I guess I am. Let me close the door – if your mother hears this conversation, she’ll be planning your wedding and spending way too much money on onesies for your babies.”

After a few moments, Michael returns on the phone. “I cannot believe what I’m about to advise you. It’s really out there, and so out of my comfort zone…”

“Trust me, Dad, this conversation is awkward for me as well.”

“You looking prim and proper on the cover of Vogue isn’t going to sell the magazine and win Kurt’s heart. It needs to be edgy and risqué. Think of the reaction you got when you were a model at the diva-off…. Now think bigger. Show the world that you’re proud of who you are – a young man in love, who knows what he wants. Judging by that video from last September, Kurt will love that too.”

Blaine feels himself blush, thinking about his father watching that video.

“It won’t embarrass you, Dad?”

“Are you kidding me? I’ll be very proud. Now, your mother told me that you know some drag queens.”

“Dad! I’m not going to dress up in drag! That’s not who I am. How could you think that?”

“That’s not what I meant. Here’s what I’m thinking….”

Blaine listens to his father’s ideas for the cover and article, and wow, he’s impressed.
“Hey, Tina. I hope I’m not interrupting your evening.”

“Maybe a little. What is it, Blaine?”

“When’s the last possible moment that we can hand over the June issue to the printers?”

“Just a second.”

Blaine can hear muffled voices over the phone.

“Friday noon, as long as Vogue is willing to pay overtime for the weekend work.”

“That was a quick reply. Is there a certain someone there from the printers?”

“None of your business,” Tina shrieks.

“Can you please call an emergency management meeting for 10 a.m. tomorrow? Make sure that you, Unique, Liam and Paul are there too. I know it’s Sunday, but I’m going to change the cover photo and main article. The new plans will Blow. Your. Mind.”

Chapter End Notes

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. Please check out here all the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics.

I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr.

Next up: Vogue’s June issue is released.
Chapter Notes

Pay attention to the day things are happening. The chapter takes place over a 10-day period.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“To share your weakness is to make yourself vulnerable; to make yourself vulnerable is to show your strength.” – Criss Jami

May - Sunday

“I think we should do the photo shoot on the set Tuesday. On Wednesday, we’ll do the outdoor shoot and then we’ll head to Blaine’s place,” Paul, the lead photographer, suggests after listening to Blaine’s plans for the revised June issue. “Can someone get the permit to shoot in Central Park? Let’s pray it doesn’t rain.”

“I’ll get someone to sort that out,” Tina replies, furiously typing into her computer.

“Will that give you enough time to get the outfits together, Liam?” Blaine asks.

“You’ve got a fantastic wardrobe, Blaine. I’m thinking that we’ll use your clothes so they don’t need to be altered. Can I come over this evening to pick out some outfits? That will leave Monday for doing any necessary cleaning and selecting the accessories.”

At Blaine’s nod, Liam continues. “The main thing that worries me is the cover. I’m not sure I can pull it off. I’m thinking we should use a professional theater costume designer, but I doubt we can get someone to create what you’re thinking of before Tuesday.”

Blaine leans back in his chair and takes off his glasses before rubbing his eyes. This was always going to be the difficult part.

“I’ve got an idea,” Paul says. “Why don’t we Photoshop it? I’m good friends with Jeff Huang, who’s the best in the field for digital art, and he’s based right here in New York City.”

“Do you think he’ll agree to do it?” Blaine asks hopefully.

“Think of the exposure he’ll get with his digital art on the cover of Vogue. Jeff will be all over it. Let me call him now.”

When Paul has left the room, Blaine turns to Unique. “I’m counting on you living up to your name in the make-up area.”

Unique gulps and slowly nods. “I’ve already texted Lady Divine, who’s promised to help me. But your hair, Blaine…”
“What’s wrong with it?”

“I’m thinking that you need an edgier style.”

“Nope, I’m not getting rid of the curls. Not doing it. I spent my teenage years gelling my hair, and now that I’ve figured out a way to control them, I’m keeping the curls.”

Unique huffs and stands up, placing a hand on her hip. “Honey, you need to trust Unique. I’m not suggesting for one single moment that you get rid of those curls. I’m thinking about a cut that will show them off even more. When Mark Townsend helped us out on the *Hamilton*-inspired photo shoot, he had some really great ideas about your hair.”

“Okay, Unique. I guess it’s go big or go home. Can you set up an appointment for tomorrow?”

“Already done. Townsend is expecting you at 4 p.m.”

Now that all aspects of the photo shoot have been discussed, the conversation turns to the main article.

“I want to make one thing very clear about the main article. I must have full editorial control. There are specific things I want included and other things I will not discuss. That is non-negotiable.”

“Do you want to write the article yourself?” Isabelle politely asks.

“No. I won’t have the time and it would get far too sappy. I’m looking for a top-notch journalist to write it to my specifications.”

Isabelle sits up straight before she replies. “Santino Cruz is a new staff writer for the website. He’s a wonderful reporter, and his articles are thoughtful and compassionate. I’m expecting him to go places one day, but for now, he writes articles about celebrities and travel pieces.”

“Do you think Santino is up for the job?”

“Yes, I do. I can be there during the interview, if you like, and polish up the article before your final editing.”

“I trust your judgement, Isabelle. I’ll email you the list of things I wish to be included. Can you and Santino start the interview tomorrow morning? It looks like I’m going to be very busy with the photo shoots after that.”

“Consider it done. We’ll also have to run the article by your PR agency.”

Tina and the head of distribution talk about the logistics of getting the revised cover and article to the printers in time. The finance director approves the additional costs for the overtime required to print and distribute the issue over the weekend. The website content has been assigned over to Isabelle’s number two – she will be far too busy with the article and coordinating events to give the website the attention it deserves.

At the end of the meeting, Blaine smiles for the first time, realizing that this is really going to happen. He returns to his office to make an important phone call. It’s the last piece of the puzzle that needs to be in place to pull off Operation Woo Kurt.
“Blaine Anderson. How nice to hear from you! I haven’t seen you since you came on the show after becoming Vogue’s editor-in-chief.”

“Has it really been that long, Ellen?”

“Yes, it has been that long. So when are you going to grace my show with your presence again?”

“I’m glad you asked that. How far ahead do you tape your show?”

“One day.”

“So if I wanted to be on the show on a Tuesday, it would be taped on the Monday?”

“Yes, that’s right. Why do you ask?”

Blaine crosses his fingers because the timing would work if Ellen agrees.

“I have a special favor to ask you, Ellen. I’d like to be on the show airing on June 1st. Here’s what’s happening…”

Blaine gives a quick spiel about Operation Woo Kurt, June’s Vogue issue, and how *The Ellen Show* fits into his plans. When he’s finished pitching his story, Blaine takes deep breaths, nervously waiting for Ellen’s reaction.

“Are you serious, Blaine? I didn’t think you had it in you to be so bold.”

Blaine chuckles, “Yeah, I didn’t think so either. So what do you say, can I be on your show?”

“Absolutely! This appearance will top everyone we’ve had this year. The only thing that would make it better is if Kurt were in the audience.”

“Sorry, but no can do. Kurt is currently in the Mid-West staying with his dad. I need this to be a complete surprise.”

“Ugh, I understand. I’ll have the program director contact your office tomorrow about when you’re needed on set. Let’s meet up for lunch that day so you can tell me all about it and we can figure out a plan for the appearance.”

*****

Tuesday

Blaine looks at himself in the mirror in the make-up area, and cannot believe that it’s really him. He’s never worn so much make-up in his life. Blaine has always been confident about his looks, knowing that others find him attractive, but this is the first time he thinks of himself as beautiful.

“Don’t touch your face!” Lady Divine cries out. “You’re a work of art and I can’t have you messing it up.”
“How do you like it?” Unique asks in a shaky voice.

“I love it, but could I have some eyeliner? Err… Kurt likes it on me.”

“Anything for that boy,” Lady Divine smirks as she carefully applies the liquid liner to his eyelids.

Unique squeezes a very small dollop of hair product into her palm and carefully works it through his hair. Blaine loves his new hairstyle and only hopes that Kurt does as well.

As he waits for the set to be ready, Blaine relaxes for the first time since Sunday morning. There had been clothes to select, the set stylists had worked there magic in his house, and of course there had been the interview itself. Blaine had been impressed by Santino Cruz. It took half an hour to get the staff writer to relax in his presence, but once Blaine and Santino realized that they both loved Broadway, they forged a bond. Santino stayed on script for the main interview, while Isabelle interjected with a few more detailed questions. At the end, Santino had asked additional questions about the Monarch Foundation and its long-term plans. Blaine could see where he was going with this, so he gave a lot of background information and shared his vision. Santino then suggested that the article should include the Monarch House and offered to find a Westerville photographer to take some photos. Isabelle was right – Santino Cruz will be going places someday.

Liam comes over and gives Blaine a quick look-over. No special clothing is needed for this part of the photo shoot. “I almost forgot. Let me take that wristband off before you go on set,” Liam says, pulling Blaine’s arm towards him.

Blaine angrily pushes the hand away, which startles Liam. “Don’t touch it! I’m never going to take off this wristband! It means **everything** to me. It stays on during the photo shoot.”

“Okay. Sorry, Blaine. I didn’t know that it was so special to you,” Liam meekly replies.

“Sorry that I raised my voice, but it is special.”

“We’re ready when you are,” Paul shouts.

Blaine nervously gets up and adjusts the tiny shorts. He feels self-conscious without a shirt to cover his chest. Unique had insisted that he have an upper body wax yesterday, and his chest feels weird. He can feel Unique rub his shoulder. “You’ll do fine. Just remember that you’re the greatest diva of them all.”

Blaine laughs at Unique’s comment and smiles back. “That’s because I’ve got you as a sidekick, my dear.”

Blaine walks onto the set and stands where the marking is on the floor. The lights are blinding and he hopes he doesn’t start to sweat.

“Anything you want to listen to?” Paul asks.

“I’ve already got it set up,” Steve, the lighting technician, replies, and he turns on the audio system.

*What a diff'rence a day made*
*Twenty-four little hours*
Brought the sun and the flowers
Where there used to be rain
My yesterday was blue, dear
Today I'm part of you, dear

As Blaine moves into the positions that Paul calls out, he thinks back to the 24 hours that he had spent with Kurt in L.A. It was the most incredible experience of his life. Blaine’s arms flow in time to the music, imagining being held in Kurt’s arms. He rolls his head, remembering feeling Kurt inside his body, filling him with ecstasy and love.

“That’s a wrap. God, Blaine, you should be a model. You can really make your body flow like liquid. And do you know how hard it is to make models look dreamy-eyed like that?” Paul remarks.

“Thanks, but I think I’ll stick to my job behind my desk after this week. This is too much hard work,” Blaine chuckles.

****

Friday

Blaine glances up from his computer screen and looks at Isabelle and at Santino, who is nervously twisting his hands in his lap.

“It’s perfect. We’ll run with this article.”

Blaine can see the relief wash over both of their faces.

“Santino, this is excellent work. I especially like what you wrote about the Monarch Foundation. Maybe I can rope you into writing some of the foundation’s promotional materials… The photos you picked out are perfect. Now go take the rest of the day off. You deserve it.”

Santino thanks Blaine before leaving. When Isabelle gets up, Blaine pleads with her to stay.

“Can you stay with me until the cover photo is delivered? I’m really nervous to see what it looks like.”

“Sure, I’ll stay. But honestly, Blaine, you have nothing to worry about. The photos in the main spread are fantastic.”

“But the cover is so out there! By the way, thanks for suggesting Santino for writing the article. You’re right. He’s very talented. I wonder if there’s a position available to give him a promotion?”

“I’ll look into it and make it happen.”

Their conversation is interrupted by a knock on the door. Blaine eagerly waves Paul and Jeff Huang into his office. Paul hands over the printout of the June issue’s cover, and Blaine gasps when he sees it.

“I… I don’t know what to say. This surpasses anything I ever imagined it would be. It truly is a piece of art. Let’s go with it.”

Isabelle jumps up and gives Blaine a hug. “You pulled it off! I have to admit, when you told us the
ideas for article and cover on Sunday, I didn’t think we had any chance of making such a tight
deadline. But you did!”

“I honestly couldn’t have done it without everyone pulling together and working crazy hours. The
real proof will be in the reactions of Kurt and the readers on Tuesday.”

Once everyone has cleared out of his office, Blaine checks the time. He needs to get ready to leave
for the airport. He plans to be in LA over the weekend so that he can spend time with Sam and
Cooper. Blaine feels bad about cutting his last trip short, but once Kurt left, Blaine just wanted to go
home. When Blaine hears his phone ping, he quickly looks at the new message.

You’ve been quiet this week. I miss you :(. Is everything okay? – K xx

Blaine feels badly about not being in touch with Kurt all week, but he’s afraid that if he talked to
Kurt, he would blurt out his plans by mistake. As much as Blaine hates doing it, he types out his
reply.

Work has been incredibly busy with the June issue deadline. I’m off to LA and won’t be returning
until Monday night. Let’s talk on Tuesday. I love you and miss you too. – B xxxxxxxx

Blaine quickly grabs his carry-on suitcase and heads out of the building and into his car, which is
waiting at the curb.

“Traffic is fine, Blaine. I think we’ll make it to JFK airport with plenty of time to spare. Get done
what you needed to at the office?” Bentley asks.

“Yeah, I’ve approved the June issue to go to the printers. It’s been quite the week. Thanks for putting
up with me and all the craziness of getting me to different locations. I’m looking forward to a
weekend relaxing with Sam, Mercedes and Cooper.”

That it’s… All or nothing… All or nothing… Cause this is my life… I’m not gonna live it twice...

Blaine smiles as he presses accept on his phone. “Hey, Marley. What’s up?”

“Oh my god, Blaine. You’ll never believe it. SONY is interested in our song! I personally dropped
the demo off at their offices this morning, and you know what? It turns out that the personal assistant
of the VP in charge of new talent has been to the Treble Clef Jazz Club before and has heard me sing
‘All or Nothing’. He remembered the song and loves it, so brought the demo directly to his boss.
After about 30 minutes, the VP ushered me into her office and started to discuss a deal to produce
my first album.”

“That’s wonderful news, Marley!”

“You better get your songwriting into gear, because I need about eight more songs.”

“That’s kind of you to think of me,” replies Blaine.

“It’s more than that, Blaine. The VP loved the music composition. She wants to see more original
songs like that.”

“Marley, I’m on my way to the airport now and will be in LA until next Tuesday night. Why don’t I
call you when I get back and we can discuss it in more detail?”
After agreeing to talk next week, Blaine ends the call and lets out a deep breath. Everything has happened so quickly this week. Recording the demo song on Saturday, changing the direction of Vogue’s June issue on Sunday, haircuts, body wax, and the interview on Monday, the photo shoots on Tuesday and Wednesday, reviewing the issue on Thursday, and approving the interview and cover photo today. However, Blaine thinks it’s all worth it, particularly if he gets to see Kurt next week.

Blaine mentally goes through all the plans from now until Tuesday, June 1st. There’s only one last detail he needs to take care of. He scrolls through his contact list and makes the call.

“Blaine. What can I do for you, bud?”

“Hi, Burt. After we talked on Saturday, I figured out a plan to woo Kurt.”

“I know you did. Your father filled me in. I even went over to the Monarch House to be in the photos. I can’t wait to see Kurt’s face when he sees the June issue. He’s gonna love it.”

“I hope he does. I need your help on one little matter. What are you doing next Tuesday at 3 p.m.?”

*****

Tuesday

Kurt is surprised to see his father at the kitchen table at 8 a.m. Usually, he’s already left at that time to open the garage.

“Shouldn’t you be at work, Dad?”

“Timmy’s opening the shop today. I thought I would take it easy this morning.”

Kurt sees his father glance at the kitchen clock and fidget on his seat.

“You home all day, kiddo?”

“No plans yet. I’m going to spend time designing this morning. I’ll see what the weather’s like before I decide what to do in the afternoon.”

“How about I come home early and we do something together. You’re always going on at me about how we don’t have a decent guest bedroom. Maybe we can fix it up or something?”

Kurt looks at his father skeptically. Since when does his dad volunteer to decorate a room? Before Kurt can figure out what’s going on, the doorbell rings.

“Go answer the door. It’s for you.”

Kurt shakes his head and chuckles. Something is definitely going on. When he answers the door, he sees the postman with a large envelope from Vogue. Kurt accepts the envelope and sets it down on the counter before opening the fridge to figure out what he’ll have for breakfast.

“Aren’t you gonna open it?”
“It’s just the June issue of Vogue. I’ll read it this evening after dinner.”

“You’ll do no such thing! Open it now!” Burt roars.

“Okay, Dad. Calm down - remember your heart. I didn’t know it’s so important to you that I read Vogue as soon as I receive it.”

“Well, it is,” Burt huffs.

Kurt can feel his dad’s eyes on him as he carefully takes the magazine out of the envelope. Kurt’s jaw drops and tears slowly form when he sees the cover.

**Blaine** is on the cover.

Blaine is naked from the waist up, wearing what looks like shorts. Kurt can tell that Blaine has been keeping up his exercise regime and he likes what he sees. Before Kurt gets too carried away looking at the distinctive V trailing down into the shorts, his eyes rake up Blaine’s chest. Did Blaine really wax his body? Kurt hopes that he can convince Blaine to grow back his chest hair because he loves the feel of it against his naked body. It *does* things to him.

