Primum Non Nocere

by jetsfanforlyfe

Summary

After Kurt breaks up with him, unable to handle a long-distance relationship, Blaine finds himself re-evaluating the path he's been on, and what he wants out of life. Eight months later, Blaine finds himself on a pre-medical track at a private college in the Midwest, defying everyone's expectations for his life after McKinley. Applying is tough, getting in is harder, but surviving medical school? It's going to take everything Blaine has to give. Throughout his journey to medical school and beyond, he learns a lot about himself, and along the way reconnects with the person he'd thought he'd lost forever. Canon compliant until Makeover. Medical School!AU.

Notes

This fic is my baby, and it was definitely a labor of love. As many of my followers on tumblr know, I recently started medical school after a lot of trips and stumbles along the way. I wanted to write this story as a chance to sort through my own experiences and to give you all a little glimpse into the life of a premedical and medical student. I also shamelessly used this as a platform to present Osteopathic medicine to my readers, something a lot of people don't really know much about. I really, really loved writing this, and exploring medicine through Blaine's eyes, and I hope you all like it, too.

Additionally, I'm a Notre Dame alum, and that's where I sent Blaine. No shame. NYCOM as it exists in this story is NOT a real school, though there is a New York College of Osteopathic Medicine. The school Blaine attends in this story is fictional.

Many thanks to my wonderful, wonderful artist, Deb, who more than exceeded my expectations and created so many beautiful pieces to go with this story. Her gorgeous work...
gave me the push I needed to put the finishing touches on the story. Thanks to the countless people who encouraged and loved me through writing this, and to my darling Sarah for offering to beta even though she doesn't like Klaine <3
Chapter 1

September 2, 2015

“Anderson, come on, live a little,” Bryce Johnson implores his roommate, lobbing a stress ball at Blaine’s head and snorting when it bounces off without a reaction, rolling away to come to a rest under their futon. He jumps down from his loft bed with a thud, coming up behind Blaine to see what’s on his laptop screen.

“Bryce, man, you’re in my way.” Blaine swats away the hand Bryce reaches out to try to snap the laptop shut, twisting in his chair to fix his roommate with a glare. “Leave it.”

“Blaine, it’s the first football weekend. What on earth could you possibly have to study for?”

“Micro test next Wednesday, and my MCAT is coming up.”

“Yeah, in January. It’s September, Blaine.”

“You know how important this test is, Bryce. Besides, it’s Thursday. The weekend starts tomorrow, not today.”

“It does when you have no class on Fridays,” Bryce quips, flopping onto the futon on his stomach so he can retrieve the stress ball from underneath it. He makes a frustrated noise as he gropes blindly underneath the futon, one hand braced on the back of it to keep himself from rolling off and onto the floor. “Got it!” he exclaims when he finally closes his fingers around the ball, dragging it out so he can keep playing with it.

“Some of us only dream of being so lucky,” Blaine returns, clicking through the last PowerPoint slide, scribbling down a few notes into his notebook. “Some of us can’t afford to spend Thursday night jerking around and avoiding homework. Some of us have three classes on Fridays.”

“When did you become no fun?” Bryce asks with an exaggerated pout, tossing the ball at Blaine’s head again. Blaine swats at it, sending it back towards Bryce and smirking in satisfaction when it bounces off Bryce’s forehead and back underneath the futon, forcing Bryce to retrieve it again.

“When I picked a career that forces me to take more tests than I ever thought possible,” Blaine answers, scrubbing a hand over his face. “But look, if I get this done tonight I can go to the tailgate with you all on Saturday before the game, and probably wherever we end up afterwards, too. I just need to make sure I don’t get behind in these classes.”

“No sympathy from me, that’s your own fault. No one told you to take three science classes this semester.”

“I like the challenge,” Blaine says with a shrug, snapping his laptop closed and stretching his arms above his head, letting out a sigh as his back cracks. He checks his phone where it’s laying on his desk, frowning when he sees the time and three missed text messages.

“Jackson wants to know if we want to grab dinner with the Lyons girls,” Blaine says after he reads the messages, turning his chair around to face Bryce, who has flipped onto his back and is tossing the stress ball into the air repeatedly. “You eat yet?”

“North or South?” Bryce asks by way of an answer, catching the ball as it falls and turning onto his side to face Blaine. “I’m not hungry if we’re going to North.”
“You’re always hungry,” Blaine quips, reaching to intercept the ball when Bryce lobbs it at his head again. He drops the ball onto his desk out of Bryce’s reach and types out a reply to Jackson. “Don’t even pretend. And we’re going to South, it’s pasta stir fry night.”

That gets Bryce moving, and he rolls off the futon quickly, shoving his feet into sandals and grabbing his keys. Blaine snorts, pulling on a pair of loafers and grabbing his keys and ID from the peg above his desk.

“Blaine, I’m hungry,” Bryce whines as Blaine stops to straighten up his desk, turning away from Bryce to hide his smile. They’ve been roommates since the first day of freshman year, and are more than used to teasing each other. In response to Bryce’s whining, Blaine takes his time organizing his notebooks, carefully tucking his Microbiology syllabus into the folder at the front of the right notebook.

After a minute of Blaine dallying, Bryce crosses the room, grabbing Blaine around the waist and throwing him over his shoulder.

“Bryce, oh my god!” Blaine squeaks, the blood rushing to his head as Bryce flips him over, carrying Blaine out of their room and into the hallway. The freshman quad across the hall is just coming back from dinner when they see Blaine and Bryce, and they freeze, still new to the pair’s antics.

“Nothing to see here,” Bryce trills, locking their door and marching down the hall with Blaine still over his shoulder. Blaine, for his part, is laughing too hard to catch his breath, playfully smacking Bryce on the back to try to get put down. The freshmen watch warily for a moment as the two carry on down the hall, disappearing around the corner with the sound of Blaine’s laughter lingering behind them.