Kurt next looks at Blaine’s face. Blaine’s wearing make-up, but it’s slightly smudged – as if he has just finished a strenuous performance. Kurt bites his fist when he manages to take his eyes off Blaine.
to see the total picture. Blaine’s arms are clasped together as if praying, and behind him are butterfly wings. The wings are ethereal and look almost transparent - a blend of green and blue colors, with flecks of gold. Kurt gasps when he sees that Blaine’s only adornment is the silicone rainbow bracelet. The background looks as if Blaine has risen from a fantasy scene. Printed along the top of the cover is _Blaine Anderson – Find out what really matters to him_. Kurt wipes his tears from his eyes, appreciating that no-one else would understand the butterfly wings.

Only him. It’s all for him.

Kurt feels his father wrap his arms around him. The feeling grounds him as he cries into his dad’s chest.

“I hope those are happy tears, son.”

“I can’t believe that Blaine did this. God, I love him so much.”

“I know you do. Aren’t you going to read the interview?”

Kurt nods and returns to his seat. He opens the issue and gasps when he sees the beginning of the six-page article.

The first pages contain two amazing photos of Blaine with a different, more polished look altogether. Blaine’s hair has been cut short along the sides and back, but the top has been left long with luscious curls. Kurt loves the new hair style. There’s shimmery blue glitter both over and under Blaine’s eyes and it expertly fades into his upper cheek bones. There’s a strip of pink rouge on his cheeks that
blends into his sideburns. Blaine’s full lips are coated with bright red shimmery lipstick. The photos are just head shots, but continue the butterfly wings theme. In the first photo, Blaine is wearing a pair of butterfly wings, and in the second photo, three butterflies flutter in front of his face.

Blaine looks absolutely stunning.

The article starts with setting out some background information about Blaine, but then it delves into what matters to him. Kurt thinks that the article is brilliantly laid out into themes, with corresponding photos. There’s a photo of Blaine playing the piano in his penthouse. The article goes on to describe how music is important in his life. The next photo is of Blaine running in Central Park, and the article describes how Blaine keeps fit and healthy. Kurt turns the page and sees a photo of the Monarch House, with teenagers and parents at a BBQ in the backyard. He looks closely to see if he can recognize anybody. He can make out Michael and…

“Dad, you were in on this!”

Burt laughs and checks out the photo. “That photo has turned out alright. Michael Anderson called me last Monday night and told me a little about the issue. I wanted to be a part of it, so I took Tuesday morning off,” Burt sheepishly replies.

Kurt grimaces when he sees the photo of Blaine and Sebastian. It’s the exact same photo that he discovered in Blaine’s wallet in LA. His eyes quickly return to the article.

Sebastian Smythe is the editor-in-chief of Elle magazine, our major competitor. Sebastian and I have known each other since high school and have always been rivals. It’s made me stay alert to potential problems and to take risks for new opportunities. It’s kept me on my toes and spurred me on to keep moving forward. Up until recently, I kept this photo in my wallet as a reminder that competition is essential to push yourself to succeed. Honestly, I admire Sebastian. He’s smart and a very savvy businessman. His recent donation to the Monarch Foundation only confirms that there is a compassionate side to him as well.

Kurt feels horrible that he jumped to conclusions as to why Blaine kept that photo in his wallet. He knew there would be a perfectly good reason that didn’t include a bet about him. Blaine was very clever at working this into the article.

Kurt laughs at the photo of Blaine in his Nightbird Outfit. He definitely wants to see Blaine in it in a more private setting. He reads the corresponding part of the interview carefully.

Someone special recently reminded me how important bucket lists are. They can contain little things like exploring your neighborhood or trying something new. However, a really good bucket list also has your long-term hopes and dreams.

Kurt thinks about his bucket list and can’t wait until they include hopes and dreams shared with Blaine. When Kurt turns the page, nothing has prepared him for the photo. It is simply Blaine’s lower arm and hand with the silicone rainbow bracelet stamped Love is love is love is love.

Above all else, love is what matters to me.

It’s the love of my family, who are very supportive. It has only been this year that I learned how important my father’s love is. Working with him to establish the Monarch House in Westerville has been an incredible experience. It has taught me that my roots really matter.
It’s the love of my partner, someone I can truly be myself with. My love for him fills me with such joy and makes me feel as if I can do anything. But at the same time, it grounds me and keeps me safe and connected. Most importantly, he’s my best friend, and there is nothing better than a day spent together.

The future? I very much believe in marriage and I want to spend every day of my life loving my future husband. I hope it will be full of love for our children and grandchildren. I will die a very happy man if I can achieve this sort of love. This is what really matters to me.

Kurt puts down the magazine. Blaine has laid out each of his core values in this article. There are so many little things in the article that make it feel so personal to him.

“I’m going to lie down in my room, Dad. I’ve got a lot to think about.”

“Yes, I think you do. I’m going to head to the garage to make sure everything is okay. I’ll see you at lunchtime.”

****

“Are you sure dove gray will be a good color for the walls? It sounds dreary to me.”

“It’s sophisticated, Dad. And it will go perfectly with the Ralph Lauren comforter set. I even have a 20% off coupon at Bed, Bath and Beyond. It won’t cost that much.”

Burt checks his watch for the hundredth time since they started the project in the guest bedroom. When it’s 2:55 p.m., Burt stretches his arms over his head.

“Okay, kiddo. You can order the comforter set. I’ll pick up the paint this week and we can decorate this weekend. What do you say we watch some TV?”

“No, thanks, Dad. You know I hate watching ESPN.”

“Come on, Kurt. I promise not to watch sports. Maybe a reality show or something like that?”

“Really?”

“I wanna spend as much time as possible with you before you run off to New York City again. I have a feeling that’s going to be sooner rather than later.”

Kurt follows Burt down the stairs and into the living room. When Kurt picks up the TV remote, his dad snatches it out of his hands and sits in his comfortable reclining armchair.

“I thought I could pick the show,” Kurt groans.

“You can, but let me flick through the channels first.”

Kurt sits down on the couch and picks up Vogue, staring at Blaine on the cover. Frankly, he couldn’t care less what they watch because he wants to read the article all over again.

“Fancy that. The Ellen Show is on. Let’s watch it,” Burt suggests.

Kurt quirks an eyebrow at his dad. “You like The Ellen Show?”
“I don’t get to watch it ‘cause I’m always at the garage in the afternoons. I wanna see what it’s all about. I hear she has interesting guests.”

Kurt shrugs. If his dad wants to watch The Ellen Show, he can. It doesn’t matter to Kurt. He continues to stare at the photo of Blaine on Vogue’s cover, wondering what his next move should be. He hears the audience clapping and Ellen’s voice doing the usual introduction.

“… warm welcome for the one and only Blaine Anderson”

Kurt looks up when he hears Blaine’s name and sees Blaine walking across the stage.

“You knew about this too!” Kurt cries out, tossing a throw pillow at his dad.

“I’ve set the DVR up. Now, shhh, let’s watch it.”

Blaine is wearing black-and-white geometric sports jacket and matching trousers with a pink collared shirt, unbuttoned at the top. Not many men could pull off that look, but Blaine looks incredible in it.

“Blaine, you look fantastic. Who are you wearing?”

“Thank you, Ellen. I’m wearing Thom Browne. There are lots of amazing designs come through Vogue’s doors.”

“I haven’t seen you since you became Vogue’s editor-in-chief. How’s that going?”

Kurt listens to Blaine explain what has been going on at Vogue, but his mind is really focused on a key question. What the hell is Blaine Anderson doing on The Ellen Show on an ordinary Tuesday? Kurt tunes back in when Blaine stops talking about Vogue.

“I hear that you might have found a new job.”

When Blaine gives her a questioning look, the back screen lights up with Blaine’s photo on Vogue’s June cover. The audience gasps and is silent for a moment or two, before loud shrieks and applause can be heard.

“Ladies and gentlemen… Blaine Anderson, the supermodel.”

“I’m not sure about that. I won’t be giving up my day job any time soon. Modeling is hard work!”

“So what made you do it? Why grace the cover of Vogue?”

“Vogue’s April issue was about ‘pushing boundaries’. It made me wonder if I pushed the boundaries in my own life. I was recently in LA, just for a day, and I had an epiphany – a clear vision about what’s important in my life.”

The photos from the Vogue issue fade in and out of the back screen. Blaine and Ellen talk through the highlights of the magazine article, with additional time spent on the Monarch Foundation.

“I think we all want to know why you decided to make such a public statement.”

“There are so many photos of me on social media and things written about me. 99% of it isn’t true.”
“You mean you aren’t a man-eater who can have sex simultaneously in New York, London and Sydney?”

“No, and I don’t live in a castle either,” Blaine chuckles.

The last photo of Blaine’s wrist with the rainbow bracelet appears on the screen.

“So, love…” Ellen prompts.

Blaine takes a sip of water before he continues. “Since I was a teenager, I’ve always known that love, a husband and a family are important to me. Being gay, I didn’t know how that would work out until marriage equality swept through all 50 states.”

The studio audience applauds and loudly cheers, before allowing Blaine to continue.

“It was during that special day in LA that I went from believing to knowing that love is the most important thing in my life. To have a husband, children – that would make me complete.”

“That must have been one very special day.”

“Yeah, it was,” Blaine shyly replies.

“So, is there someone special in your life?”

“Yes, there is a special man in my life. I’m not going to name him. Our relationship is still new and fragile, but I love him very much.”

“I understand you have a song you want to perform.”

Blaine nods his head.

“After the break, we will be hearing a live performance from Blaine Anderson.”

Kurt’s tears turn into sobs as the ads start. Burt walks over, sits on the couch and pulls Kurt in with one arm.

“I just…”

“I know, Kurt. Deep breaths.”

When The Ellen Show returns, Blaine is on the stage sitting at a baby grand piano, with a small back-up band. The spotlight is on Blaine, and as he looks up, he says, “This one’s for you, boyfriend.”

If I was a raindrop  
Would you be my thunder storm?  
It's cold so surround me  
With rain clouds to keep me warm  
I feel like I'm falling  
So darling, don't let me go  
The thought is appalling
But should I slip away
Into the stormy sea will you remember me?

Kurt loves the song, its upbeat tempo, and Blaine’s rich tenor voice as he sings. The song’s lyrics are playful and hopeful, and give Kurt a warm feeling.

Asleep in our warm cocoons
We dream of lovely things
We're both gonna wake up soon
So we hope that tomorrow brings
Us our butterfly wings

Kurt laughs at the butterfly reference. Butterflies are really their thing. It had started with the first photo shoot where Kurt modeled for Vogue and then led to the beautiful brooch Blaine gave him for his birthday. When the song ends, Kurt can hear a thunder of applause from the audience.

When Ellen introduces the next guest, Burt gets up and switches off the TV. He glances over at Kurt furiously tapping on his tablet.

“6:36 a.m. tomorrow,” Burt remarks.

Kurt looks up and gives his father a questioning look.

“The next direct flight from Dayton to New York City is at 6:36 tomorrow morning. There are still seats left. I checked earlier.”

“But… How did you know?”

“Buddy, it’s been obvious since you arrived ten days ago. You may be in Lima, but your heart is firmly in New York City. After what Anderson did for you, I figured that you would want to go to him.”

“Do you think I’m ready?”

“The more important question is whether you think you’re ready,” Burt replies.

“I’m not sure what I’m going to do with my life, but studying fashion is a step in the right direction to figure it out. One thing I know for sure is that in any version of my life that I dream about, Blaine is in it.”

“So what are you waiting for? Don’t you have a phone call to make? Some packing to do? I’ll go book the flight.”

*****

“Kurt…Hi,” Blaine says when he answers his phone.

“I love you! I love you! I love you! That photo on Vogue’s cover is amazing. The article is amazing. The Ellen Show is amazing. The song is amazing. You’re amazing.”

“It wasn’t too over the top?”
“Of course it was, but that’s what I love about it. How did you organize things so fast? I only gave you the rainbow wristband ten days ago.”

“Let’s just say that very few people at Vogue got any sleep last week,” Blaine chuckles. “But I would move heaven and earth if it meant that you would come to New York City to be with me.”

“You’re the master of the cheesy lines.”

“Do they work?” Blaine whispers.

“I have only question for you, Blaine…”

When Kurt hears Blaine breath hitch, he continues,

“Will you pick me up at LaGuardia tomorrow morning?”

Chapter End Notes

Song at Blaine’s photo shoot – ‘What a Difference a Day Made’. There are many covers of this song but my favorite is by Jamie Cullum.
Song Blaine sings on the Ellen Show – ‘Butterfly Wings’ by Owl City. Now you know how I picked the title for the story :)

Isn’t the artwork for the Vogue issue amazing? You can just imagine my reaction when I first saw them. They were created by at CC-Graphics. Please go here and let her know what you think. She has been so unbelievably supportive for a newbie author like myself. The overall story artwork was produced early in my writing and some days, it kept me going.

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr.

Next up: Kurt arrives in New York City. Heads up – there are only three more chapters and an epilogue to go.
“Communication is the fuel that keeps the fire of your relationship burning, without it, your relationship goes cold.” - William Paisley

June

“I heard that you got your man in LA, and that you and Kurt are an item now. That Ellen Show was really something,” Connor says.

“Err… yes, I did,” Blaine replies, wondering where this phone conversation is going. He feels uncomfortable talking with Connor if he wants to discuss Kurt.

“Butterfly Wings is trending on Twitter and everyone wants to know where they can buy a copy. The performance already has three million hits on YouTube.”

“I saw that this morning. It’s hard to imagine that people actually want to buy a copy of the song.”

“The reason I’m calling you is that music labels will be knocking on your door for a recording deal very soon and you need to be prepared.”

“You think so?” Blaine tentatively asks.

“I know so. Can I give you a piece of advice? Don’t sign anything, no matter how sweet the deal seems. You’ll need a good entertainment lawyer to help negotiate the contract. You don’t want to sign your song’s copyright away or commit to a tour or album. You can send the record labels to me until you’ve found the right lawyer.”

“I think you’re right. I don’t know the first thing about the music industry. Your offer to help me out… You’d really do that for me?”

“Of course I would, Blaine. I like you - you’re a good person. I might wish that we could have been something special, but I always want to be your friend.”

“I’d like that too, Connor.”

“Good - I’m glad we cleared the air about that. Now, the first thing you need to do is figure out how to meet the demand of people wanting to buy a copy of Butterfly Wings. You don’t need a music label to promote the song - it’s a hit already. However, you do need a polished-up version you can sell via iTunes, Amazon, Spotify… and of course the Monarch Foundation website.”

“Well, that will be easier than you think. Last Friday I cut a version of ‘Butterfly Wings’ at a recording studio, with Marley Rose as back-up vocals.”

“That’s fantastic news! How about I get things started? I have a good friend who’s an excellent entertainment lawyer. He can advise on how much to pay Marley for her vocal work on the song,
and get the song uploaded on iTunes, Amazon, and other websites.”

“Sure, that sounds like a good plan, Connor. I’m not sure whether there will be many sales, but it seems like we need to strike while the iron is hot. I’m on the way to the airport to collect Kurt, and I’ll be busy for the rest of the day. Why don’t I send Bentley to your office with the demo file later this morning and you can take it from there.”

*****

When Kurt arrives at the LaGuardia Airport’s baggage claim area, he looks around and spots Blaine and Bentley leaving the Starbucks kiosk with coffees. Blaine is wearing those tight-fitting jeans that show off his ass, a simple graphic T-shirt and a beanie that covers his curls. As soon as Blaine sees Kurt, his face lights up like a Christmas tree. Blaine hands the coffees to Bentley and rushes into Kurt’s arms. Kurt loves how Blaine is a little bit shorter than him and fits perfectly against his body.

“I was afraid that you might change your mind,” Blaine whispers into Kurt’s ear.

“Are you kidding me? I barely got a wink of sleep last night. I was too worried I wouldn’t wake up in time for the flight. Nothing could have stopped me from coming to New York City today.”

They collect Kurt’s suitcases and walk to the car in the short-term parking garage. Bentley arranges the suitcases in the trunk, and soon they are on their way to the Upper East Side. Blaine tugs Kurt’s hands into his, gazing into his eyes.

“I missed you so much, Kurt.”

“I missed you too.”

Kurt leans in and presses his lips against Blaine’s – they are warm and soft, and kissing Blaine feels like he’s coming home. Soon, their lips start moving together, and when Kurt feels Blaine’s wet tongue against his lips, he opens his mouth immediately. Blaine explores inside, and when Kurt feels the gentle sucking motion on his tongue, he can’t help but moan.

“Boys… Boys… Remember I’m here,” Bentley chuckles.

Kurt moves his hand to knock off Blaine’s beanie, then starts twisting and tugging the curls at the nape. Blaine leans in closer so that their chests are pressed together, and clutches the back of Kurt’s thigh. Blaine pulls away when his phone starts playing.

He's a tramp, he's a scoundrel, He's a rounder, he's a cad, He's a tramp but I love him…

Blaine immediately sits up and groans, “I can’t believe I forgot to turn off Bentley’s ringtone.”

“Good one, Blaine. I knew I’d find out my ringtone eventually. Thanks for distracting him, Kurt. Now can you boys keep it G-rated? I’ll get you home in about five minutes.”

Blaine puts his beanie back on his head and hands Kurt a blanket.

Kurt whispers, “I am not going to fool around with you under the blanket while Bentley’s in the car.”

Blaine bursts into a fit of laughter, and when he eventually calms down, he explains, “Since The
Ellen Show, the paparazzi have been camped out in front of my building, trying to get a photo of my boyfriend… of you. I want us to have some time together alone to discuss what we’re going to do.”

Kurt’s heart sinks, remembering how intrusive the American paparazzi can be. He has been spoilt in Paris, with their strict privacy laws, and doesn’t want to deal with the media problem. Blaine pulls his beanie down over his curls and puts on his Oakley sunglasses. Kurt bends down and Blaine covers him with the blanket until they’re inside the building’s underground parking garage.

When they enter the penthouse, Kurt yawns. He and his dad had left Lima at 3:45 a.m. to catch the early morning flight from Dayton.

“You look exhausted, Kurt. Why don’t you take a nap?”

“Only if you join me. I don’t want to let you out of my sight.”

Blaine pulls Kurt in for a gentle hug and replies, “You’re not the only one who didn’t get much sleep last night. I was way too excited about you coming to New York City today.”

They move to Blaine’s bedroom, quickly strip to their briefs and climb into the huge king-sized bed. Blaine’s bed is so comfy that Kurt feels as if he’s lying on a cloud. Kurt tugs Blaine towards his chest and soon they both drift off to sleep.

*****

Kurt can feel soft whiskers brush his chest as Blaine snuggles closer. He cracks one eye open and sees the late afternoon sun giving the room a gentle glow. Kurt rolls toward Blaine, and with a gravelly low voice says, “Hi there.”

Blaine smiles back and then proceeds to kiss every part of Kurt’s chest that his lips can reach.

“Ugh, I feel gross after the flight. I’m going to take a quick shower.”

Kurt climbs out of bed and makes his way to the master bathroom. There are large gray slate tiles on the walls, a huge sunken tub, and a shower stall that could easily fit four people. Two pink princess electric toothbrushes are on the marble counter with double sinks. When the water temperature is just right, Kurt enters the shower stall, and smiles when he sees all his favorite products lined up next to Blaine’s. After shampooing and conditioning his hair, Kurt squeezes some body wash on the loofah and scrubs his body. Just when he finishes rinsing off, he feels the press of Blaine’s chest against his back.

“You smell delicious,” Blaine murmurs.

“I think it’s your turn now.”

Kurt pours body wash on the loofah and gently moves it over Blaine’s body. Kurt giggles when he bends down to wash Blaine’s legs and Blaine’s cock almost poking him in the eye because it’s jutting out. If Kurt wants to suck off Blaine in the bathroom, it’s nobody’s business but their own. But Kurt wants something different – he wants to feel Blaine inside him.

When Kurt stands up, Blaine pulls him into a searing kiss. “You can’t bend over like that and show off your ass unless you plan to use it.”
“I have every intention of using it, but not in the shower.”

Blaine switches off the shower jets, quickly leaves the stall and dries off. He opens the spare towel wide between his hands and thoroughly dries Kurt.

“Go wait for me in the bedroom,” Kurt says with a soft smile.

Kurt represses his laughter as Blaine sprints to the bedroom, obviously eager and excited. Kurt takes his time brushing his teeth and combing his hair, before joining him. Blaine is lying on his side, propped up on one elbow. Blaine’s hair is wild and his eyes are sparkling, and Kurt gets butterflies in his stomach because he knows that Blaine’s eyes sparkle just for him. Kurt rakes his eyes over Blaine’s body – it’s compact but perfectly formed, from his tiny waist to his strong muscular legs.

Kurt drops the towel he’d slung around his waist, slowly walks towards the bed and joins Blaine, who immediately rolls him on his back and lies on top of him.

“You’re too sexy for your own damn good. I want to kiss you all over,” Blaine says in a low husky voice.

Kurt can feel Blaine’s body weight and heat on top of him, and it makes him feel cocooned in Blaine’s love. Blaine scrapes his teeth along Kurt’s neck and zooms in on that place near his collarbone that he discovered in LA. Kurt’s body goes all tingly, and his cock is now fully erect.

“Tell me what you want, Kurt. Tell me what you need.”

“I want you inside me. I want to feel you.”

“God, I want that too.”

Blaine gets lube and a condom from the night table and then takes a pillow to put it under Kurt’s hips. He scooches down the bed and starts kissing Kurt’s inner thigh. Kurt loves the feel of Blaine’s whiskers, sometimes feeling soft and other times feeling scratchy. Kurt is so caught up in the sensation that he’s surprised when he feels Blaine’s finger start to make its way inside him.

“Relax, honey. It will feel strange at first, but then it’s gonna feel really good.”

Kurt wills himself to relax whilst Blaine’s finger fully makes its way inside him. It doesn’t feel good or bad – it just feels weird. Blaine covers Kurt’s cock with his mouth, hollows his cheeks and starts bobbing, with his finger pushing in and out and twisting. Kurt feels a heat spread through his body because it’s starting to feel so damn good.

“Another finger,” Kurt demands.

Kurt feels another finger move inside him slowly. The extra intrusion burns a little, but feels amazing nonetheless. When Blaine rubs his fingertips over his prostrate, Kurt’s hips thrust up and his cock hits the back of Blaine’s throat.

“Another!” Kurt orders.

Blaine hums around his cock, and the vibrations give Kurt a whole new sensation. When Blaine finally gives him the third finger, he gently starts twisting and scissoring Kurt. As sweet as it is that Blaine is going so slowly and carefully, Kurt wants more – harder – faster. Kurt pushes back on
Blaine’s fingers, hoping that he gets the idea. Kurt is setting the pace with every movement—
pushing down on the fingers, then thrusting up into Blaine’s mouth.

“I want your cock inside me right now!”

Blaine slowly releases Kurt’s cock from his mouth. “I want to make sure that you’re fully prepped so
that I don’t hurt you.”

Not able to wait another second longer, Kurt flips Blaine over and straddles him, leading to a
surprised ‘Oompf’. Kurt quickly strokes Blaine’s cock until it’s jutting out, picks up the condom and
rips it open with his teeth. Kurt carefully rolls the condom onto Blaine’s cock and lubes it up.

“I’m gonna ride your big fucking cock.”

“It’s going to be a lot of work for you. Are you sure?”

“You’re not the only one with powerful thighs,” Kurt smirks.

Kurt angles himself over Blaine and uses his hand to guide Blaine’s cock to the right spot. Kurt
reminds himself to breathe as he slowly guides Blaine’s cock inside him. Kurt can feel the burn, but
he loves the sensation, and when Blaine bottoms out, he feels so full.

“Jesus, Kurt. You’re so tight, so hot. Give me a second, otherwise I’m going to cum just looking at
you.”

After thirty seconds, Kurt runs out of patience. He slowly raises his body until Blaine’s cock almost
slips out, then drops back down. He presses against Blaine’s chest for additional leverage and then
rolls his hips so that he can feel Blaine’s cock all inside him.

“Yeah… Work those hips… ggh… Feels… fucking good,” Blaine moans.

Kurt sets the pace quicker, and Blaine thrusts up so that Kurt can feel Blaine’s cock even deeper.
Kurt adjusts the angle until Blaine’s cock hits his prostrate.

“Harder, Blaine. I wanna feel you. Keep hitting that spot.”

Their eyes meet as Kurt looks down at Blaine, who’s in the throes of pleasure - his legs are
trembling, he’s erratically thrusting, and he’s moaning.

“Kurt…. Oh, god…. You’re so hot… I’m…. I’m gonna…. Fuck… KURT!”

When Kurt sees Blaine climax, he pushes down one last time, feeling the orgasm rip through his
body. Spurts of thick white cum cover Blaine’s chest while Blaine keeps thrusting up to chase every
last bit of pleasure.

Kurt leans forward, puts his weight on his hands, and waits for his breath to even out. When Kurt
looks up, he sees Blaine with closed eyes, drool to the side of his mouth, sweaty curls, and a dopey
smile on his face. Kurt’s not sure which look he likes better – Blaine in the throes of having an
orgasm or Blaine fully sated and happy.

Kurt pulls off Blaine and takes care of the condom. He quietly goes to the bathroom to clean himself
up. He then prepares a warm wet washcloth for Blaine, returns to the bedroom and cleans his cum
off of Blaine’s chest. When he lies down on the bed on his side, Blaine turns to face him.

“Wow. You’re really something, Kurt. The way you took control…”

“I’m sorry. You were going so carefully and slowly. I was going crazy wanting you inside me. I couldn’t wait a second longer.”

“Don’t apologize. It was hot!”

“I’m sure you had something different in mind.”

“I love you so much. I want to try everything and anything on either of our minds with you.”

Kurt smiles at Blaine. He definitely likes the thought of that.

“Also…” Blaine waggles his eyebrows at Kurt suggestively. “Now that I know that you like it a little rough and fast, next time I’m going fuck you hard into the mattress… or maybe the dining room table.”

“God, don’t says things like that. My cock is definitely interested, but I can’t cope right now. I’m totally spent,” Kurt groans.

Kurt can see the smug look on Blaine’s face. After doing his best to kiss it off, Kurt rests his head on Blaine’s chest, listening to the steady heartbeat. Kurt wonders why it took him so long to leave Lima and come back to New York City to be with Blaine.

“Can I ask you something?”

“Anything, my love,” Blaine replies.

“Why did you do it? Model for the cover of Vogue, agree to an interview as the feature article and then go on The Ellen Show? Don’t get me wrong – I loved it – but I thought that it was up to me to make the first move and return to New York City.”

Blaine rolls onto his side and sighs.

“I felt so vulnerable when you were in Lima, particularly when you were so angry about that photo of Sebastian and me. I respected that you needed time to figure out your future, but the longer you stayed in Lima, the more I was afraid that you wouldn’t come back to me.”

“I was always going to come back to you,” Kurt interrupts.

“But I didn’t know that. You’re the first person who has loved me for who I really am. I didn’t want to lose you, so I planned a big romantic gesture to tip the scale in my favor.”

“You’re such a wonderful person, Blaine. I can’t believe that there haven’t been other men who saw that before I did.”

“It’s been like that all my life. When I transferred to Dalton Academy, I quickly joined the Warblers glee club. We were like rock stars at school, and I was the lead soloist. For the first time in my life, I was around other gay boys who wanted me. But I soon realized what they really wanted was the bragging rights to say they made out with Blaine Anderson. And then there was Sebastian, who was
always propositioning me and made lewd remarks about my ass. It was then that I realized that who I am deep inside doesn’t matter to others.”

“Oh, but you do! You matter to so many people – friends, family, Vogue staff, and the Monarch Foundation.”

Kurt cups Blaine’s face in his hand and slowly strokes his thumb along Blaine’s cheek. Blaine closes his eyes and Kurt can hear Blaine purr.

“Blaine, you matter to me very much. Besides my dad, you are the most important person in my life. You are a truly beautiful man.”

Their lips press together softly. The kiss has none of the earlier heat and passion, but it’s full of love and promise. Kurt’s stomach grumbles loudly, and he looks at Blaine sheepishly.

“I haven’t eaten since a quick breakfast at the airport.”

“How do omelets sound?” Blaine asks.

Blaine pulls on a T-shirt and some shorts while Kurt rummages in a suitcase to find something casual to wear. When they enter the kitchen, Blaine takes the ingredients they need out of the fridge. They work in silence, Kurt dicing the bell peppers and ham, and Blaine whisking the eggs and shredding the cheese. While Blaine heats the skillet on the stovetop and cooks the omelets, Kurt prepares a pot of coffee. When Blaine transfers the last omelet to a plate, Kurt gets the silverware, napkins and coffee mugs ready on a tray. Kurt loves how they work together, intuitively knowing what needs to be done and how to divide the tasks.

“Can we eat up on the rooftop?” Kurt asks.

“Great idea. Let me go get the key.”

They climb up the stairs to the rooftop and Blaine gets the cushions out for the sectional so that they’re comfy. As soon as he’s scarfed down his omelet and drunk a mug of coffee, Kurt feels much better. He scooches along to the end of the sectional, pulling his feet up, to watch the sunset.

“Kurt, we need to talk about things – about what happened at the end of your LA visit and also about our future.”

When Kurt nods, Blaine continues, “That photo of me and Sebastian in my wallet…”

Kurt interrupts, “I understand everything now. I’m sorry I jumped to conclusions and overreacted. I felt so overwhelmed at the time.”

“The thing is, there are going to be lots of things happening in the future – our future – that won’t initially make sense. You know how the media twists things to sell photos or stories. You can’t keep running away each time. I can’t tell you how upset I was when you switched to Elle and cut off all communication.”

“I was upset too! I couldn’t work at Vogue anymore…. Not with that video on the Internet,” Kurt cries out.

“I wasn’t upset that you switched to Elle. Believe it or not, I understood why you made that decision.
No, I was upset because you didn’t want me to be part of your life. And when your dad told me that you moved to Paris, I thought I had lost you forever.”

Blaine wipes a tear trickling down his face. “You’ve got to let me know - talk to me – when something’s not right. I can’t live my life worried that you’ll leave me at the first sign of trouble.”

“You have to be honest with me too, Blaine. You didn’t tell me about your true relationship with Sam. That hurts.”

“You’re right. I haven’t been the innocent victim in the past, and I made a really poor decision to not tell you about Sam. I’m not perfect by any means.”

Blaine places his palms over his eyes and Kurt hears the little sniffles.

“Hey, come here,” Kurt says, with his arms open. Blaine scooches across the sectional and lies against Kurt’s chest.

“You’re imperfectly perfect to me. I’m very committed to you – to us - and we’ll find a way to make this work. I’ll find some way to tell you when there’s something wrong and I’m feeling overwhelmed,” Kurt reassures Blaine.

“Spider.”

“Spider? I don’t see any spiders, Blaine.”

If you’re upset but don’t know what you feel or how to express it, just say ‘spider’. Then I’ll know that something is wrong. We’ll make the time to talk about it, before it escalates into a huge problem.”

“I think that might work. Why don’t we try it out? If we do this, I want you to say ‘spider’ too when something’s wrong. As a matter of interest, why ‘spider’?”

“It’s a natural enemy of the butterfly.”

*****

Kurt wakes up earlier than Blaine the next morning. After a visit to the bathroom, he grabs two mugs of coffee from the kitchen and returns to bed with his tablet. Kurt feels as if he’s been in a wonderful bubble since the Vogue issue was delivered to him in Lima, and he’s lost touch with what’s happening in the world. After checking his e-mails, he switches to Twitter and smiles when he sees that #ButterflyWings and #BlaineAnderson are trending. Leave it to Blaine to trend after singing a song on The Ellen Show. He clicks on #ButterflyWings and his mouth drops open as he reads the first tweets.

“Blaine, wake up! Wake up! You have to see this!”

“Mmm… I was having a good dream about you. What’s going on, Kurt? Is there a fire somewhere?”

Blaine asks in a rough morning voice.

“Butterfly Wings is topping the sales chart on iTunes, Amazon, Spotify, eMusic, and BeatsMusic. It’s made history as the fastest song to reach number one after its release.”
“Oh my god. Connor said he would organize for ‘Butterfly Wings’ to be sold online. I didn’t realize that it would happen so fast.”

“Connor? He’s still part of your life?” Kurt asks, arching one eyebrow.

“It’s not like that, Kurt. You know my heart belongs to you only. Connor called me while I was on the way to the airport and suggested I sell downloads of ‘Butterfly Wings’ right away because there was such a high demand. He’s working with an entertainment lawyer to make it happen. I need to call him today to find out what the arrangements are.”

“That’s a lot of trust you have in Connor,” Kurt observes.

“Yes, I do trust Connor. He’s a good man and has my best interests at heart. I think we’ll always be friends, and I think that you’ll like him too.”

Blaine takes the day off and they spend it in the penthouse, watching trashy TV programs in bed. In reality, the TV is on, but it’s just background noise for their make-out sessions. They go to the building’s gym in the afternoon, but quickly return home, when Kurt starts licking the sweat off of Blaine’s neck.

Amy is conveniently spending the day way from the penthouse, running errands, but insists on preparing them a proper dinner. When she comes to the dining room to clear the plates, Blaine is in Kurt’s lap, his mouth open like a baby bird, while Kurt feeds him large juicy strawberries.

“You two are so adorable together. I’m really happy that you’re here, Kurt,” Amy remarks when she sees them.

“I’m happy too,” Kurt replies with a dopey grin on his face.

“Are you going to work tomorrow, Mr. A?”

“Yeah, I’ve got to, but I’ll be home for dinner,” Blaine sighs with regret in his voice.

“And you, Kurt?” Amy asks.

“I’ve got a lot of things to sort out during the day, but I’ll be back in the afternoon. So count me in for dinner.”

“Shall I unpack your things tomorrow? I can make room in Mr. A’s closet and chest of drawers.”

“Umm… I’m not sure. Can I get back to you on that?”

Kurt knows that they haven’t had the discussion about how their future in New York City will unfold – if they’ll live together or if Kurt will find his own apartment. How fast or slow they should take their relationship. What Kurt will do now that he’s in New York City. Kurt feels overwhelmed with so many things that need to be sorted out.

When Amy returns to the kitchen, Kurt looks into Blaine’s eyes, and calmly says “Spider”.

Blaine weakly smiles and nods. “You ready to talk about it, or do you want some space?”

“I really want to tell you what’s going on in my mind, but it’s still a mess, so it might not come out
right. But, yeah, we need to talk about it.”