Bryce makes it halfway down the stairs before he puts Blaine down, both of them laughing so hard they have to pause before they keep going.

“I hate it when you do that,” Blaine gasps, punching Bryce in the shoulder as they jump the final steps into the lobby of their dorm, where Jackson and two of their other friends are waiting. Bryce shrugs, his face splitting into a wide grin as the small group heads out onto the quad towards the dining hall.

“He carried you downstairs again, didn’t he?” Jackson asks, waving at the group of girls walking across the quad to meet them in front of the dining hall.

“It’s not my fault Blaine’s so tiny,” Bryce says, throwing up his arms in mock surrender. “It’s almost too easy.”

“I’m not tiny!” Blaine protests, the smile on his face betraying that he’s not angry. “I’m just short.”

“Or fun-sized,” Bryce teases, ducking away from Blaine’s punch as the girls catch up to them and they head into the dining hall. “You know you love me, Blaine.”

“I’m the only one who’d tolerate living with you for three years – that much is sure.” Blaine gets one last good-natured punch in before they swipe into the dining hall, and he grabs a tray to dart away from Bryce’s retaliation, heading over to the stir-fry line to fill up his plate.

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October 4, 2012

“I don’t understand,” Blaine says, running a hand through his hair in exasperation, tears pricking
“At his eyes. “Kurt?”

“Blaine, it’s not-Jesus, Blaine. Do you know how hard this has been, these past few months?”

“Kurt, you think I don’t? That I don’t understand, I don’t know? I’m here, alone, you’re in New York. This is as hard for me as it is for you, Kurt.”

“I know, Blaine. I know. I’m sorry, I just—“

“So this is it? Are we done?”

“Blaine, we can always stay—“

“Friends? Kurt, we can barely communicate now without something interrupting us. Do you honestly think that’s going to get better just because we stop dating?”

“I don’t know, Blaine, I just-this hurts, too much. Not being able to hold you, see you-I don’t know if I can keep this up until next August, without going crazy. I miss you.”

“I miss you too, Kurt. More than you can know. It’s eight months. Eight more months and then I’ll be with you in New York, and—“

“Eight months is a long time, Blaine. Almost a year.”

“It’s eight months for the rest of our lives, Kurt. Am I not worth that? I changed everything for you. All of this? Me here at McKinley, in New Directions, away from my friends at Dalton-I did that because of you.”

“You’re worth everything to me, Blaine. You’ll never know how much it meant to me to have you with me last year, to be able to hold and love you all year long. And that’s why I can’t—“

“This isn’t a romantic comedy, Kurt. You don’t get to say that you’re letting me go because you’re setting me free.”

“And what if I’m setting myself free, too?” Kurt asks quietly, his own eyes filling with tears as he looks at Blaine through the camera. “What if I’m setting us both free?”

October 14, 2015

“I swear to god, if I ever meet the man who invented physics in this life or the next, I’m going to strangle him,” Blaine moans, dropping his head into his physics text book and banging it against the pages a few times for good measure. “This is awful.”

Lisa Breggins, Blaine’s physics lab partner and typical study buddy, looks up from the calculation she’s working on, smirking at Blaine as she taps the back of his head with her pencil.

“I’m gonna take a wild guess and say he’s long dead, but you’re more than welcome to try,” she offers, poking him in the temple when her first efforts don’t get him to look up. “Focus, B. We’re almost done with this homework set.”

He rolls his head to look at her, pouting as he does so. Lisa laughs, shaking her head as she turns back to her calculations.

“It’s not like I’m ever going to use physics again after this class,” Blaine whines, picking his head up
from his textbook with an exaggerated sigh and finding the next problem on his set, copying it out onto his paper.

“Except for the MCAT,” Lisa points out, biting her bottom lip as she checks over her calculations, erasing a few numbers and replacing them with the correct ones.

“Which in itself is dumb,” Blaine contends, typing into his calculator and frowning at the response. “It’s not like when I’m in practice they’re going to ask me to calculate the velocity with which something hit the ground. I’m pretty sure we’ll be more concerned with the fact that a fall like that probably caused some damage.”

Lisa giggles, covering her mouth to muffle it when the other people in the study area glare at her. Blaine smiles when she smacks him on the arm, blaming him for the disturbance, and turns back to his notebook, tapping his pencil against it as he stares at the figures.

“Did you get an answer for number forty-nine?”

“Is that the electric field problem with the moving charge?”

“Yup. I feel like I’m missing a number because this doesn’t make sense the way I have it written.”

Lisa pulls Blaine’s notebook towards her, frowning over his work until she finds the problem.

“Here you go,” she says, sliding the notebook back over and pointing out the mistake to Blaine. “You left out a zero here. Try that.”

Blaine erases the numbers and rewrites them, plugging them into his calculator to see if the result works out.

“What would I do without you, Lis?” Blaine asks with a smile, copying in the right answer and moving onto the next problem.

“Probably fail physics, bomb the MCAT, and never get into medical school,” Lisa quips, smiling to let Blaine know she’s teasing. “Speaking of, how many months?”

“Three to go until test day,” Blaine replies, finishing the problem he’s working on and moving to the last one. “I’m getting nervous. Be glad you don’t have to deal with this.”

“At least not this year. Beauty of taking a year off for service, right?”

“Among other things. Sometimes I wonder if I might be better off taking a year off, but at the same time-well, I’m already a year older than the rest of our class. It kinda feels like killing time.”

“It’s not killing time if it’s something you want to do, Blaine. You know that, right? Age is just a number. You don’t have to move that quickly if you don’t want to.”

“You are wise beyond your years, Lisa Breggins.”

“One of my many redeeming qualities, or so I’ve been told,” she returns with a smile, finishing the last few calculations on her problem. “But really, B. If you’re not sure-“

“I’ve never been more sure of any decision in my life, Lis.”