“God, Kurt. Do you know happy it makes me to hear that? Not that you’re confused, but that you want to talk about it.”

“Hey, I’m a fast learner,” Kurt giggles.

They move to the living room and get comfortable on the couch. Blaine sits on one end and Kurt lies down, placing his head on Blaine’s lap. As Blaine cards his fingers through Kurt’s hair, Kurt takes a deep breath.

“We haven’t really talked about the future, what’s going to happen tomorrow… or next week… or next year,” Kurt calmly points out.

“Now that I have you here, I don’t want to let you go. I want to share my life with you, Kurt. I want you to live with me, and I want us to get married and raise a family together. All I want – all I’ve ever wanted – is to spend my life loving you.”

“Wow. Right. Uhm… I want that too, eventually. But honestly, Blaine, right now, that feels overwhelming. I turned twenty years old last week. I don’t know what I want to do with my life and how it’s going to blend in with your career. I want to be my own man – an equal partner. I need the time to figure things out for myself, so we need to take things slowly.”

Blaine continues to stroke Kurt’s hair as he tilts his head back against the couch. Kurt patiently waits for Blaine to process his concerns. Kurt feels better now that he has told Blaine how he feels, but isn’t sure he’ll like the reply.

“When I’m with you, I forget that you’re ten years younger than me. When I was your age, I felt the exact same way - I wasn’t sure what my future would hold. So I understand your need to take things slowly.”

“My dad gave me some really great advice last week. When something feels so big that you don’t know where to start, it’s best to break it down into smaller pieces.”

“Starting with talking about what’s going to happen tomorrow when real life kicks in?” Blaine asks.

“Yeah, real life,” Kurt chuckles. “I want to go back to school and study fashion design. I loved the creative side of things when I worked for Christophe Bellerose. When I was in Lima, I did a lot of research and submitted applications to Parsons, FIT, and Pratt.”

“Those schools are all in New York City,” Blaine observes.

“Yes, they are. I told you I want to be with you.”

“So you’ll live with me?” Blaine asks with a hopeful tone in his voice.

“I’m not sure… A lot will depend upon the media attention that we get. There’s still paps out on the street.”

“Amy told me it’s now down to three people.”

“It is for now, but what will happen when they find out we’re together? I don’t want to live my life
in a fishbowl, wondering what photos will be posted online and what people will say.”

“Do you want to keep our relationship a secret, Kurt?”

“No, I really don’t. I’m proud that you’re my boyfriend and I want everyone to know that you are mine… and no longer available. But I don’t want to hide under a blanket every time I enter the building. It’s not who I am.”

“I don’t want to hide you away either. I’ve already announced to the world that I’m in love and I want people to know that you are the special person in my life. How about we just do things as normal but avoid the big events. When our relationship leaks out, we’ll figure out what to do then. We’ll have a better idea of what we’re dealing with.”

“Okay, but I want to make one thing perfectly clear. I will not go to every high-profile event that you attend for work. I want to stay out of the spotlight.”

“I can respect that. I’ll take Isabelle with me instead. She’ll get to network with more people and no-one will think we’re together.”

Kurt smiles and nods, happy with that solution.

“So, the living arrangements?” Blaine tentatively asks.

“How about I stay here for the summer before starting school in September. Let’s take a vacation during the last week of August. We can take a step back and look at the situation… honestly. We can talk about how things are going, weigh the pros and cons, and make sure living together is the absolutely best thing for our relationship.”

“That sounds like an excellent idea. When did you get so smart?”

“Since I listened to my dad. So, we’re good?” Kurt asks.

“Umm…”

“Tell me, Blaine. I want you to be 100% honest about your feelings.”

“Okay. This is hard, but I need to be honest with you too. I’ll go at any pace that you want and respect any decision you make about whether you’ll live with me or not when you start school in September. But I need to know that we’re both working towards the same goal. Once you start studying fashion design, you’ll have a brand new life, with brand new friends… And how will I fit into that? I’m so afraid that we’ll grow apart. That you won’t want to be with me anymore. You’re the love of my life, Kurt. I want to be your forever.”

“I promise you’re not going to lose me. If we’re going to be in this forever, we’ll need to do lots of things by ourselves, and they will make each of us a better-rounded person. But we’re in this together, and I have the same long-term dreams as you. We’ll make decisions together about what is right for us and our future.”

Kurt wraps his arms around Blaine and hugs him tightly. “I love you so much.”

“I love you too.”
Two weeks later

Kurt holds Blaine’s hand as they exit the New York City Library in Bryant Park. Kurt has organized a two-part date night and they have just seen the Library’s Hamilton Exhibit.

Blaine is positively glowing. “I can’t believe that we just saw the Hamilton exhibit together. You’d never believe this, but I was planning to take you next weekend as a surprise.”

“It just goes to show that great minds think alike.”

“Now I’ll have to find something else on my bucket list to do with you,” Blaine pouts.

“Our bucket list, Blaine. There are so many things I want to do with you.”

They find the Mercedes-Benz parked nearby, and once they slide onto the back seat, Bentley pulls away from the curb for their next destination. Kurt is relieved that the paparazzi now leave them alone. Blaine is kissing along Kurt’s neck, and when he gets to Kurt’s pleasure spot and starts nibbling, Kurt pulls Blaine off.

“You can do that all you like, but I’m not telling,” Kurt sing-songs.

Blaine gives Kurt big puppy dog eyes. “Pleasse?”

“Come on, Blaine, you always like my surprises.”

Bentley pulls the car to the curb on Hudson Street, in New York City’s meatpacking district. Blaine becomes excited when he sees the sign for Pizzetteria Brunetti.

“I’ve heard their pizza is to die for. How did you know it’s on my bucket list?” Blaine asks.

“I didn’t know – I must be psychic or something. But I do know that you love Neapolitan-style pizza, and Brunetti’s has really good reviews on the Internet.”

A waiter leads them through the restaurant to a table in the outside patio area. Once they’ve placed their order for pizzas and salad, Kurt can hardly contain his news anymore.

“What’s up? I can see you bouncing in your seat,” Blaine asks.

“You are now looking at FIT’s newest fashion design student. I got accepted!”

Blaine jumps up and pulls Kurt up from his chair to give him a hug. “That’s excellent news! I’m so proud of you. When do you start?”

“I’m starting on Monday. I decided to take two summer courses that will finish at the end of July. That will still leave August to prepare for a full-course load in the autumn and for us to take the vacation and sort things out.”

“What courses will you be taking?”
“Most courses are already filled, but there are two that sound interesting. One is Intro to CAD Software for Fashion Designers. If I really want to be in design, I’ll need to learn how to use the tools of the trade. The second course is more fun – Intro to Jewelry Fabrication.”

“Wow, that jewelry course sounds right up your alley. You’ve always had a flair with brooches and accessories. What does it cover?”

Pizzas are delivered to their table, and they talk about course syllabuses, trends in jewelry designs, and which new computer Kurt should buy. Kurt loves that Blaine seems so genuinely interested and supportive of the new direction his life has taken. For the first time, Kurt feels like a strong independent man.

They make plans for Sunday that include attending the outdoor performance of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* that is part of the ‘Shakespeare in the Park’ series. The conversation moves on to their bucket lists and events that are happening during August in New York City. While Blaine is engaged in the conversation, Kurt can see a distant look in Blaine’s eyes.

“You’re here with me, but your mind is elsewhere,” Kurt observes.

Blaine puts down his slice of pizza and gives Kurt an apologetic smile.

“What are you thinking about, Blaine?”

“I think you could do anything that you put your mind to. I really admire how you have taken the time to figure out which direction you want your life to go, and you’re making it happen. I’m so proud to be your boyfriend.”

Blaine’s words make Kurt feel warm inside. Although Kurt enjoys the compliment, it doesn’t fully explain Blaine’s melancholy expression.

“You always know what to say, but why do I think there’s something else going on inside your mind?” Kurt probes.

Blaine lowers his head and remains silent.

“Blaine, look at me. We promised we would be honest with each other, to tell each other how we feel.”

“You’re right, Kurt. It’s just…. I’m pretty jealous of you right now. I wish I was ten years younger and making choices about what I should study and what I should be doing. I didn’t really think through what I wanted to do after I was accepted at Harvard.”

“It’s not too late, Blaine. God, you’re only 29 years old. You can do anything you want to.”

“Perhaps. So… I’ve been looking into Mediterranean cruises in August,” Blaine remarks.

Kurt notices how quickly Blaine has changed the subject. It’s something they should talk about, but he appreciates that a pizzeria in the meatpacking district might not be the right place, so he goes with it.

“Blaine, as nice at that sounds, I’m thinking of a vacation where we can spend time together without too many distractions. Leave it to me – I already have an idea.”
“What are you thinking?”

“I know how much you like surprises, Blaine. My lips are sealed.”

Kurt can feel Blaine’s foot rub up his leg.

“Even if Nightbird makes an appearance tonight and the evil Dr. Porcelain has his wicked way with him?” Blaine says in a low raspy voice, waggling his eyebrows.

Kurt waves, snapping his fingers wildly, to catch the waiter’s attention for the bill.

*****

Blaine is lying in the bubble bath with his back pressed against Kurt’s chest. It’s become their favorite place to relax and talk about things.

“The things that come out of Nightbird’s mouth are filthy and sinful. Maybe next time, he should be gagged.”

“What do you expect when Nightbird is tied to the bed. The things Dr. Porcelain can do with his hips…”

Kurt can feel his cock twitch thinking of other ways to get Nightbird to fall apart in his bed. Sex with Blaine is hotter than any high school fantasy he had back in Lima.

“I love having sex with you, Kurt. I feel safe enough to let go, and open up to experience new things.”

Kurt tightly squeezes Blaine in his arms, and gives him a lingering kiss on the shoulder.

Blaine carries on talking. “It’s hard to explain. I’ve never before had this sort of relationship with anybody. When I’m with you, it’s like there’s a whole different version – a better version - of me. I have so many dreams, I feel as if I could do anything.”

“But you can do anything, Blaine. Life isn’t limited to dreams that you had when you were a teenager. Heck, if I still had that Broadway dream, I would still be stuck as a waiter at the Starlight Diner. Since I moved to New York City, life’s been full of little twists and turns, and honestly, Blaine, that’s half the fun. The real secret is taking the risk to explore new opportunities.”

“And you’ve done that so well, Kurt. It’s what makes you so strong.”

“Blaine, have you ever considered revisiting that dream of a music career? ‘Butterfly Wings’ has been on the iTunes bestseller list for weeks, and Tina’s told me that there are so many music labels wanting to meet with you.”

“God, it’s bad enough having paps and fans follow me around for being Vogue’s editor-in-chief. Can you imagine how awful life would be with even more media attention? I really don’t want that.”

“A music career doesn’t have to be about singing, doing tours, and putting yourself out there. You can have new dreams about what how you want your music career to go. You could work behind the scenes, songwriting or even producing.”
“But I have a job, responsibilities…”

“Your number one responsibility is to take care of your own needs. Of course, mine are a very close second,” Kurt giggles. “Look, Blaine, I know that it can feel overwhelming. I’ve been there myself plenty of times. I have to tell you that once I was so scared of trying out a new opportunity, I nearly backed out. But then there was a wise man who gave me one word of advice.”

“One word?” Blaine asks.

“Yep. And do you know what that word is?”

When Blaine shakes his head, Kurt continues.

“Courage.”

Chapter End Notes

Bentley’s ringtone – ‘He’s a Tramp’ from Lady and the Tramp

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. Please check out here all the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics.

I’ve posted my thoughts about this chapter while I was writing it over at Tumblr.

Next up: The August vacation. Heads up – there are two chapters and an epilogue to go.
The August Vacation - part 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“The success of Yoga does not lie in the ability to perform postures but in how it positively changes the way we live our life and our relationships.” - T.K.V. Desikachar

August

Blaine enters the penthouse early in the morning and sets down his carry-on suitcase. It was a hectic three-day trip, but it was so totally worth it. Kurt has been really busy with his summer courses, spending every free moment at the FIT jewelry workshop. Instead of sitting home and feeling sorry for himself, Blaine had decided to fly to LA while Kurt finished the final coursework.

“Is that you, Blaine?” he hears Kurt calling out. Soon he has an armful of Kurt, who wraps his legs around Blaine’s waist.

“Good morning, my love. God, I missed you so much,” Blaine murmurs, kissing Kurt and holding onto him tightly. If this is the welcome home he gets, then Blaine thinks he might have to take a few more short trips away.

“I’m so happy you’re home. I missed you too. Let’s have breakfast and you can tell me all about your trip.”

Within minutes, Amy has the table laden with blueberry pancakes, bacon, fresh fruit salad, freshly pressed orange juice, and a pot of coffee.

“All my favorite foods! You spoil me, Amy,” Blaine declares, starving after the red-eye flight he has taken.

“Kurt isn’t the only one who misses you when you’re away, Mr. A. Unless you need anything else, I’m off to the Greenmarket over in Brooklyn. I hear this season’s Georgia peaches are in. I won’t be back until 1 p.m.”

When Amy has left the penthouse, Kurt bursts out into laughter.

“What’s so funny?” Blaine asks.

“The Greenmarket isn’t open today, and I spotted a boxful of peaches in the laundry area last night. Amy is making herself scarce to give us some alone time. Now, tell me all about the trip.”

“Sam and Mercedes are doing fine, although they haven’t had much sleep since the baby was born. I insisted on doing all the middle-of-the-night feeds. Monica is so gorgeous and sweet that I almost packed her into my suitcase to bring her home with me. I swear she smiled at me, but Mercedes insisted that it’s too early for that.”

Blaine hands over his tablet so that Kurt can see the hundreds of photos taken over the three-day trip. Most of them show Blaine positively glowing with a baby in his arms.
“Did you finish your end-of-term projects?”

“I handed them in yesterday afternoon. I’m rather proud of the jewelry designs.”

“You’ll have to show me later, maybe after 1 p.m.? I can think of a few other ways to spend the next four hours before Amy returns,” Blaine whispers hotly into Kurt’s ear.

*****

Blaine enters Le Bernardin, and the maitre d’ whisks him off to a table in the center of the restaurant, where Sebastian is waiting for him.

“Sebastian, good to see you. I can’t believe you managed to book a table here at such short notice.”

“You’re not the only one who has connections. When I told them that my guest would be Blaine Anderson, they practically wetted themselves thinking of the publicity that the restaurant would get with us dining together.”

“I guess that explains the high-profile table,” Blaine chuckles.

They select their seafood courses from the prix-fixe menu, and two glasses of Krug champagne that Sebastian had ordered earlier are poured.

“I’m surprised that Tickle-Me-Doughface let you join me for lunch,” Sebastian smirks.

“Do not call Kurt that,” Blaine growls. “If you’re just going to throw insults at us, I’m leaving.”

“Okay, simmer down. I didn’t think that would hit a nerve.”

“Well, it did. Treat my boyfriend with respect. So why did you invite me to lunch, Sebastian?”

“I read the interview that was in Vogue’s June issue. Frankly, what you said about us surprised me.”

“I thought it would. You see, Sebastian, in a weird way, I think you bring out the best in me at work. I know how smart you are, I know how you operate and I try to keep up. It focuses me to make Vogue the top-selling magazine.”

“It’s working. Elle’s circulation numbers are down since Kurt left. Maybe if I pretend to be your friend, you’ll take the eye off the ball,” Sebastian snorts.

“I’m tired of playing games with you, Sebastian. I don’t think there are any winners in the end – just other people like Chandler and Kurt that get hurt by our tactics. Let’s call a truce.”

“I can’t promise that, Blaine. After all, my number one goal is to have Elle on top. What I can promise you, though, is that I’ll make it less personal. Believe it or not, Blaine, I admire you as well.”

The first course of raw oysters is served, and they eat and chat about the Monarch Foundation.

“I really appreciate your generous donation, Sebastian. We’re using the money to buy a property in Defiance, Ohio.”
Sebastian laughs. “I love that my money will be used for a Monarch House in a town called Defiance. It pretty much sums me up, particularly when I was a teenager.”

“I can’t imagine what you got up to in Paris, before attending Dalton,” Blaine remarks cautiously, not sure where this conversation is heading.

“Oh, it started way earlier than that, Blainey. The summer before starting high school, my father got me a job at the State Attorney’s mailroom. There was a really hot college intern who started hitting on me, and we messed around. One lunchtime, the state attorney general himself caught us in the mailroom - I was fucking the intern’s brains out. Later, the intern claimed I was raping him and he wasn’t gay.”

“You were the one underage, not him. What he did… It’s called statutory rape!” Blaine exclaims.

“I wasn’t in the position to argue finer legal points with the state attorney general, was I? The way he and my father saw it, I was the aggressor, because I was topping. To make matters worse, I hadn’t come out to anyone! The state attorney general conveniently found a one-year position in Paris for my father at the Bureau du Procureur. The next week, we were on the plane.”

“That sounds awful. I can’t imagine going through that at fourteen years old.”

“My parents said I was a disgrace to the Smythe name and enrolled me in a French boarding school. I decided right then that I couldn’t ever depend on anyone but myself. At school, the French boys were attracted to the new American boy, and I fucked them all – it made me feel powerful. Once the gossip calmed down, we returned to Ohio, and I was enrolled at Dalton.”

“Wow. I didn’t know, Sebastian.”

“I think it would really have helped if there had been a place like the Monarch House I could go to that summer when I worked in the mailroom. I think I would have come out to my family before the scandal happened, and I would have known what to expect when it came to sex.”

The main course of Dover sole is presented, and the conversation turns light and breezy, remembering Warbler antics and updating each other with news in their lives. When they’ve finished their meal and walk out of the restaurant, there are dozens of paparazzi taking photos of them.

Sebastian and Blaine smile for the cameras and joke about their friendly rivalry. When Sebastian goes to shake Blaine’s hand, Blaine pulls him in for a one-armed hug, and the paps go wild, because it’s the exact same pose as the photo taken during their Dalton years that was featured in Vogue.

Once Blaine sets off in a separate direction from Sebastian and turns the corner, he whips out his phone and sends Kurt a text. Lunch with Seb went great. Paps swamped us at the end. We posed for pictures.

Blaine certainly doesn’t want Kurt to misinterpret the photos that are probably already on Twitter. Blaine realizes how far they have come in such a short time when he reads Kurt’s reply.

Yeah, I’ve seen them. You are so much hotter than Seb ;). Fans think Klaine rules over Seblaine. I do too! K xx.

Weeks ago, the paparazzi discovered that Kurt was his boyfriend, when he left Blaine’s apartment building one early morning to go to class. Initially, there was a media frenzy, and Blaine had insisted
that Bentley drive Kurt to and from FIT. Once the media realized that he and Kurt did everyday things – and didn’t have public sex in nightclubs - they soon got bored of following them and turned their attention to an actor who insisted he was straight, but acted like a tart at gay clubs.

Blaine checks his watch, and it’s 2:30 p.m. There’s nothing pressing at work, so he decides to go home and start the weekend early. Kurt is spending the day browsing the vintage jewelry and antique shops in the Village to get inspiration for future designs.

When Blaine enters the penthouse, he immediately goes into the kitchen to let Amy know that he’s home. He can’t find her, but notices her laptop open on the kitchen counter. Amy uses it to find new recipes on the Internet. Blaine walks over to the computer to see what’s on the menu for tonight. However, Blaine notices that instead of a recipe, a Word document is open.

Kevin licks his lips when he sees Brian’s hands and feet tied to the bed, spread out for before him. Brian is in for a very long night, and if he’s lucky, Kevin will let him cum. Kevin pulls out the large chest from the closet and slowly opens it. He can sense that Brian is watching every move that he makes. Kevin bends over, making sure to show off his ass, and takes out a blindfold, gag, and leather restraints. It’s going to be a long night of pleasure and pain. Brian whimpers when he sees…

Blaine doesn’t recall an e-mail notification that KrianFeels has updated the Breakout fic, and then it dawns on him.

“Blaine! I wasn’t expecting you home so early. Is everything all right?” Amy asks as she walks into the kitchen.

“You’re KrianFeels!”

Amy blushes profusely and grabs the laptop to snap it shut.

“All this time, you knew that Sam and I read KrianFeels’ stories. And it was you! How did you even…?”

Amy sighs. “I guess I should start at the beginning. When you and Sam started reading Breakout fics, I went on the Internet to check them out for myself. I thought they were pretty lame – way too romantic and fluffy for my liking. Then I created a username and went on to Tumblr and discovered the kink meme board - that was a real eye opener. I decided I could do a much better job of it, so I started writing fic. You and Sam loved the stories so much that I kept on writing.”

“How do you even know about these things? You’re not even gay!”

“Hey, you don’t need to be a murderer to be a mystery writer. I research on the Internet, chat online with Tumblr friends, and I read stuff. I might be middle-aged, but that doesn’t mean I don’t have a creative and active imagination.”

“This is a whole different side to you that I didn’t know existed,” Blaine laughs, shaking his head.

“Don’t tell Sam, Mr. A.! Let me have my fun. He’s my number one reviewer and I love reading his reactions. I try to fill every prompt that he gives me.”

“Oh. My. God. You’re JiffyFeels too!”

“The one and only. Now if you excuse me, I need to go into the other room and die of
embarrassment.”

“Don’t do that, Amy. Actually, I think it’s pretty hilarious. Sam and I have always assumed that KrianFeels was a gay man. It’s not going to affect anything between us. I promise I won’t mention it to Sam. Take the afternoon off and go finish that chapter.”

Amy gathers her things and waits in the private lobby for the elevator. Blaine pokes his head out the main door and says, “Amy, one more thing. For god’s sake, let Brian cum. He’s been waiting for weeks.”

Blaine goes to the piano and starts his warm-up exercises, chuckling at the image of Amy hunched over her computer at night writing gay smut for his and Sam’s enjoyment. A little tune comes into his head, and soon Blaine is working on the chorus.

Well surprise, surprise, surprise
Yeah surprise, surprise, surprise
Well surprise, surprise, come on open your eyes
And let your love shine down

Blaine stops when he realizes that he’s started to compose a new song. Yesterday’s meeting at SONY records with Marley Rose and Connor was a real eye opener. When the SONY executives realized that Blaine composed the music for Marley Rose’s ‘All or Nothing’, they offered him a recording contract on the spot. Connor had predicted this, and so Blaine was prepared.

Blaine informed the SONY executives that he didn’t want a solo career as a musician. He was more interested in songwriting and eventually producing for other artists. He agreed to work with Marley Rose on her solo album, providing songs and back-up vocals where needed. However, no-one was to know that this was Blaine’s work - he would use a pseudonym. In addition, SONY would need to donate 1% of the sale proceeds to the Monarch Foundation.

The SONY executives reluctantly agreed to Blaine’s terms. While they wanted Blaine to front his own songs, they quickly realized that Blaine would not compromise on the matter.

Blaine wonders how he’ll find the time to work on new songs, join Marley Rose in the recording studio, run Vogue, and spend time with Kurt. He decides to put this dilemma on the backburner until he and Kurt have their holiday together soon.

*****

After messing around on the piano, Blaine takes a long hot shower and then lies down on the bed to cool off before getting dressed. His body’s feeling loose and relaxed, and he lets his fingers brush down his chest. The latest installment of Amy’s has him wondering what he and Kurt might put in a toy chest. There’s so many possibilities, so many combinations, so many ways they can make each other feel good.

Blaine picks up his phone and sends Kurt a text. *Came home early. I gave Amy the rest of the day off. I’m lonely, so hurry back ;) – B xx*

Blaine thinks of Kurt’s body – the taut muscles of his chest, the biceps, the endless legs, the wide expanse of creamy soft skin. Blaine hugs Kurt’s pillow to breathe in the scent. Blaine imagines how
Kurt’s cock feels and tastes in his mouth. God, if Kurt doesn’t get home soon he’s going to explode.

Blaine eagerly grabs his phone when he hears a new notification ping. *On my way home, lover boy. I’ll see you in 15 min. K xxx*

Blaine is horny and wants sex as soon as Kurt walks into the penthouse. But pouncing on his boyfriend and fucking him against the wall probably isn’t a smooth move, so Blaine comes up with another idea.

*****

When Kurt enters the penthouse, Blaine’s yoga playlist fills the penthouse with music. Instead of wearing his usual yoga gear, Blaine has opted for the tightest fitting pair of lycra shorts that he owns, and no shirt. Blaine is sitting in the cross-legged ‘lotus’ position, with hands in front of his body as if he’s praying.

“Namaste,” Blaine says calmly.

Blaine allows his body to flow into the ‘seated twist’ pose, making sure that Kurt gets a little glimpse of his right ass cheek. He then glides down on the mat in time with the music. Blaine places his hands by his side, then presses his feet into the mat and lifts his hips high in the air to do the ‘bridge’ pose. Blaine hears a gasp from the other side of the room, which encourages him to continue.

Blaine gracefully rolls to his stomach and places his hands a few inches in front of his shoulders. With one quick move, he jacks his ass up into the ‘downward dog’ pose. Blaine is physically prepared for Kurt to ravish him, and disappointment sinks in when he hears Kurt sit down on the couch, which is in the opposite direction of his ass. Still, he has one more trick up his sleeve.

Blaine drops from the pose, curls his body into a ball and turns 180 degrees so that his face is in the opposite direction of Kurt. He slowly rises to his feet and stretches his arms above his head. He spreads his legs three feet apart, lowers his upper body, and clasps his ankle into the ‘standing straddle forward bend’ pose. Blaine can hear Kurt’s heavy panting for a minute, but there’s still no action. Blaine carefully moves his right hand and brings out the condom and packet of lube that he placed under the yoga mat earlier, making it even more obvious what he wants.

“God Blaine, you really want me so badly. Take off your shorts and get back in that position,” Kurt says in a low authoritative voice.

Kurt’s command goes straight to Blaine’s cock, which is leaking with precum. Usually, Kurt is so quiet during sex – breathy sighs and muted grunts – but this Kurt turns him on. Blaine peels off the lycra shorts, taking his own sweet time to slowly reveal his ass. He tosses the shorts aside and gets back in his previous position, taking deep breaths to ready himself for Kurt’s fingers. He can hear Kurt take off his shirt, undo his belt, and unzip the fly of his trousers. Just when the suspense is killing him, he feels soft lips kiss on his ass instead of the fingers he expected. *Holy shit!*

Blaine’s arms tremble as Kurt gives him kitten licks around his puckered hole, squeezing his ass roughly. The combination of the rough and the smooth sensations is turning Blaine on, and he lets out a groan.

“Oh my god… That feels fantastic… Kurt… Don’t stop… ghh…”
Kurt flattens his tongue and takes a long swipe from his hole down to his balls. Kurt takes one in his mouth and slowly sucks, while his finger is circling Blaine’s hole.

“Fucking hell… I need something inside me… More!” Blaine cries out.

Kurt rolls his tongue and thrusts it as deep as it will go inside him. Every nerve in Blaine’s body is on edge. When Kurt slips a finger inside next to his tongue, Blaine whimpers at the feeling. Soon Kurt has three fingers inside, twisting and rubbing his prostate. Blaine’s entire body trembles and drops, not able to hold the position any more.

“I’m sorry.” Blaine sobs. “Maybe if I do the advanced yoga class…”

Blaine can feel the weight of Kurt’s naked body over him, and gentle kisses along his shoulders and neck. It grounds him and makes him feel safe.

“Don’t ever say sorry for what you need or what you can’t handle. I need to know what makes you feel good. Now tell me what you want.”

Blaine’s cock is still throbbing, and god, he wants more.

“I want to feel you inside me so badly. I want… I want you to claim me as yours. If you don’t fuck me right now, I think I’ll die. I’ve been fantasizing about it since I got home.”

Kurt pushes off Blaine’s body and orders, “Then get on your knees.”

Blaine’s haste is almost comical as he scrambles onto his knees. When he hears the condom wrapper crinkle, Blaine moves his hand to his cock.

“Don’t touch yourself. That belongs to me… You belong to me,” Kurt growls.

Blaine’s heart starts racing when he hears those words. Kurt’s cock quickly but smoothly enters him, and in this position, Blaine feels claimed. Once Blaine nods, Kurt starts thrusting quickly and holds on to Blaine’s hips for leverage.

“Look at you taking it, Blaine. That tight little hole of yours is made for me.”

Blaine moans and starts babbling, pushing his ass back to get even more of that incredible feeling. Kurt changes the angle every few thrusts until his cock finds Blaine’s prostrate.

“There, Kurt!… Right there…. Don’t stop… Fucking Incredible…”

Kurt leans forward and takes Blaine’s cock in his hand.

“You are mine, mine, mine… No-one else will hear your moaning. No-one else will see you like this. No-one else will ever have you. Mine! Mine! Mine!”

When Kurt twists his wrist at the top of Blaine’s cock, Blaine screams at the top of his lungs. There are streams of thick white cum shooting across the yoga mat. Blaine can feel Kurt go still as he orgasms ten seconds later. Once Kurt pulls out of him, Blaine collapses to the side of the mat.

“Oh my god, Kurt. You were amazing.”
“You were pretty amazing too. I think we ruined your yoga mat.”

“I’ll buy a dozen more tomorrow. When you talked dirty to me… Wow, I wasn’t expecting that.”

“Neither was I,” Kurt replies. “But I could tell that it really turned you on.”

“You know, Kurt, I don’t always want sex fast and rough like that. I also love it when you’re caring and gentle, but what made it really special was that you did it for me.”

“Hey, I had an incredible orgasm too. I like trying out different things with you. I love you.”

“I love you too.”

*****

Kurt drives up I-87 through the Catskill Mountains and Albany, and then keeps heading north. They stop at Mrs. London’s Bakery and Café in Saratoga Springs for lunch.

“Oh my god, Blaine. I haven’t had a baguette sandwich this good since I was living in Paris.”

“Saratoga Springs is an excellent choice, Kurt. The flat track horse racing is still going on and the Philadelphia Orchestra is currently at SPAC for its summer season. Where are we staying?”

“We’re not staying in Saratoga, Blaine. It’s too busy and expensive in August. Besides, there’s media everywhere, what with Marylou Whitney and other high society people staying at their mansions for the month. This is just a lunch stop.”

While Kurt is buying a dozen pains au chocolat from the bakery to go, Blaine wonders where they could possibly be going, because they are very close to the Canadian border.

“Umm, Kurt. I don’t want to be a killjoy, but I didn’t bring my passport.”

“You won’t need one, silly. But I promise it will feel like we’re in a different country because where we’re going is nothing like New York City.”

They get back in the car and return to the Northway. They are soon in the Adirondack Mountains and leave the highway a few exits past Lake George. Blaine spots a sign that says “Welcome to Schroon Lake. Population 1,654.” Kurt drives on the road that borders the lake, then takes a right hand turn onto a short gravely drive. Blaine gasps when he sees what’s in front of them.

There’s a small cute two-story log cabin with a wrap-around balcony on the top floor. In the front yard, there’s a campfire area surrounded by comfy-looking chairs. The sides and back of the cabin are completely surrounded by pine and maple trees, giving them privacy. Kurt rushes up the stairs on the side of the cabin and takes the key from under the welcome mat. Inside, the main room has a kitchen, a dining area and a living space with comfortable looking chairs and a sofa. There’s an old-fashioned cast iron wood-burning stove in the corner to keep the cabin warm during cold winter nights. Kurt opens the French doors that lead out to a balcony to take in the beautiful view of Schroon Lake.

Blaine stands behind Kurt and wraps his arms around him. “I can’t believe that we’re still in New York State. It’s perfect. Where did you ever find this place?”
“I had coffee after class with Nicole a month ago, and she was telling me about upstate New York, where she’s from. She showed me pictures of her aunt and uncle’s log cabin in the mountains, and it looked perfect for our getaway this month. Nicole contacted her aunt, and here we are,” Kurt explains.

They explore the rest of the log cabin. There are two bedrooms and a bathroom on the main floor. They climb down the steps to the lower level and find a pool table, bunk beds, an old sectional sofa, and a large flat-screen TV.

Kurt has packed for both of them, and when they go to unload the car, Blaine is surprised to find a large ice-chest and a half-dozen recyclable bags filled with groceries.

“I knew we would be in the mountains, so I had Amy buy food supplies and prepare a few meals in advance. I can think of a hundred other things I’d rather being doing instead…” Kurt pulls Blaine in close and whispers “… with your body.”

An hour later – after they’ve christened the pool table – they unpack their things, and Blaine fires up the BBQ while Kurt prepares a salad to accompany the lamb kebabs Amy prepared for them earlier. After dinner, they make a campfire and toast marshmallows for s’mores. Blaine loves the sticky kisses he gets after they’ve eaten the sweet treats. After adding a few logs to keep the campfire going, Blaine sits on Kurt’s lap, who’s positioned in the huge cushioned wooden Adirondack chair. Blaine nuzzles into Kurt’s chest, watching the sparks fly up from the fire and listening to nature’s sounds around them.

“There’s lots of things to do in the area, Blaine. There are water skis and fishing rods to use with the boat if we want to. There’s tons of walking trails in the mountains. If it rains, we can go to Lake George and go shopping at the outlet mall and hang out in the indoor arcades. If we drive thirty minutes, we can…”

“Do you know how much I love you,” Blaine interrupts. “I can’t believe you organized such a perfect vacation. There is nowhere I’d rather be right now than in your arms.”

“I love you too, Mr. Cheesy. Is it okay if we talk about something that I’ve had on my mind lately? It’s about next week and starting back at school again. There’s a change in my plans.”

Blaine nuzzles further into Kurt’s chest, worried about where the conversation will go. He’s been so happy living with Kurt these past two months, and Blaine doesn’t want it to ever end. Could this idyllic vacation be over before it really started?

Blaine nods his head and whispers, “What change in plans? I thought we were happy together.”

Kurt squeezes Blaine tightly. “Oh god, that didn’t come out right. We are happy together. I’ve never been happier in my life than during the past two months. It has more to do with FIT.”

Blaine lets out the breath he’s been holding, relieved that Kurt isn’t breaking up with him.

“I went to my academic advisor yesterday and told him I was changing my major. I want to study jewelry design. I loved the summer course, and there’s something about creating a work of art from metals and different color gem stones that people can wear that appeals to me. It’s really sparked something inside me. Now, when I look around, I see inspiration everywhere for brooches, rings and the like.”
“I’m not really surprised. The things I had to do this summer to convince you to leave the jewelry workshop at FIT. I love the jewlery you’ve created and I think you have a special talent. And trust me, I see a lot of jewelry come across my desk at Vogue, so I know what I’m talking about.”

“You don’t think I’m too fickle, changing my major?”