“Then you’re going to do great,” she says with a smile, bumping Blaine with her shoulder. “You finished yet?”
“Just did the last problem. You?”

“Beat you again,” Lisa says over Blaine’s groan, sticking her tongue out at him. “Reckers smoothies?”

“It’s a tradition,” Blaine replies, ripping out the notebook sheet his homework is on and carefully removing the frayed edge, stapling the pages together and slipping it into his folder. “We can’t break tradition now.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it,” Lisa agrees, borrowing Blaine’s stapler and fixing her homework together, zipping it into her messenger bag as she stands up, waiting for Blaine to join her. “Shall we?”

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November 11, 2012

In the month following his breakup with Kurt, Blaine throws himself fully into his clubs and activities. He plans a clothing and food drive with the student council, organizes a Glee trip to the local nursing home to sing for Thanksgiving, and spearheads an effort to clean up McKinley’s campus. He keeps himself busy to avoid thinking about how lost he feels at McKinley without Kurt, to avoid thinking about how lonely he is without the knowledge that Kurt is waiting for him.

Sam’s the first person to notice and understand that Blaine’s hiding from his feelings by helping everyone else, and he takes Blaine aside after Glee practice one afternoon, pulls Blaine into an empty classroom so they can talk.

“You’ve been acting a little…crazy, man,” Sam opens with, looking at Blaine sympathetically. “Are you-okay?”

Blaine opens his mouth to reply, thinks better of it, and shrugs.

“Cause like, I know you and Kurt broke up and no one really knows why, except I think Finn might know something but he said it’s not his business, anyway, but-“

“Yeah, we broke up,” Blaine interrupts, all too aware that Sam will continue to ramble until someone stops him. “Probably a month ago.”

“Dude, why? You and Kurt were like, practically married. What happened?”

“I think the worst part is I don’t really know, Sam. I’m not even sure why.”

“He dumped you,” Sam states, watching Blaine’s face for confirmation.

“Dumped is a bit strong. More like, the distance got to be too much and he was tired of his high school boyfriend tying him to Ohio,” Blaine offers instead, dropping into the nearest desk, exhausted. “At least that’s the impression I got, in not so many words from him.”

“You haven’t talked since it happened?”

“We barely talked before it happened…which I guess is part of the problem. I was here, with nothing exciting happening in my life except for student council elections. Kurt’s in New York, interning for the company of his dreams and exploring the city with Rachel. All of our conversations were about New York—about Isabelle and Chase and the latest Vogue.com feature, or about the latest office gossip, or the new café around the corner that he’d found on his Sunday morning walk.”
“Did he even know about the student council elections?”

“I told him I was running, yeah. But after the debate, we never—didn’t pick up the phone when we won, that night. I never really got a chance to celebrate with him.”

“That blows, man. I can’t believe he’d blow you off like that, that’s not at all like Kurt.”

“I don’t think he meant to, I think it just…happened. It wasn’t intentional. You know how he gets when he’s excited about something, and he had every right to be. We just -- weren’t clicking anymore. Not like we had been.”

“You still love each other.” It’s a statement, not a question, and Sam doesn’t expect a reply from Blaine.

“I think at this point? I love the idea of what we had, which isn’t what we became. I don’t know. I’m just…confused.”

“But you’re still planning on going to New York for school, right? So maybe it won’t be so confusing when you get there?”

Blaine chews on his bottom lip in response, staring out the window of the classroom to avoid answering Sam’s question.

“Blaine? You are planning to go to New York still, right?”

“That’s part of what I’ve been confused about,” Blaine finally replies, turning away from the window to look at Sam. “I’m not sure anymore.”

“Dude, you’re not going to throw away your dreams just to avoid Kurt, are you?”

“The funny thing is -- I don’t think I am. I think this is the first time in awhile that I’m thinking just about my dreams, and not about anyone else’s.”

“What?”

“All of this—McKinley, student council, leaving Dalton—I did all of this for Kurt. And without him, it all feels kinda hollow. Like it doesn’t matter. I’m trying to figure out what matters to me. Not what matters to my boyfriend, my parents, my brother. Me.”

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January 4, 2016

Blaine returns from Christmas break frazzled and in a near-constant state of test anxiety, much to Bryce’s annoyance. He takes to leaving the room whenever Blaine breaks out the MCAT prep books, heading down the hall to play video games in Jackson’s room. Blaine, for his part, barely notices, too stressed about his looming test to pay much attention to anything except Organic Chemistry and Biology.

Bryce comes back into their room late on Wednesday night, one week before the test, to find Blaine sound asleep with his face in the book, his cheek sticking to the pages. Taking pity, Bryce crosses the room and shakes Blaine’s shoulder gently, waking him.

“Blaine, man, you can’t sleep at your desk. Go to bed.”

“One more chapter,” Blaine mumbles, unsticking his face from the book and flipping the page,
yawning deeply as he tries to focus on the figures in front of him.

“Blaine, you’ve been studying for months. You’ve got this. You’re killing your practice tests, and you know more than any human should actually know about these things. You can go to sleep, I promise you it’ll be okay.”

Blaine blinks a few times, slowly, looking up at Bryce in confusion, then back to his book. He stifles another yawn and rubs at his eyes, realizing that it might be time to call it a night.

“What time is it?” he asks, closing the book around a pencil to mark his page, stretching to let his joints pop and relax.

“It’s two in the morning, man. You’ve been at that book for six hours.”

“Six hours?”

“Ever since we got back from dinner. I’ve been in Jackson’s room playing Call of Duty all night.”

“Shit,” Blaine groans, shaking his head to clear his mind and try to wake up more. “I feel like I’ve wasted the last hour.”