“Nonsense, Kurt. You’re following your gut feeling about what’s right for you. I’ve been giving a lot of thought to what I’m going to do as well. I’m thinking of really giving songwriting a go. I have enough ideas for songs to put together an album and I want to spend some time with Marley Rose and flesh them out. I think she has the perfect voice for them.”

“That’s fantastic, Blaine! Pretty soon you’ll be giving up your day job and pursuing your music.”

“I’m not sure about that. New York City’s pretty expensive, and I still need to pay the mortgage.”

“New York City is expensive when you live in a penthouse, and have a driver and housekeeper. But we don’t need to have that sort of lifestyle. Honestly, Blaine, I would be happy living in a shoebox as long as we’re living together.”

Blaine suddenly sits up and wonders if Kurt really means it. When he looks at Kurt, he sees a warm hopeful expression. Kurt’s eyes are sparkling, and he’s wearing the same large smile that he had on the first day Blaine met him.

“Do you mean…?”

“Yes, Blaine. I want us to live together, now and for always. I like spending time with my best friend, my lover, my prince charming. I’ve been crazy happy since I returned to New York.”

“Me too. I love living with you, Kurt. I can’t wait to get home each day to spend time with you.”

Kurt slaps his forearm and brushes off a dead mosquito. “Let’s take this inside before I’m eaten alive by bugs. I can think of a lot of ways we could be celebrating.”

Chapter End Notes

Song Blaine starts to compose - ‘Surprise, Surprise’ by Bruce Springsteen

Did you guess the identity of KrianFeels?

I couldn’t have possibly written this story without my fantastic beta, Lilyvandersteen. Please check out here all the amazing story artwork created by Cassie at CC-Graphics.

Next up: the last chapter (there’s also an epilogue).
Kurt wakes up to the smell of coffee brewing in the nearby kitchen. While Blaine is an early riser, he much prefers to sleep in. He stretches his arms over his head, then rolls to the side and hugs Blaine’s pillow. Last night’s sex was amazing, with Blaine worshiping every part of his body. It was sinfully slow and luxurious, and made him feel so loved.

Kurt mentally goes over his plans for this evening’s surprise for Blaine. He hopes that tonight goes exactly how he wants it to go. He’s taking a chance, but Blaine is totally worth it. Kurt has thought of the grand romantic gestures that Blaine loves to do, but Kurt feels a little uncomfortable doing them himself. Blaine has always enjoyed the little things and moments in their relationship. Hopefully, this will be an extra one to put in the bank of memories to cherish.

“It’s an overcast day – there’s a 60% chance of rain,” Blaine says as he enters the bedroom with two mugs of coffee. He gives Kurt a kiss before climbing back into bed. “How about we explore the little towns nearby. I think everyone will be going to outlet mall and arcades in Lake George on day like this.”

“That’s fine by me. I’ve planned a special dinner for tonight, so we have to be back by midafternoon so I can get it ready,” Kurt replies.

They head to nearby Chestertown and browse in the small shops before going to the Main Street Ice-cream Parlor for a light lunch of soup and half a sandwich. They giggle at the food on display as they pay for the meal, and Blaine can’t resist buying Adirondack Moose Poo (chocolate covered raisins). They stop at the Crossroads Country Store on the way back, and buy soft ice-cream cones at the next-door kiosk.

“Why don’t you head down to the lake, Blaine. Maybe take the boat out? Or do something that will get you out of here for a couple of hours.”

“I didn’t think you’d want to get rid of me so quickly,” Blaine pouts.

“I’ve got plans for tonight and I need to get ready. When you come back, take a shower downstairs.”

“I think I’ll go for a long run and then a swim in the lake. I’ll see you later,” Blaine says as he heads to the bedroom to get changed.

Once Blaine has left the log cabin, Kurt pulls out from the freezer the lobster bisque and peach pie that Amy made for him last week. He peels the potatoes and cuts them into fine slices before placing them in the casserole dish. Kurt whips up a salad with ingredients they have bought from the local farmer’s market. Kurt consults his tablet and makes the marinade and sauce for the main course. When all is under control in the kitchen, he pulls out two bags from the spare bedroom’s closet and sets things up.
When Kurt is satisfied with the result, he rummages around in the bedroom’s chest of drawers and pulls out smart casual clothes for Blaine to wear. He places these in the downstairs shower room and makes sure Blaine has everything he needs for when he gets back.

Kurt heads back upstairs and takes a long, hot shower. He gets dressed in his preselected outfit - shorts, button-up casual shirt and scarf. He spends even more time than usual on his hair. When he heads to the main room, Kurt can hear Blaine’s footsteps down below. Once Kurt hears the shower on, he turns on the heat in the oven and heads toward the main area to wait for Blaine.

*****

Blaine slowly climbs up the stairs, wondering what’s in store for the evening. The only light in the room are an endless number of candles, covering most surfaces. However, what captures Blaine’s attention are the tabletop picture frames now on display. Blaine walks around the room slowly, examining each frame. Most display photos of Kurt and himself – at the Brooklyn Flea Market, at the Tony Awards Ceremony, at the Vogue staff party, chatting at the Hamilton photo shoot, at the baseball game with Burt, and in the hammock on Governors Island. Blaine giggles when he sees the selfie Kurt took when they were in the bubble bath in LA. Blaine’s eyes tear up thinking of all the good times they have had together. He can’t wait to for more memories and photos.

Blaine sees two additional frames that contain something that aren’t photos, so he moves over and picks the first one up. It contains their bucket list, handwritten in beautiful calligraphy. The last frame contains a water color picture of two butterflies.

“Did you paint this, Kurt?”

“Yeah, I did. I’ll tell you about it later. The first course is ready.”

Blaine moves to the table and notices it has candles as well. Always the gentleman, Blaine pulls out Kurt’s chair for him to sit down. Blaine loves the lobster bisque, and he can tell that this was made by Amy, but he’s not going to let on to Kurt that he knows. Jazz music is softly playing in the background, and they chat about what they’ll do during their last couple of days in the Adirondack mountains.

“It’s going to take a little time for the next course, Blaine. Have a seat on the couch and relax.”

Kurt takes a platter that contains two New York strip steaks that have been soaked in his special marinade and heads off to the balcony. After a couple of minutes, Blaine can hear Kurt cursing, so he goes outside to see what’s happening. There is Kurt, bent over the BBQ, trying to figure out how the gas cylinder turns on.

When Kurt looks up, his cheeks are tinged pink. “You and my dad make this look so easy. I can’t figure out how to turn on the gas grill.”

Blaine chuckles and swiftly moves toward the grill. He turns the tap on the top of the gas cylinder, opens the grill hood, and then presses the igniter button. Soon flames can be seen underneath the cooking grate, and Blaine closes the hood whilst it’s heating up.

“Why don’t I cook the steaks, while you get everything else ready?” Blaine offers.

“I wanted to do everything by myself, to make it a special night for you.”
“We’re a team. It’s always a special night when we work together.”

“That cheesy line just earned you the title of chief BBQ griller. I’ll head back into the kitchen.”

Blaine hums to himself as he cooks the steaks, stringing musical notes into a new tune. He feels so inspired to compose new music when he’s with Kurt like this. When the steaks are ready, he cuts them into strips and returns to inside, and places the platter onto the table.

“Mmm. Gratin potatoes. They’re my favorite,” Blaine exclaims, licking his lips.

They eat the steaks with the béarnaise sauce Kurt prepared earlier, and the conversation is light and easy. When they’ve finished, Kurt takes their plates to the kitchen. Blaine quickly follows and helps him stack the dishwasher and tidy things up.

“I’m stuffed. I thought we could wait a while for dessert,” Kurt suggests.

“Good idea. I couldn’t eat another thing right now. Why don’t we head to the balcony and watch the last of the sunset?” Blaine replies.

“I’ll meet you there in a minute.”

Blaine refills their glasses and sits out on the deck, enjoying the cool gentle breeze that is coming off the lake.

“I have a present for you,” Kurt says when he walks onto the balcony. Kurt moves a chair so that he is sitting directly in front of Blaine.

Blaine lights up when he hears those magic words, and Kurt deposits a small box wrapped in paper decorated with hand-painted butterflies in his lap. He carefully unwraps the present, being careful not to rip the paper. Inside, there’s a box that is the perfect size to hold a ring. Blaine’s heart starts to race - could it be? When he opens the box, he sees a small blob of molten silver with a gem stone half sticking out.

“This is my promise ring to you. I came up with a beautiful design, I found the perfect piece of amber that matches the color of your eyes, I spent hours creating the setting, and then when I was soldering the amber onto a ring band, I used too much heat, and the whole thing melted into the blob that you see.”

“It’s the thought that counts, Kurt,” Blaine reassures.

“I’m glad you said that, Blaine. At the time, I was beside myself when the promise ring became a huge disaster. When I was in the subway on the way to Tiffany’s to buy a proper ring, I had this blob in my hand and was rolling it around in my palm and it became deliciously warm. When I got out of the subway, I went to the nearby park to think. The more than I thought about it, the more I realized that this ring symbolizes my promise to you.

The blob is smooth in most places, like our relationship is most of the time. But it’s a little sharp where the amber peeks out. There will always be bumpy times in the future, and I promise you that I will make the time to really listen to you and work things out.

The blob heats up if you give it attention. I promise to love you and do both big and little things to keep you feeling warm inside.
If we’re going to make it in the long haul, we’ll need to be brave enough to take chances and experience new things. This blob is a reminder that things don’t always work out, but I promise you that I will always be there to catch you if you fall.

I promise to do silly simple things with you and keep our bucket list fresh and interesting. You’re my best friend, and I love spending time with you.

Lastly, I promise that I love you and that I’m committed to the same long-term vision as you – marriage, family, and doing what matters to us. We’ll go at the pace that feels right for both of us, but we’ll get there in the end.”

Blaine cups Kurt’s face in his hands and leans in to give him a kiss. Blaine pours every ounce of his love into the kiss. Blaine didn’t believe it was possible, but now he loves Kurt even more.

“I’m going to lose it right now – that was so beautiful. I need one of your hugs.”

Kurt stands up and holds out his arms. Blaine quickly rushes into them. With Kurt’s warm body against his, Kurt’s strong arms wrapped around him, Blaine feels like he can do anything.

Eventually, Blaine pulls away from Kurt and they head back inside. Blaine looks at Kurt’s watercolor painting of the two butterflies in the frame.

“I love this painting, Kurt. I’m going to keep it on the night table on my side of our bed. God, I love thinking that it’s our bed in our place.”

“Go have a seat and I’ll make some coffee. There’s a story about the painting.”

Kurt heads to the kitchen and brews the coffee while slicing two pieces of peach pie. There’s still one part of his plan that he needs to execute. He returns to the main room and sits down on the couch, barely touching his slice of peach pie.

“When I was in Lima in May, on the first warm day, I headed out to the backyard in the afternoon to sketch fashion designs, and I spotted two butterflies. I couldn’t stop watching them. They would flutter close together and then fly away from each other, but never too far apart. Sometimes one would soar high, and at other times, one would dip a little low, but they would always come back to each other. Sometimes they would land on a flower and stay still for a minute, then they would flutter their wings and fly again. It seemed like a dance that they knew so well.”

Blaine places his empty dessert plate on the nearby table.

“I get what you’re trying to tell me. That I should take the risk with my songwriting. That I should focus on what makes me happy. I want to be like you and really go for it – go for my dreams. But what if I’m not good enough? What if it doesn’t work out? Music is a tough business to get into.”

“I know you, and this is a side of you I don’t get to see very often… You’re scared. But, sweetie, I believe in you. You have a musical gift, and it wouldn’t be right to let you hide that away.”

“But what if I fail?” Blaine asks in a small voice.

“Then you’ll pick yourself up and try again. I can’t predict what will happen in the future, but remember my promise to you earlier. I can’t stop you from failing, but I can promise to make it safe if
“I love how you get me, Kurt. I love how you’re there to support me.”

“You don’t know how much you’ve changed my life since the first day I met you, Blaine. You’ve given me courage to try new things. I’m so glad that I found someone who I know will always be 100% behind me, whether I soar or drop to the ground. Blaine… Now it’s your turn to fly.”

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After they spend time waking up in the most delicious way, they put on their swimming trunks and gather up beach supplies. They cross the small street at the front and fifty yards ahead is the lake. The private lakefront has a picnic table and a small dock with a motorboat.

“Let’s take a spin on the boat,” Blaine suggests as he rushes over the deck.

“Are you thinking fishing or waterskiing?” Kurt asks, handing over the motor key.

“Neither. I want to feel the rush of air on my face one last time before we leave tomorrow.”

They climb into the boat and Blaine starts up the engine. They circle the lake a few times and take in its natural beauty.

“This is the life,” Blaine sighs when they stop in the center of the lake, spotting the families swimming along the shore and a few fishing boats at the lake’s western end. “I’ve always wanted to learn how to sail, but I never got around to it.”

“It’s not too late, Blaine. I’m putting it on our bucket list. Maybe on our next vacation, we can go someplace where we can take sailing lessons together.”

“You’d do it with me?” Blaine asks.

“Sure, why not? I’ve never thought of sailing before, but I can totally get behind an activity that shows off your naked chest.”

“It’s all about the naked chest, isn’t it? Maybe I’ll wear a Speedo while I’m at it,” Blaine jokes.

“Don’t say things like that unless you mean them, mister,” Kurt growls as his eyes darken. “It’s more about the smile, you know. You have this special smile when you’re really happy.”

“I don’t want to go back to New York City tomorrow,” Blaine says wistfully. “It’s a concrete jungle full of busy self-important people, noisy streets and dirt. I’ve really enjoyed the nature and being close to the water this week.”

“If you pursue music, there’s nothing to say that we have to live in New York City.”

“We’ll have to be in New York City for at least four more years until you graduate FIT.”

“FIT does have a two-year program in jewelry design. I’ve looked into it and with my high school AP credits, the courses in Paris, and working at Bellerose Boutique… If I take a full load during the summer, I could graduate with an associate degree by December next year.”
“Kurt, you told me that when you were growing up in Lima, your dream was always to live in New York City. I can’t take that away from you. Besides, what would Tiffany’s do without Kurt Hummel as their lead designer?” Blaine says as he nudges Kurt.

“Dreams change, or at least they evolve. The reason I wanted to move to New York City was to live in a place that was accepting of me. But there’s lots of places in this world that are accepting of gay couples. And for the record, I don’t want to be Tiffany’s lead designer. That would be a job with long hours, stress, and high-profile events. Just think of it, Blaine. We would have PAs coordinating our schedules to fit in a date night every once in a while. Our children would be taken care of by a nanny and Bentley would drive them to and from an exclusive private school each day. When they’d get home, they would be greeted by Amy, and a tutor would arrive to help them with their homework. There wouldn’t even be time for regular Friday night dinners! On vacations, we would go to openings of new Monarch Houses, all smartly dressed for photo opportunities.” Kurt wrinkles his nose. “Maybe it’s just me, but I don’t like that vision of the future.”

“Neither do I,” Blaine agrees.

“So maybe we should talk about how we envision our lives in ten years’ time.”

“You’re right, Kurt. I can see that if we stay in New York City, our lives could get out of control and we wouldn’t focus on the things that are important to us. With so many changes in our dreams, can we call it a ‘work in progress’ and figure out where it would be best for us to live and raise a family the way we want to?”

“I like the ‘work in progress’ idea, Blaine. We don’t have to figure out everything in a week. I think we both have a lot of things to think about and discuss for our future.”

*****

Blaine is awake at 6 a.m. and quietly climbs out of bed to use the bathroom. He closes the bedroom door to let Kurt sleep in before their drive back to New York City. He heads to the kitchen and brews a pot of coffee, and slices a slither of leftover peach pie. Hopefully, Kurt won’t notice. Once Blaine has poured himself a mug of coffee, he heads to the balcony to watch the sunrise over the lake.

This vacation has been more than Blaine could ever dream of. He’s had so much fun with Kurt at Schroon Lake, whether it’s been boating, swimming or exploring the area. And the sex has been freaking fantastic as well. However, the times Blaine liked best was when they spoke honestly with each other…about their future.

Blaine knows that Kurt is right – something big has to change in his life. Kurt’s version of the future without making any changes in their lifestyle is quite frankly frightening. Blaine already resents the events he attends with Isabelle – they cut into his personal time, which he would rather spend with Kurt. And while he enjoys being Vogue’s editor-in-chief, it’s starting to get samey. He needs a new challenge and new dreams.

He’s been offered the unique opportunity to write songs for Marley Rose’s debut album with SONY Records. He recently received the first royalty check for ‘Butterfly Wings’ and the sales are still steady. He’s got money saved up in case something happens, and maybe he should use it to take a chance.

Blaine mulls over the interview he gave for Vogue’s June issue. He was very clear about what
mattered to him – music, staying healthy, helping others, challenges, and dreams. But the most important item was love – love for a man and love for his family.

Even though Kurt is ten years younger than him, Blaine feels that Kurt is the wiser one in their relationship. Kurt was brave enough this week to lay everything on the table. The commitment to live together and share a long-term future. To accept new challenges in pursuing jewelry design. To be willing to leave New York City if that’s what it takes to make their version of family life come true.

When Blaine feels a gentle hand on his shoulder, he looks up and sees an adorable Kurt with messy sleep hair. This is the man that he wants to spend his life with. This is the man he wants to have a future with. Blaine puts down his coffee mug and says,

“I’m ready to fly.”