“Because you fell asleep?” Bryce asks, a hint of sarcasm in his voice. He’s standing at their sink washing his face, and he finishes rinsing the soap off before hanging his washcloth on the towel bar, using the bottom of his t-shirt to dry it off. “Besides, don’t they say you should lay off the books for the week leading up to the test? Give yourself a break?”

“I wanted to finish the last orgo module tonight,” Blaine sighs, closing his book as he yawns deeply, his shoulders shaking with the force of the yawn. “I’m least confident about that section.”

“Says the kid who got an A in the class without a problem,” Bryce answers, pulling off his jeans to get ready for bed. “You’re gonna be fine, B.”

“This is just-it’s a huge step, and if I mess this up-“

“You can take it again,” Bryce finishes for Blaine, pulling on pajama pants and climbing up into his loft, wiggling around until he gets under the comforter. “It won’t be the end of the world. Now go to sleep, and turn the light off before you get in bed.”

“Are you my mother now?”

“No, just your roommate who’s going to be exceedingly angry with you tomorrow if he doesn’t get to sleep within the next fifteen minutes.”

Bryce rolls over to face the wall and pulls his blanket up over his head to block out the light as Blaine straightens up his desk, brushes his teeth, and pulls on pajamas. When he hears the light switch click and the rustling of Blaine’s covers as the latter climbs into bed, he flips back over and resettles his blanket, closing his eyes and trying to ignore Blaine’s nervous rustling across the room.

“Blaine?” Bryce finally says ten minutes later, not even sitting up in bed to look at his roommate.

“Yeah?”

“I can hear you worrying all the way over here. Go to sleep.”

Blaine snorts, his sheets rustling as he turns over one more time in defiance, making extra noise as he adjust his comforter. After a minute, he settles, closing his own eyes against the darkness of their
“Night, Bryce,” he says softly, his voice carrying across the quiet space. Bryce smiles when Blaine’s gentle snoring fills the room five minutes later, allowing him to drift off into his own restful sleep.

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**November 14, 2012**

“You’re absolutely sure this has nothing to do with Kurt?” Sam asks as they sit in front of Blaine’s laptop in the McKinley library, the list of colleges he’s sent his application to open on the screen. “This is what you want to do?”

“I’ve thought about this a lot, Sam. This is what I want. I’ve talked to Cooper, and my mom. This is what I need to do, for me. For no one else.”

“Then let’s do it,” Sam says in response, sliding the piece of notebook paper on which they’ve written Blaine’s new college choices over to Blaine. “Change away.”

Blaine logs into his Common Application, navigating to the section where he can declare which schools receive his application. There are already a dozen listed, nearly all schools in New York with the exception of Ohio State. Quickly, Blaine adds the six schools he’s decided on to the list, withdrawing his application to every New York school except Columbia. He looks over the information one last time before he hits submit, letting out a sigh of relief when the confirmation comes up.

“Blaine Anderson, you’ve just applied to college. What will you do next?” Sam asks in an impression of a sports announcer’s voice, holding an invisible microphone in Blaine’s face. Blaine throws his arms up in mock celebration, wiping an invisible tear away as he plays along.

“I’m going to Disney World!” he replies, pumping his fist in the air and pretending to thank the invisible crowd. He quickly dissolves into laughter at the look of reprimand from the librarian, causing Sam to double over next to him. It takes several minutes for them to regain control, because every time Blaine looks at Sam he starts laughing all over again.

When he can finally catch his breath, Blaine wipes actual tears from his eyes and throws an arm over Sam’s shoulder, pulling his best friend into a one-armed side hug. Sam returns the hug by throwing both of his arms around Blaine, pulling him into a tight hold.

“Thank you,” Blaine whispers when they break apart, keeping his hand on Sam’s shoulder. “For supporting me.”

“Least I could do after what you did for me with the video,” Sam replies, shrugging off Blaine’s hand. “And don’t thank me yet. You still have to do those supplementary essays.”

Blaine groans at Sam’s reminder, pulling his laptop back towards him and accessing the first site. He navigates to the list of essay prompts for the supplement, tapping his fingers on the trackpad while he thinks.

“Go Irish,” Sam says as he slings his backpack over his shoulder, standing up to leave Blaine to his work. Blaine smiles as Sam walks towards the door, opening Word and starting a new document to answer the first question.

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“There is no way I could possibly eat right now,” Blaine moans, sitting at a table in the dining hall with his roommate, poking listlessly at his omelet. “I feel sick.”

“Blaine, man, you’re going to pass out on top of your test if you don’t eat. You have to.”

“It’s a computer, it would be hard to pass out on top of it,” Blaine grumbles, cutting off a tiny piece from the corner of the omelet and swallowing it, going back to poking at the eggs right after. He washes the bite down with a gulp of coffee, nearly dropping the cup when he realizes how hot the coffee still is. He manages to keep the cup mostly upright, but a large amount of coffee spills over the lip of the mug, splashing onto the table.

“Fu-” Blaine hisses, pushing back from the table to avoid the dripping coffee spill heading towards him. Bryce slams a handful of napkins onto the spill, handing another handful to Blaine to clean off his arms.

“Easy there,” Bryce says, bunching up the wet napkins and dropping them onto his tray. “You gonna be okay?”

“I should just give up on today and go back to bed,” Blaine says, dropping his own wet napkins into his mostly empty coffee cup with a sigh. “This can’t be a good sign.”

“You just haven’t had enough coffee,” Bryce reasons, handing over his own mug and standing to go get another. “Drink this, I’ll be right back.”

Blaine sips miserably at the coffee, every fiber of his being itching to take out his phone to run MCAT Question of the Day while he sits there. He picks some more at the omelet, swallowing about a third of it before he can’t stomach anymore.

Bryce comes back with another dining hall tray, stacked with three coffee mugs, a plate of donuts, three bowls of cereal, and several bagels. He sets the tray in front of Blaine with a smirk, grabbing one of the mugs as he settles back into his chair.

“What-“

“Hot chocolate and more coffee, milk and two sugars like you like it. Every type of bagel they have today, every type of donut, and your three favorite cereals, complete with that awful soy milk you like to drink in it. There has to be something here you’ll eat.”

Blaine looks down at the food, then back to Bryce, who’s sitting back in his chair and sipping at his coffee with a smile.

“Please, be my guest,” Bryce says with an exaggerated gesture, nodding at the tray. Blaine snorts, reaching for the cinnamon bagel and tearing off a piece.

“Thanks, Bryce,” he says after he swallows, smiling at his roommate.

“Someone has to make sure you make it to the test alive,” Bryce replies, leaning over to grab a chocolate donut from the tray and taking a big bite out of it. “And I love watching the dining hall workers’ faces when I walk out of there with this much food. Never fails to make my morning.”

Blaine laughs, grabbing the rest of the bagel and taking a bite out of it as he notices one of the dining hall monitors at the door looking suspiciously at Bryce, who turns to wave at her as he takes another bite of his donut. Blaine shakes his head, washing down the bagel with a sip of coffee as he finally
starts to settle.

Two hours later, Bryce drives him to the testing center in Mishawaka, offering Blaine a fist bump and good luck before he leaves. Blaine’s hands are shaking as he walks into the Prometric center, nothing but his cell phone and a bag of snacks, a Gatorade, and a water with him.

He checks in and receives a locker key, making sure his phone is fully off and silent before stowing it inside the locker with his bag of snacks.

“Make sure you have anything on that you’re going to wear for the rest of the test,” the proctor advises, handing Blaine back his ID. “Sweatshirts, sweaters—anything like that is either on for the whole time or not at all. Your things stay out here in the locker, but you can keep the key on the desk next to your computer while you’re testing, and you can come out during your breaks, but no notes or any communication with other students during those times. Are you about ready?”

“As I’ll ever be,” Blaine answers, pushing up the sleeves of his cardigan. “Do we start now?”

“Yup. If you’re ready to head into the testing room, I’m just going to need you to sign in on the sheet here, enter your fingerprint, and then we’re going to use the security wand real quick, and you’ll be set.”

Blaine does as he’s asked, slightly alarmed at the security measures taken to ensure that there’s no cheating happening (and he has to stop himself from laughing when they break out the metal detector wand, because really?), and the proctor takes him into the room and directs him to his workstation with his scratch paper and a set of pencils.

“Good luck,” she whispers, exiting the room quietly and leaving Blaine to his test. Taking a deep breath to center himself, Blaine opens the test and starts on the first passage.

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April 24, 2013

“Are you Blaine?”

“Michael?”

Blaine stands up to shake the other boy’s hand, a smile breaking out across his face. They’re standing outside a small café on Notre Dame’s campus, Michael’s meeting place of choice to join up with Blaine for his overnight visit.

“That’s me!” Michael answers, offering to take Blaine’s duffel for him. Blaine declines, slinging it over his shoulder and falling into step next to Michael as they head out.

“So what’s your impression of the campus so far?” Michael asks, holding to door of the building open for Blaine as they walk out onto the quad. “How long have you been here?”

“My brother dropped me off about an hour ago, over by the bookstore? I haven’t had much chance to see it yet,” Blaine responds, looking out over the vast expanse of grass and sidewalks they’re standing on, lined on either side by rows of buildings. “Is this the main quad?”

“Well, that depends who you ask,” Michael laughs, pointing in the direction he’s heading and motioning for Blaine to follow. “This is South Quad. There’s also North Quad, God Quad, West Quad, and Mod Quad. People tend to get a little protective of the quad they live on.”
“And you live on-“

“So, obviously,” Michael grins, nodding towards a building near the middle of the quad. “Alumni Hall. But before we head to drop your stuff, I was wondering if you wanted to grab some Starbucks? I just got out of a lab and haven’t really had a chance to get my afternoon caffeine.”

“That would be great, actually,” Blaine agrees, still following one step behind Michael as he tries to take in everything on the campus that they’re passing. “You guys have a Starbucks on campus?”

“In our student center, yeah,” Michael confirms, holding the door of said center open for Blaine to enter before him. “We’ve got Starbucks, Subway, Burger King, and a convenience store on this level. Downstairs is a Taco Bell and Pizza Hut. What do you want to drink, Blaine?”

“Oh I can-“

“Flex Points,” Michael explains with a smile, holding up his student ID card for clarification. “Part of our dining plan gives us over $300 each semester. It’s on me.”

“Oh, then-can I get a medium coffee, plain? Room for cream?”

“Dark or light roast?” the barista asks when she overhears Blaine’s order, picking up a cup and slipping a heat sleeve onto it.

“Dark roast, please,” Blaine answers, accepting the coffee when it’s handed over to him. He heads to the condiment bar to add milk and cinnamon to the coffee, waiting for Michael to get his mocha. When they both have their drinks, Michael leads the way to his dorm, narrating the campus, the buildings they pass, and some of the school’s traditions as they walk.

He lets Blaine into his dorm room and points out the restroom down the hall, handing Blaine a pillow and blanket so he can set up a bed on the futon Michael shares with his roommate.

“So, listen-I know you mentioned on your questionnaire that you were considering a music major, but unfortunately—not many music majors volunteer for the ambassador program or are willing to take on prospies. So I’m actually a biology major, and I have an orgo class in about twenty-five minutes. You’re more than welcome to come sit in, but you’re also more than welcome to hang out around here and rest a bit, too, if that’s more your speed.”

“Orgo?” Blaine asks, watching Michael switch the notebooks in his backpack for a binder and his laptop.

“Organic chemistry. The bane of all premeds’ existence. My professor is actually really great, he’d be a pretty cool example of an ND professor. I usually grab dinner with a few friends after class, so if you’d want to come we can do that.”