*****

Two months later

“I feel great, Dad. It feels right,” Blaine says into his phone.

“Are you sure you and Kurt don’t want to come to Ohio this weekend? Get away from New York City?”

“No, we’ll be okay. Kurt and I are still planning to come to Ohio for Thanksgiving. Has Burt accepted your invitation yet?”

“Burt and I have got it all planned. Burt is picking you two up from the Dayton airport. Cooper arrives half an hour later and then everyone’s coming here. Burt will stay for Thanksgiving and we’ll all go to Lima the next day, after Kurt has done his Black Friday shopping, of course. On Saturday, we’ll head to the Monarch House in Lima for the opening.”

Blaine looks up and sees Unique with her make-up bag. “I gotta go, Dad. I’ll call you over the weekend.”

When the phone call ends, someone unexpected enters the room.

“Blaine, I’m really proud of what you’re about to do. Good luck,” Unique says.

Blaine is in a small room outside the ballroom at the Carlyle Hotel, waiting to for someone to tell him that everything’s ready.

“I didn’t expect to see you today, Unique.”

“Did you think I would send you out there without Unique’s special brand of magic?” she retorts.

“Well… Can you help me with my hair? Kurt is pretty good at it but I’m sure you can make it look even better.”

Unique fusses over his hair, muttering about how she’ll have to spend time with Kurt to perfect his efforts with enhancing Blaine’s curls. She takes out make-up powder and starts brushing it on Blaine’s face… sniffling.
“Don’t you *dare* cry, Unique. If I see one tear, I’m going to lose it.”

“Unique doesn’t get over-emotional about her fantastic boss and close friend. The powder must have landed in my eyes.”

Blaine pulls up his arm and gives her a gentle squeeze on her shoulder.

Blaine goes through his speech in his head, making sure he remembers all the points he wants to cover. Blaine looks up and smiles when he sees Kurt walk into the room. Kurt is wearing the exact same suit that he wore for the Tony Award Ceremony – the black Dsquared2 jacquard camouflage blazer that Blaine loves so much.

“Nervous?” Kurt asks.

“Not at all. I feel surprisingly calm. I know this is right for me – right for us.”

“I’m going to head into the ballroom then. I’ll meet you after the press conference.” Kurt pulls Blaine into a searing passionate kiss before leaving the room.

After a few minutes, Blaine hears the call that everything’s ready. He takes a deep breath and looks into the mirror. Blaine is wearing the exact same Armani suit that he wore when he met Kurt eighteen months ago. *I’m ready too.*

Blaine walks onto the small stage set up and finds his place on the podium. There are board members sitting on both sides, as well as Anna Wintour and Isabelle Wright. It takes a few minutes for Blaine’s eyes to adjust to the bright lights and the flashing cameras. When he feels ready, Blaine starts to speak.

“Thank you for coming today. Earlier this week, I tendered my resignation as Vogue’s editor-in-chief to the Board of Directors. I’ve enjoyed working at Vogue, and the challenges and opportunities it has given me. However, I have new goals, new dreams, and new opportunities I wish to pursue. These are not related to the fashion industry, but are more personal in nature. My resignation will be effective at the end of this month, but I’ll be working at Vogue on a part-time basis for the next twelve months. This will give me sufficient time to hand over the Vogue reigns to Isabelle Wright.”

As Blaine continues on about Isabelle’s achievements, press kits available and the like, he glances around to seek out Kurt in the audience and finds him in the last row.

They’ve spent the last two months talking about their plans. The penthouse has been put up for sale and they’ll rent a more modest apartment until Kurt graduates FIT. In the meantime, Blaine will work part-time at Vogue in order to keep some income flowing in. They’ll regularly reassess their plans as Kurt decides what to do in jewelry design and Marley Rose’s debut album is released.

At the end of his speech, Blaine’s eyes lock with Kurt’s – they are full of love, warmth, hope, and promises. When Kurt jumps up to be the first to applaud him, Blaine notices the butterfly brooch attached to his lapel.

Blaine thinks that he’s like a butterfly - growing and changing and finding his true colors in life.

Chapter End Notes
Although there’s still the epilogue to go, I want to take a moment to thank Lilyvandersteen from the bottom of my heart for being my beta.

Without her, this story would simply not be.

Some authors just need a beta to correct typos and grammar, but I needed SO much more. It’s really hard to draft a 200k+ word story before posting the first chapter, particularly for a novice writer like me. She contributed fantastic ideas as I was plotting the story. She read the draft chapters as I was writing, giving me her feedback with flaws in the story’s logic and characters’ behaviors, and cheering me on when it was going well. She helped me figure out the best way to solve problems when the plot didn’t work as I expected. She then reread every single chapter after I polished them up and corrected my grammatical flaws. She did a second beta review for certain chapters that I fine-tuned based upon your feedback.

You cannot begin to imagine the amount of time she has spent on this story. On top of all this, she has a full-time job, young children and writes her own Klaine fic. Her time management skills are impressive.

Most importantly, she was my personal cheerleader when I thought I couldn’t do it. Writing a multi-chapter creative story was a personal goal for me, and I could never have done it without her help. Along the way, I made a friend who I admire so very much. I don’t think that I’ve ever had a friend who has supported me quite like she has. She’s simply amazing. I thank you Lilyvanadersteen <3 <3 <3.

Next up: the Epilogue.
Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“If you want a happy ending, that depends, of course, on where you stop your story” - Orson Welles

Seven Years Later

“Kurt, you’re not going to believe this. I just got off the phone with Matt Bomer. He wants to commission two bracelets for his and Simon Halls’ wedding anniversary. He said that money was no object.”

“When’s their anniversary?”

“In May.”

“That sounds doable, Tina. As a matter of fact, I’ve been tinkering away at a new design. I’ll send you a preliminary sample next week. Tell Matt that his anniversary bracelet will be part of my new line, but he’ll be the first one – after Blaine, of course – to have the limited-edition bracelet in precious metals. How’s everything else going?”

“Our back order will keep the factory going for the next three months. The Pride bracelets are still selling like hotcakes. I’m getting all the quarterly figures together for when you and Blaine visit in two weeks’ time, and I think you’ll be very happy.”

After discussing forecasted silver prices and the inferior jewelry findings recently delivered from China, they end their call. After graduating FIT, Kurt had decided to start a jewelry business labeled ‘Buckeye Designs’ and sold brooches on Etsy. His dad thought he had named the business after his favorite Ohio football team. Only Blaine knew the real reason for the name – after all, it’s Kurt’s favorite butterfly.

On their wedding day, Kurt surprised Blaine with a bracelet using differently colored precious metals to create a rainbow. Blaine was thrilled with it, but refused to take off his silicone rainbow wristband, and he now proudly wears both. Blaine urged him to sell his version of the rainbow bracelet on his Etsy site. Once Neil Patrick Harris and David Burtka bought them, and the bracelets were noticed in a Vogue photo spread, it became an instant bestseller. The demand was so great that Kurt couldn’t keep up. After discussing it with Blaine, he called Tina to enlist her help.

Tina immediately quit her job at Vogue – she wasn’t happy there once Blaine had left. She established a workshop in Long Island and ran the company, and it now has its own website and also sells through Amazon. This allows Kurt to focus on creating designs and infusing capital when it’s needed. It also means that Kurt can work anywhere he wishes and set his own hours.

It works perfectly into Kurt’s life.

Kurt looks at the clock on the workshop’s wall and starts tidying up his area. He’s finishing earlier than usual, but tonight is very special. He walks to the tiny store front and covers the display cabinets. The shop is tucked away in a little back street in Key West’s historical district. It’s one of those places you need to know about, otherwise you’ll miss it. The only reason Kurt keeps the shop
is so that he can see people’s reactions to his work first-hand without them knowing he’s the designer.

Kurt sends a text to Blaine saying that he’s on his way home and asking whether he should pick up anything. In record time, Kurt receives a reply: *Nothing needed except you. Hurry up! I miss you <3 <3 <3.*

Kurt smiles at the text, wondering how he got so lucky with Blaine. Even after seven or so years together, his heart races at the thought of going home to his sweet Blaine.

Kurt locks the front door to his store and peeks into the window display of the art gallery next door. His chest bursts with pride when he sees a few of Blaine’s photos on display. They certainly have fun exploring the Florida Keys and knocking things off their bucket list. Blaine’s passion for photography is still strong and he continues to be inspired by the vibrant colors of Florida’s subtropics.

“Kurt! *Buena suerte (good luck). Toda la familia (the whole family) will be watching tonight,*” the local Cuban cigar and bar owner shouts as he passes by.

“*Gracias, Martín. I’m keeping my fingers crossed.*”

Kurt loves that he knows all the local shop owners in the area and that they’re supportive of Blaine and himself. Sexual orientation isn’t relevant in Key West, and the LBGT community seamlessly blends into all aspects of the island’s laid-back lifestyle. When Kurt was finishing his associate’s degree at FIT, Blaine took a one-month job in Miami as a back-up musician for Jason Derulo’s latest album. At the end of the month, Kurt flew to Florida for a long weekend in Key West. They fell in love with the island and the lifestyle, and decided to move there once Kurt graduated.

Kurt crosses the street and heads into Kermit’s Bakery. After a thorough taste-testing throughout Key West, leaving no shop or restaurant untouched – and Blaine groaned when there were semi-finals and finals – Kurt reached the verdict that Kermit’s has the very best key lime pie. Kurt had always thought that cheesecake was the best thing on earth, but now he knows better. The rich tangy key lime filling with the crispy base now holds the number one spot. The best part is that Blaine’s lips pucker with every tart bite that he takes, and Kurt knows exactly what to do with those puckered lips – kiss them senseless. Kurt purchases the key lime pie, hoping that the Anderson-Hummel household will have something to celebrate tonight.

Kurt walks the few blocks to Mallory Square, the main plaza and the tourists’ focus for the famous Key West sunsets. He walks past El Meson de Pepe, where he and Blaine are the kings of the dance floor every Tuesday on salsa night. Pepe himself jokes that he could charge people to watch them move their hips together.

Kurt walks on board the small old ferry and takes a seat on the wooden bench. It’s a three-minute ferry ride home. When they first arrived in Key West, they rented a house in the historical district, but found the island too busy. Blaine had been nervous around so many tourists with cameras. After house hunting in the area, they found the perfect lot on Sunset Island. The 27-acre island is only 500 yards away from Key West, but it feels like another world. There are fifty private homes and one exclusive resort on the island with strict access controls. They purchased a vacant lot on the waterfront and then spent a year building their dream house.

As the ferry approaches Sunset Island, Kurt can make out two silhouettes on the dock. When it finally anchors, Kurt races off to be with his family.
“Papa! Papa! Daddy said we could visit the butterflies on Saturday!” Kurt feels stubby arms wrap around his legs.

Kurt rolls his eyes fondly at Blaine and groans “Not again” before giving him a kiss.

Blaine laughs as he takes Kurt’s messenger bag and the key lime pie. “You know you like the butterflies.”

Kurt picks up three-year-old Lizzie and tosses her in the air before kissing her. Since the first time they held her, minutes after she was born, she has been the central focus of their lives. When they were looking for a surrogate mother, Rachel had insisted that she wanted to carry their children. They will always be indebted to her for giving them Lizzie and the baby due next month.

They get into their golf cart – no cars are allowed on the island. Blaine drives and Lizzie sits on Kurt’s lap.

“Tell me the wedding story. Pleaasess, Papa,” Lizzy pleads.

Kurt smiles and gives Lizzy a gentle squeeze. Even though he has told the story countless times, she never tires of hearing it.

“There was a special area on the beach set up for us, and our closest friends and family. I walked down a white carpet that was covered in rose petals. At the end of the path was a special pagoda covered with flowers, where I saw your Daddy waiting for me. He looked like Prince Charming, wearing a black tux. His hair…”

“I know! I know! Grandpa said stuff. Nana cried. You and Daddy kissed. Now get to the good part!”

Blaine chuckles, “That was the good part, angel.”

Kurt presses a lingering kiss to Blaine’s cheek and whispers, “No, the good part was later that night. Maybe I can give you a refresher course this evening?”

“Come on, Papa. Stop kissing Daddy!”

“When Daddy and I kissed, hundreds of butterflies were released into the air. They fluttered around us and then flew towards the sun.”

Lizzy lets out a big sigh. “I wanna wedding like that. Only I’m gonna be a princess and wear glass slippers. And I’m gonna ride a white horse into a castle.”

Blaine stops the golf cart in front of their house and lifts Lizzy from Kurt’s lap. He opens the white picket gate and says, “Come on, princess. Go inside and wash your hands. It’s almost time to eat.”

When Kurt joins him on the veranda, Blaine pulls him into his arms and gives him a kiss that he can feel down to his toes. When Blaine finally releases Kurt, he murmurs, “I expect the advanced and intensive refresher course.”

They giggle as they enter the reception area. The two-story house is light and airy, with honey-colored wooden floors and ceiling fans throughout. Blaine’s baby grand piano is situated in what is
usually used as a formal dining area. Kurt had wanted to make the guest cottage in the backyard Blaine’s special music room, but Blaine had insisted he wanted to play the piano and still be around his family. Amy now lives in the guest cottage, giving them the privacy they need at night for refresher courses.

“Dinner will be ready in five minutes,” Amy shouts from the kitchen. She had moved with them to Key West when they built their house. They now have someone come to clean twice a week, allowing Amy to help with Lizzy and keep the Anderson-Hummel household humming along.

Even though it’s February, it’s plenty warm enough to eat outside on the patio. Kurt and Blaine have a simple meal of conch chowder and salad, while Lizzy eats chicken fingers, carrots and peas.

“I don’t wanna eat yucky veggies!” Lizzy protests as she pushes the plate away from her and pouts.

“Come on, sugar plum,” Blaine coos. “Veggies are good for you.” Blaine starts singing as he pushes the plate back towards Lizzie.

Grab a plate and add some peas
Then a carrot and a broccoli
Take a bite, chew it around
Lovely taste, crunchy sound
Eat your vegetables
they’re so much fun to munch!

Kurt smiles as he watches Blaine sing and Lizzie quite happily eats all the vegetables on her plate. It’s a well-tuned dance that they play every mealtime. Blaine is about to go into the music studio as Mr. Healthy and record a children’s album. He has composed songs about pancakes, snappy beans, sweetie corn, table manners and the like.

Blaine certainly has a way with children, and is very happy staying at home with Lizzy during the day. Whilst Kurt needs to go to a separate and quiet space to be his most creative, his husband is the opposite. Blaine takes inspiration from the little things in their daily life and squeezes in song writing during naptime and weekends. This perfectly suits Kurt – after all, he has a regular tea party with Lizzie on Sunday mornings, complete with scones and cucumber sandwiches (with the crusts removed, of course).

After dinner, Kurt gives Lizzy her bath. She has bubbles, color bath drops and rubber toys. It’s almost impossible to get her out, and usually Kurt loves this one-on-one time each day. But tonight, Kurt is working to a strict timetable. He goes through the usual routine, but he does not give in to Lizzy’s pleas for an extra goodnight song. When Lizzy’s eyes shut and her breathing evens out, Kurt adjusts the covers and gives her a peck on the forehead. Kurt quietly leaves her room, closing the door very slowly, and joins Blaine and Amy in the main living area. The large flat-screen TV is turned on to the Grammy Awards.

“You’ve got the DVR going?” Kurt asks, plopping down next to Blaine on the sofa.

Amy nods and whispers, “Shhh! They’re showing the interview with Rachel when she walked down the red carpet.”

Kurt sees a heavily pregnant Rachel discussing her return to *Funny Girl* after she delivers the baby.
“God, Blaine. Rachel’s so huge and there’s still a month to go. Do you think she’s going to have twins?”

“That’s not what the scans say, but I would love to have two babies that look like you,” Blaine replies.

Blaine is Lizzie’s biological father - it’s so obvious with her curls and hazel eyes. They initially agreed that they would have two children, one sired from each of them. Recently, Blaine has been begging to adopt an older child, someone who could benefit from their love. They agreed to put the discussion on the backburner until their second child is one year old. Kurt knows that eventually they will have a family full of children.

The Grammy broadcast returns to the stage. LL Cool J and Ed Sheeran are announcing nominations. LL Cool J rips open the envelope, “And the song of the year is ‘You Move Me’, composed by BK Viceroy.”

Kurt leaps into Blaine’s lap, kissing him all over his face, chanting, “You did it! You did it! Oh my god! I’m married to a Grammy winner!”

Before they can get carried away, they look back at the TV. Marley Rose is walking onto the stage to accept the award.

BK Viceroy asked me to accept this award on his behalf. Personally, it’s been an incredible journey to go from a jazz nightclub singer to performing the song of the year. BK Viceroy is the most talented songwriter I know and composes songs that anyone who’s in love – or wants to be – can really connect with. BK wishes me to thank the love of his life, the inspiration for the song, the inspiration for his everything. BK and I are collaborating on our next album, so watch this space. Thank you.

Kurt’s eyes tear up listening to Marley Rose’s acceptance speech.

“You know that the song was written about you.”

Kurt nods his head, but that doesn’t stop the tears from flowing.

*****

One month later

“Don’t you cry, my sweet Tracy Michael. Papa and I are going to take care of you and love you until the end of time,” Blaine coos, cradling the newborn baby in his arms. He and Kurt took him from the hospital yesterday, and they’re staying in a self-catering apartment in New York City for another two days. Blaine’s mother has taken Lizzy to Alice’s Tea Cup for afternoon tea, and Kurt is catching up on his sleep in the bedroom.

“You’re a real natural,” Michael comments, who’s in the kitchenette preparing the bottle.

“I love being a dad, but honestly, I couldn’t do it without Kurt. He keeps me grounded. While I throw myself into the moment, Kurt reminds me about what matters in our lives.”
Michael hands Blaine the bottle, which Tracy greedily latches onto.

“I’ve always been proud of your accomplishments - at Dalton, Harvard and Vogue. The Grammy award proves that you can do anything that you set your mind to. But honestly, Blaine, seeing you in a loving marriage… watching you raise children… well, that’s in an entirely different league. I wish I could have been the same sort of father.”

“Hey, that’s not true. Look at us now. Sometimes a struggle is necessary before really connecting. God knows, that’s the way it was with Kurt.”

Blaine takes a good hard look at his father. SONY Records donating a percentage of the sales proceeds from his songs to the Monarch Foundation has allowed them to move along at record speed. After the sixth Monarch House was opened, Michael quit his job at the insurance company. He’s now the chairman of the Foundation and oversees operations in nineteen locations. There are plans to open a Monarch House in Tate, Georgia – the first presence in the South. Michael has been inspirational to other parents of LBGT kids, telling his story of finally accepting Blaine for who he really is.

“Hey, Dad…. Once Lizzy and Tracy get older, I’m sure that they’re going to throw a curve ball or two at Kurt and me. Some things that we’re not prepared for and don’t know how to deal with. Could I come to you for advice?”

“Yeah, I’d like that. I have learnt a few tricks over the past seven years.”

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They arrived back in Key West two days ago, and Blaine is relieved that the flight went so well, with Tracy sleeping the full three hours. Lizzie now wants to be a flight attendant, with glass slippers and a tiara, of course. After feeding Tracy, Blaine lays him down gently in the crib set up in the nursery. Even though Blaine had wanted to have the crib in their bedroom, Kurt wouldn’t hear of it. He claimed he needs his beauty sleep and their down time alone. Blaine couldn’t say no to that. Blaine heads to the patio and sits in the lounge chair, and just as his eyes start drooping, his phone starts ringing.

“Congratulations, man. How’s my godson doing?”

“Tracy is gorgeous, Sam. He has Kurt’s beautiful blue eyes. I pray each night that his eyes won’t change color over the next few months. He mainly sleeps, eats and poops - but that’s how it is the first few weeks.”

“Getting much sleep?”

“Enough. Amy takes the day shift, Kurt the evenings, and I’m on from midnight till 6 a.m. We’re managing.”

“Well, tonight, when you do the midnight feed, you’ve got look at the new story that JiffyFeels started.”

“A new story?” Blaine asks.

“There’s only one chapter posted so far. Biffy is a shy nerd who gets bullied in high school and works at the local bakery on weekends. Jamie’s a bad boy, and when he gets out of juvie, he’s
transferred to the same high school. Jamie’s openly gay, and when he goes to his first class, he sits down next to Biffy and hits on him. Biffy is shocked and brushes off his comments, but secretly he thinks that Jamie is hot. The story’s rated explicit, so I’m sure stuff will go down pretty soon.”

“I’ll read it tonight.”

“During the 3 a.m. feed, you can read the new one-shot by KrianFeels. It’s 20,000 words and it’s epic. They’ve got this superhero fantasy thing going on in the bedroom, but it’s got a twist. Brian is dressed up as the superhero and is tied to the bed and Kevin is the evil one, having his wicked way with Brian. He…”

“Enough, Sam! Don’t spoil it for me. I’m not sure this is the sort of thing I should be reading with a newborn baby in my arms.”

“Dude, relax! Don’t you know that Tracy can’t read yet?”

Blaine rolls his eyes, because the problem is that certain parts of his body would get far too interested when he’s reading. Even though he and Sam haven’t lived in the same place for years, they still manage to remain close.

“So tell me, Sam, how’s the filming going?”

“It’s really happening! Everything’s on schedule. Mark September 6th in your calendar – that’s when the pilot is going to air.”

Sam’s Surfs!Up webcomic now has over a million followers. When Sam had attended the Swarm Con convention last year, a production company offered a substantial amount for the TV rights. It is now being filmed in LA, and Sam is the lead story advisor.

After finishing the phone conversation with Sam, Blaine shouts for Amy and Kurt to come join him.

“Two updates, Amy? Where do you find the time?”

“For the past couple of weeks, I’ve been a writing ninja. I knew I’d be busy when Tracy arrived. I posted them when Rachel went into the hospital.”

“I can’t believe that Sam hasn’t guessed yet that you are both KrianFeels and JiffyFeels,” Blaine remarks.

“Don’t tell him, Blaine!” Kurt shrieks.

“Naw, there’s no fun in that,” Blaine chuckles. “A superhero bedroom fantasy one-shot?”

“Kurt had a stroke of genius to replace the eye mask with a blindfold.”

Blaine gives Kurt a pointed look. Kurt blushes and shrugs behind Amy’s back. Once Kurt had found out that Amy was posting smutty fanfic, he volunteered to be her beta. Whenever Blaine finds the two of them in the kitchen, whispering and giggling, he knows that they’re brainstorming new story ideas. It has certainly kept things interesting in the bedroom. Once Tracy starts sleeping through the night, Blaine knows for sure that Nightbird will rise again.

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Blaine is panting as he enters the house after his run on the beach. He goes to the kitchen and Amy hands him the power smoothie she’s just finished making.

“All good here?”

“I put down wee Tracy for his morning nap ten minutes ago. I’ll pick up Lizzy from preschool in a couple of hours.”

Blaine nods and heads to the patio to cool down and drink his smoothie. As a man in his late thirties, he knows how important it is to keep fit and healthy. Blaine wants to be with his family for a very long time. It was easy to replace morning runs in Central Park with runs along the beach. He keeps up with yoga, which Kurt very much approves of. Now that the ocean is at end of their back garden, Blaine enjoys swimming as well.

Blaine admires the lantana shrubs in the garden that are in bloom with red and yellow flowers. Kurt planted them years ago because they attract butterflies. The pool and Jacuzzi look very tempting, but Blaine discards the idea of jumping in. He’ll wait until Lizzie comes home and they can have a swim together after lunch. It’s been challenging to combine parenthood with his songwriting, but he wouldn’t have it any other way. While some of his friends tease him about being a househusband, Blaine wants to be home while their children are still young.

Blaine had really enjoyed recording the Mr. Healthy children’s album while they were in New York City, waiting for Tracy to be born. Blaine decided long ago that his music career was going to be spent behind the scenes writing songs for others. The royalties are more than enough to keep them in the lifestyle they want, with regular savings tucked away for retirement and college funds.

Blaine writes songs under a pseudonym – he doesn’t want fame or media attention. However, when he came up with the idea of creating a Mr. Healthy album to help parents with fussy eaters, he couldn’t resist singing the songs himself. Lizzy would have been so disappointed if he hadn’t.

Blaine mulls over the Skype conversation he’ll have next week with the music producers. He’s looked at their proposals for a tie-in TV program, and it’s a very interesting idea. Blaine is thinking of setting up a production company and hiring someone to create the show. He thinks that Sebastian Smythe might be the perfect person for the job.

After his truce with Sebastian, Blaine meets him for lunch whenever he and Kurt are in New York City for Buckeye Design’s quarterly board meetings. Sebastian is still a very generous patron of the Monarch Foundation. Blaine now understands better how he ticks, ever since Sebastian told him how he was outed the summer before high school.

Sebastian has said many times that the editor-in-chief job at Elle isn’t as interesting now as it was when Blaine headed up Vogue. Sebastian doesn’t have it in him to keep up a serious rivalry with Isabelle Wright. Maybe moving into television is exactly what Sebastian needs. Sure, he has no experience, but Sebastian is smart and will soon pick it up. His business acumen will help keep the concept on the right path. Blaine chuckles when he thinks that Sebastian has gone through every hot gay male model from New York City to Milan. Maybe hot gay actors will be his next challenge.

In whichever direction Mr. Healthy goes, Blaine will make sure that it somehow includes his brother. Cooper met Cassie when she was an extra on The Young and Restless. Within six months, they were married and expecting their first child. Cooper quit the show when their second daughter was born. Cooper’s on-screen wife murdered his character, and it was epic. She served him a strawberry
milkshake full of sedatives before bludgeoning him to death with his golf clubs. She then rolled his body up in a carpet and had it placed in their storeroom in their Park Avenue complex.

Cooper’s dramatic death scene won him a Daytime Emmy Award. Cooper capitalized on this fame and opened up an acting school in LA, where he gives master classes. He supplements his income by doing voice-overs for Doritos. Blaine is sure that Cooper can supply students to audition for the Mr. Healthy show, as long as they don’t do too much pointing.

*****

As Blaine reads the latest Vogue issue, he glances over from time to time at Lizzy cooing at Tracy, who’s in the baby swing. Blaine likes the direction Vogue is going under Isabelle’s leadership – the magazine now has a blend of fashion and thought-provoking stories.

“Hey, bud. Can I get you anything?” Burt asks, as he enters the living room.

“No, I’m good. Come have a seat,” Blaine replies.

Burt arrived yesterday to spend time with his grandchildren. He retired from politics three years ago. Burt still works at the garage, but has given Timmy more responsibilities, allowing him to visit them often. Burt says that Key West is good for his heart. While Kurt thinks that his dad means his medical condition, Blaine knows that Burt means that they’re food for his soul.

“Have you heard from Bentley recently?” Blaine asks.

“Yeah, we’re headed to Lake Superior in June for our annual fishing trip. It’s the perfect time of year to catch trout and salmon.”

When Blaine and Kurt had moved to Key West, Isabelle quickly snapped up Bentley to be her personal driver.

“Next year, you two must have your annual fishing trip in Key West. You need to check out deep sea fishing. I want a stuffed marlin hanging outside the guest cottage.”

When Blaine hears a ping, he grabs his phone and quickly swipes across the screen, eager to read the text message. I’ll be home in an hour. Can’t wait until you’re back in my arms again - K xxxx

Blaine smiles at his phone, knowing that the four kisses are for each person in their family. Over the years, Kurt has become quite the master at cheesy texts. Blaine looks lovingly at his screensaver, which is a photo of him, Kurt, Lizzy, and Tracy the first day they returned to Key West. He snaps out of it when he hears Burt clear his throat.

“That was Kurt. He’ll be home in an hour. We usually meet him at the dock, if you want to join us.”

“How about I stay here with Lizzy and Tracy, and you go on your own? Maybe take the boat out and enjoy the sunset.”

“Are you sure?”

“Amy and I will be fine holding down the fort. Go spend some time on your own with Kurt.”

Blaine jumps up and nods, before running to their bedroom. He wants to look his best for Kurt. He
takes a quick shower and uses a little hair product to tame the curls. He puts on his favorite board shorts and the Surfs!Up T-shirt that Sam gave him last Christmas. It’s a size too small, so it clings to his upper body - Blaine loves how Kurt’s eyes darken when he wears it. He pulls out some clothes for Kurt to wear during their sunset sail, knowing that he won’t want to wrinkle his work clothes.

When Blaine returns downstairs, Amy has an ice-chest ready for him. Blaine peeps inside and sees drinks and little containers filled with finger food. He then takes a deep breath to tell Lizzy the evening plans.

“Hey, angel. I’m going to meet Papa by myself at the dock today.”

Lizzy looks up from her coloring book. “Grandpa told me. We’re gonna play Chutes and Ladders, and then have a special picnic in the backyard. You and Papa aren’t invited.”

Blaine chuckles and silently mouths ‘thank you’ to Burt.

Blaine grabs two beach towels and drives the golf cart to the main dock. Blaine glances at the time on his phone – there’s still ten minutes before the ferry arrives. Blaine reflects upon their decision to build a house on Sunset Island.

When they decided to marry, Kurt had wanted to renovate a large house in the historical district of Key West. However, Blaine wasn’t comfortable with living so close to all the tourists. It would have only been a matter of time before fans would have found out where they live, so Blaine suggested that they look for a place at one of the other Keys. If Kurt had still been the way he was the year they met, he would have assumed that Blaine wasn’t happy with their relationship and was getting cold feet about the marriage, and Kurt would have fled to Lima or far-off lands. Thankfully, Kurt has changed and matured over the years, so he took the time to find out why Blaine felt that way. Kurt came up with the perfect solution of building a house on Sunset Island – it gave Blaine a sense of security, but allowed them to enjoy the Key West lifestyle as well.

When they signed the deed to the vacant lot, Blaine knew that they could work through anything. There have been discussions about whether to send Lizzy to private or public school (Kurt won that one – Lizzy’s already on the list for the best private education), and how to keep their careers in check so they don’t rule their lives. What makes their day-to-day marriage work is their commitment to figure things out together.

As the ferry is getting closer to the island, Blaine feels butterflies in his stomach. When he sees Kurt leaves the ferry, Blaine’s breath hitches at the beauty before his eyes. Kurt looks incredible and effortlessly sexy in his dress trousers and short-sleeved shirt. There’s a scarf draped around his neck, secured by one of his signature brooches. When Kurt smiles at him, a warm tingly feeling flows through Blaine’s body. There is so much caring and love in Kurt’s eyes. Kurt wraps his arms around him and pulls him in tight, and Blaine’s arms immediately clutch onto Kurt. Blaine can feel Kurt rub his back gently as he nuzzles closer into Kurt’s neck. Blaine sighs, feeling as if he were the one who had just arrived home. When Blaine tries to nibble that spot that gets Kurt feeling good, Kurt pulls back.

“Where’s the rest of the welcome committee?”

“Your dad and Lizzy are having a special picnic in the backyard. Amy’s looking after Tracy in the house. I’m on strict orders not to come home for at least a couple of hours. Let’s take the boat out to watch the sunset.”
“God, that sounds so freaking good. I miss our alone time together.”

Blaine drives the golf cart to the private dock where they moor their 17’ sailboat. Blaine plans to go to the Ft Lauderdale Boat Show next year to buy a bigger model that will accommodate their growing family. As Blaine makes the safety checks, Kurt artfully changes into his swim trunks beneath the beach towel. When Kurt pulls on his rash guard swim shirt, Blaine’s eyes rake over his body, loving how it fits so snugly. Kurt is still very careful about protecting his skin from the sun, but has loosened up significantly since they moved to Key West. Blaine loves the freckles that now grace Kurt’s face – they’re like sun kisses for each happy time they’ve had together.

Blaine pulls up the anchor and starts the engine until they are a few minutes away from shore. He then hoists the masts up, kicks off the engine and sails towards nearby Wisteria Island. Blaine shares the details of his day and what he did with the children. Kurt confirms that he signed up Lizzy for the summer dance program during his lunchtime. Kurt excitedly talks about the new café that is opening up one street over from his workshop, and Blaine makes a mental note to reserve a table for two on its grand opening day.

When the boat reaches the little hidden bay at Wisteria Island, Blaine drops the anchor and hoists down the sails. Blaine pours the mojitos into two plastic tumblers, and Kurt spreads out the food nibblies. Kurt kicks his feet up and scooches along the cushioned bench so that his back hits the end, and opens up his arms. Blaine immediately sits in front of him with their feet tangled together along the bench. He loves it when Kurt holds him like this.

“I love you,” Kurt whispers.

“I love you too, husband… papa of our children… lover… best friend,” Blaine replies.

“When I was younger, I had thought that New York City was the only place for me. But now, I’m living my personal teenage dream,” Kurt sighs.

Blaine squeezes Kurt’s arms that are wrapped around him. He’s living his dream as well, and life is good… Life is perfect. Blaine looks at the red burning sun as it sinks into the sea. For all the gay bashers, rivals, spies, and especially the paparazzi…

They can’t touch them or what they have.

Chapter End Notes

Nine months, 42 chapters, 210k words later… and the story is now completed. This story has been an incredible journey, for Blaine and Kurt, and myself. There will be no sequel to this story. I believe I’ve left Kurt and Blaine in a very happy place. However, I’m open to writing one-shots so please give me any ideas you might have.

Hopefully, I’ve given you many hours of enjoyment reading this story. Please take a minute or two to let me know what you think in a review. Whether you’ve read the Epilogue ten minutes after I posted it or ten plus years later, I’ll read it. If you give the story kudos or a bookmark, it will also bring a huge smile to my face.
Before I wrote this story, I thought this was my one and only Klaine fic, so I went for the long multi-chapter story with my favorite elements included. Go big or go home was my motto! It turns out, I have another Klaine story to tell – a Downton Abbey inspired AU. If you’re interested, subscribe to me as a writer to get a notification for ‘Westerville Abbey’. I’ll start drafting it next month and won’t post the first chapter until the story is fully drafted. I promise that you won’t need to have watched Downton Abbey to enjoy this historical AU set in Britain during the 1910s. Look out for it sometime this summer.

Thank you to Lilyvandersteen for her beta work, Cassie at CC-Graphics for the fic artwork, Sunshineoptimismanangels for giving me the encouragement to write this fic at the start, and fhartz91 for politely answering silly random questions and reviewing my first smut scene. They are all fantastic writers so I urge you to click on the links.

I also thank every single person who left a review or messaged me. Your words of encouragement and constructive feedback helped to keep me motivated and wake up early on Saturday mornings to post a new chapter.

I’m HKVoyage on Tumblr so please don’t be a stranger!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!