“That actually sounds pretty cool,” Blaine agrees easily, pulling his wallet from his duffel and slipping it into his pocket. “Do I need to bring anything?”

“Just yourself. We should probably head out though—the class is in the science building which is more or less the opposite end of campus. I usually take my bike, but we’ll walk there today.”

Blaine follows Michael back out into the quad, asking questions of the older boy as they walk to Jordan Hall. Michael answers everything Blaine asks honestly, elaborating on some of the scenery and buildings they’re passing as they walk.

“That’s the stadium, obviously, and right across the quad from it is the library. And Touch-“
“Touchdown Jesus,” Blaine finishes, stopping to snap a quick picture on his phone. “My brother and I have always had a soft spot for Rudy.”

“As everyone should,” Michael laughs, pausing to wait for Blaine to catch up. They walk the last bit to the science building in companionable silence, Blaine too busy looking around as they walk to ask any more questions. Michael leads Blaine into the first classroom on the left as they walk in, heading about halfway down the lecture seats to a row that’s about a third full.

“Blaine, this is Spencer, and Allison. Guys, this is Blaine, my prospie for the night.”

“What’s up?” Spencer asks, sliding over one seat so Blaine can sit between him and Michael. “You’re looking to be a bio major?”

“Uh, music, actually,” Blaine corrects, looking around the row as people start to pull out laptops and notebooks, settling in for the class to start. “Vocal performance.”

“I’m actually a Music Theory major,” Allison says, flipping through her notebook to the next available blank page. “Music Theory and premed.”

“That’s a thing?”

“Almost anything is a thing here,” Allison laughs, digging in her bag for a pen. “We have two premed tracks, one science only and one where you declare a liberal arts major. I did the second one.”

“Allison’s a little over ambitious,” Michael teases, winking at Blaine. “And a little indecisive.”

“So you’re all premed?” Blaine asks, looking from Michael to Spencer, who shakes his head, laughing.

“I’m Chemical Engineering, Michael’s Bio premed. I’d say probably about two thirds of this class is premed though.”

“Two thirds?” Blaine repeats, looking around the room, estimating that there’s at least one hundred students sitting at the desks. “Wow.”

“They say only a fraction of those will make it past this semester,” Michael offers, dropping his voice as the professor walks into the room and starts to pull up his lecture slides. “Orgo is the best way to weed out who’s serious about medicine, and who isn’t.”

Blaine settles back as the short man at the front of the hall starts lecturing, engaging the students with questions and anecdotes the whole time. The fifty minute class passes quickly before Blaine is even aware, and he realizes he’s been paying rapt attention to the lecture the entire time, even though he’d barely understood a word of what was being said.

He follows Michael, Spencer, and Allison out of the lecture hall, listening quietly as they discuss one of the more confusing concepts they’d covered that day.

“But wouldn’t that compound end up in cis conformation?” Allison is asking as she adjusts her backpack strap. “If the substituents are both-“

“Yeah, but the t-butyl compound overrides that, because it’s so bulky,” Michael explains, using his hands to demonstrate for Allison. “See? It has to end up in trans conformation because of the steric.”
“I think we’re overwhelming your prospie,” Spencer says, nodding back at Blaine, who’s watching the conversation with confusion and interest. “Let’s finish this in study group tomorrow night.”

“Sorry, Blaine,” Michael apologizes, falling back into step next to his charge. “We tend to get a little excited about chemistry sometimes.”

“No, it’s no problem,” Blaine says, waving away Michael’s concern. “I actually found all that really interesting. It’s very different from the chemistry I took a couple years ago.”

“It is, that’s for sure. But I think it’s pretty interesting. Definitely a challenge, but I feel like I’m learning a lot, you know?”

“Yeah, I get that,” Blaine agrees, following Michael’s lead as they arrive at the dining hall and swipe in, grabbing trays and food. Later, as he lies awake on Michael’s futon and reflects on his day, Blaine finds himself returning to thoughts of the organic chem class, mulling over the figures and charts the professor had drawn on the whiteboard, the concepts he’d been explaining.

Resolving to look into it when he returns to Ohio, Blaine flips over and quickly falls asleep, his breathing evening out within minutes.

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February 25, 2016

“Earth to Blaine Anderson, is anyone home?”

Bryce waves his hand in front of Blaine’s face when the latter zones out for the third time at the lunch table, his wrap barely touched on his plate. Blaine shakes his head, rolling his shoulders as he focus on Bryce.

“What?”

“Dude, you went somewhere else again,” Jackson leans over from two seats down, smacking Blaine on the back. “Pay attention.”

“It’s MCAT score day,” another of their friends, Jaclyn, says from across the table, looking down at her phone as she’s speaking. “He’s as nervous as I am.”

“Are they up yet?” Blaine asks, reaching in his pocket for his phone as Jaclyn looks down at hers, frowning.

“Still nothing,” she replies with a sigh, slipping her phone back into her pocket and taking a bite of her hamburger. “I don’t know what’s taking so long.”

She and Blaine are the only members of their friend group on the premed track, though a few others are science majors as well. They’d both taken the MCAT on the same day, though Jaclyn took hers early in the morning, and they’ve been waiting nervously since breakfast for scores to come in.

“They’re drawing it out on purpose,” Blaine says, finally taking another bite of his wrap and washing it down with Coke. “It’s psychological.”

“Y’all are taking this way too seriously,” Jackson teases, reaching across the table for a napkin. “This isn’t the end of the world.”

“Tell me that in a few months after you take the LSAT,” Blaine shoots back, jumping when his
phone vibrates in his pocket. He ducks from the balled up napkin Jackson lobbs at his head as he pulls his phone out, checking the screen.

“Scores are up,” he says at the same time Jaclyn pulls out her own phone, having received the same text. “Andrew just texted me.”

The table falls silent as Blaine and Jaclyn both hunch over their phones, typing furiously on the internet browsers as they try to access their scores. Blaine chews on his bottom lip as he waits for the site to load, quickly entering his email and password and waiting for the screen to pop up.

He looks up at Jaclyn’s joyful squeak, his heart beating faster than he thought possible as she pumps a fist in the air in celebration.

“How’d you do?” she asks, leaning across the table to try to see Blaine’s phone. “Is yours up?”

“Hold on,” Blaine mutters, shaking his phone as if that will make the browser load more quickly. “Still loading. How’d you do?”

“Thirty two!” Jaclyn says happily, still standing up to try to see Blaine’s. “I can’t believe it.”

“I knew you’d do fine,” Blaine says with a smile, looking back down at his screen to see if it’s loaded. “Hold on-“

He scrolls down the page to the little score box, sees his test date listed with a line of numbers, and scans quickly to the last one.

“Thirty-three!” he breathes out, jumping in surprise when Jaclyn reaches across the table to hug him. “We did it!”

“I’m so proud of us!” Jaclyn cries, letting Blaine go so they can both sit down, and return to eating. The rest of their friends offer handshakes and smiles, but Blaine’s too busy floating on air to really comprehend much of what they’re saying to him until Bryce throws an arm around his shoulders and informs the group that they’re going out to celebrate.

They discuss plans over the rest of lunch before Blaine and Jaclyn have to leave for Physics lab, and agree to meet in front of Fisher so they can all catch a cab together that night. Blaine practically skips out the door with Jaclyn, both of them smiling so widely they get a few strange looks from people just coming into the dining hall.

When they pile into the cab a few hours later, Blaine has no idea where Bryce intends to take them, but he’s more than content to go along for the ride. They end up hopping between several bars, Bryce announcing loudly to anyone who will listen that Blaine and Jaclyn are going to be doctors, and somehow managing to get them both countless free drinks because of that. They end the night around four in the morning, piling into another cab and laughing when they end up crushed in the backseat with two strangers also heading back to campus.

As he falls asleep, already regretting the hangover he’ll have, Blaine smiles to himself, happy.
August 31, 2013

Blaine spends his first week on campus in total awe of the school, soaking in everything he can about his dorm life, his roommates, and his classes. He tags along to a few dorm parties with Bryce, and quickly learns that the intolerance he’d heard about when applying to Notre Dame only applies to a small section of the student body. He feels incredibly welcomed by the people he meets, and starts to enjoy the time he shares with his vocal performance classmates.

Midway through the second week of school, Blaine follows Bryce to the basketball arena, where countless student organizations have set up tables for Activities Night. Blaine isn’t really planning on joining any clubs (mostly because Notre Dame has no official LGBT organization), but he figures that it can’t hurt to look around, see what catches his eye. College organizations are vastly different from the few he’d joined at McKinley, evidenced by the vast array of displays, sounds, and performances scattered across the room.

Blaine wanders for several minutes after he loses Bryce to the Ultimate Frisbee team, grabbing flyers from a few tables but refraining from putting his information down on any signups. He’s circling the outside tables when he comes upon a booth attended by two students in red hoodies, First Aid Services Team stamped across the back. He drifts closer to the table, reading the information listed on their poster board with mild interest.

“Hey!” The girl notices Blaine reading the sign, and she waves him over with the pamphlet in her hand. “You’re interested in joining FAST?”

“Just looking, actually,” Blaine corrects, taking the pamphlet she offers him. “What is it?”

“We’re the First Aid Services Team,” she tells him, pointing to her shirt. “I’m Lizbeth, the president. We basically take care of the first aid stations at sporting events on campus, runs, pep rallies, any big event held on campus. We’re first responders in case something happens.”

“How often does something happen?” Blaine asks, flipping through the brochure. He’d been first aid trained at the theme park as part of his orientation, but he hasn’t kept up with it and he’d never had to use it outside of skinned knees and bumped foreheads.

She laughs, putting her hands in her pockets as she stands talking to Blaine.

“Not all that often. Football games are the most active, so we usually have around fifteen of us on duty at all the games, posted in every section. Typically, the other events don’t need us as often, except for things like Muddy Sunday or Bookstore Basketball. But it’s hit or miss, really.”

“Are you all premeds?” Blaine asks, folding the brochure and slipping it into his pocket. “Or thinking about medical school?”

“A lot of us are,” she says with a nod, turning back to her partner. “Jack’s actually a polisci major, and we’ve got people from every department on the team. You don’t have to be premed to join us. Are you?”

“I’m vocal performance, actually,” Blaine answers, picking up a second pamphlet from the table. “I’ve got a bit of a history with first aid, though, so this is really cool to me. I’m not trained though.”

“We’re having CPR and first aid certification next Sunday, actually,” she tells him, pointing to the
date on the flyer he’d just picked up. “If you train with us and work at least three events, we cover all the costs of your certification. My email’s listed on there, you can think about it and shoot me an email by Friday if you think you’re interested.”

“Thanks,” Blaine says, shaking her hand when she offers it. “I’m definitely going to think about it.”

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May 4, 2016

Blaine sighs as he opens up the Word document that contains his half-finished personal statement, running a hand through his hair as he scrolls through the document. He’s been working on it for close to two weeks, and nothing he writes seems to sound right anymore. Frowning, Blaine erases the last paragraph he’d written, about growing up in Ohio, and taps his fingers on his keyboard, trying to think of a new angle.

“Talk about your challenges,” his advisor had told him earlier in the year when they met to discuss Blaine’s plans to apply to medical school. “Talk about something that changed the way you looked at the world. Talk about something you’re passionate about. Give them a glimpse of the Blaine Anderson that doesn’t come through on paper.”

Blaine’s drafted three version of his personal statement, none of them actually personal enough to distinguish him from the statistics on his application. He knows what he wants to write about, but he’s too afraid that putting it into words will be painful, too painful to handle, so he’s been avoiding it.

“What’s something you’ve overcome, that’s given you insight into how you want to live and practice medicine?”

Blaine keeps thinking about the last question his advisor had posed to him at their meeting, circulating possible answers in his head over and over.

Coming out was certainly something he’d overcome, but not really something that gave him insight into the practice of medicine.

Sadie Hawkins? Well, he’d spent eight months in a hospital, so it had given him something about medicine, hadn’t it?

Blaine types out a few quick paragraphs about coming out to an unresponsive family, before reading it over and realizing it sounds cliché and impersonal. Sighing deeply, he erases the entire essay and starts again with a blank screen, resolving to outline before he tries to write again.

He starts the page with “Blaine’s Personal Statement” across the top, and starts a bullet list with the points he wants to talk about. He adds in Sadie Hawkins and the doctors on the ward who’d worked with him, the nurses who’d made sure that the time he spent there wasn’t entirely terrible. He adds a bullet point for the slushy incident, and another for Burt’s cancer, for the time he’d spent talking with doctors about Burt’s health.

He keeps adding bullet points, listing events that have shaped him, and after fifteen minutes has a list comprising two pages of talking points, and an inkling of an idea about where he wants to start. Opening up a fresh document and saving it as “Personal Statement,” Blaine takes the first of his bullet points and starts to write.

“When I was fourteen, my life changed in an instant.”
September 7, 2013

“Blaine, you and Jack will be in the sophomore section, down closer to the field, alright? Jack has your walkie,” Lizbeth reads off a clipboard, handing Blaine a pack filled with first aid supplies. “You guys can head out.”

Blaine follows Jack’s lead out of the First Aid room, navigating the back hallways of the football stadium until they come out into the open near the student section, mostly empty except for a few freshmen milling about in the farthest left section. There’s still two and a half hours to kickoff, but FAST members were asked to arrive early to get into position. Blaine stops momentarily when they walk out onto the bleachers, looking around at the field and the mostly empty stadium in awe.

“First time in here, isn’t it?” Jack asks with a smirk, pointing out the bench they’ll be sitting on to Blaine. “It’s crazy.”

“I never thought I’d actually be here,” Blaine says by way of response, quickly jumping back into place behind Jack as they bounce down the bleachers. “It’s pretty different seeing it on TV.”

“Nothing quite like it in college football,” Jack agrees, setting his bag on the ground and settling on the bench. “You can get comfortable, there’s not going to be much to do until the stadium fills up, and then it’s mostly gonna be heat stroke and drunk people passing out on the stairs.”

Blaine laughs, sitting next to Jack and shifting until he’s comfortable.

“My dad took me to a Buckeyes game once when I was a kid, like maybe six,” Blaine says after a moment, sliding out his phone to take a picture of the field. “This is actually pretty small compared to their stadium.”

“They keep saying it’s about the tradition,” Jack explains, offering to take a picture of Blaine standing in front of the stadium, which he quickly uploads to Facebook for Cooper’s benefit. “Something about keeping it classic. You’re a Buckeyes fan?”

“I figured it’s not too taboo to admit that around here,” Blaine says, shrugging. “At least we’re not in Ann Arbor.”

“You have a point,” Jack agrees, adjusting his ear piece as static comes over the walkie talkie. “So you’re from Ohio?”

They pass an hour talking about their hometowns and majors, Jack far too eager to explain his love for political science to Blaine, who finds it much more interesting than he’d expected. Jack pauses a few times to answer calls on the walkie talkie, but their conversation flows easily as the stadium fills steadily behind them.

“We’ve got about twenty minutes to kickoff,” Jack says when the stadium is full and alive, the team long since finished with their warm up routines. Blaine looks around behind him at the students crowding the section, smiling when he sees a clearly drunk group of guys hugging on top of one of the benches, screaming made up words to Crazy Train as it plays on the sound system. The student section is entirely on its feet, something Jack explains will stay that way for the whole game.

The first quarter and a half passes with little incident, the Irish pulling ahead by two touchdowns with no effort. After the second, Blaine knows to duck as the students behind them start throwing each other in the air-something Jack explains as push-ups, done to match the number of points the Irish have scored—and he almost misses the sudden commotion slightly to his right.
A loud scream that pierces above the rest of the noise in the section alerts Jack to what’s happening, and he grabs his bag, motioning for Blaine to follow him as they quickly locate the source of the scream.

A petite girl is sprawled over two benches, her friends forming a circle around her as they panic. It’s clear that someone dropped her during the pushups by the way she’s lying, but the most startling thing about the scene is the trickle of blood running down the side of her face from a large gash on her temple.

“Can you guys clear out for us?” Jack asks, motioning for the people immediately surrounding the area to move away so they can reach the girl. “Blaine can you assess her, I’m gonna call it in?”

“Got it,” Blaine confirms, carefully kneeling at her head and scanning the area for any immediate danger. He looks up at the people surrounding, asking one of them directly for her name.

“Angela?” he asks loudly, tapping her on the shoulder, leaning over to see if she responds. He tries again when she doesn’t, quickly reaching into his bag for gauze to press against the wound on her head. He’s just finishing checking her breathing when Jack kneels next to him, bracing his hands along the sides of her face to stabilize her.

“How’s she doing?”

“Uh, she’s not responding but her breathing is stable and her airways are clear. I can’t find anything else except the gash on her head.”

“The EMTs are on their way with a backboard to take her out of here,” Jack informs him, handing Blaine a fresh wad of gauze to press over the quickly saturated one. “Keep pressure on that.”

Blaine nods, switching his hands to adjust his grip on the gauze. Jack shifts next to him, careful to keep Angela’s head steady as he does, and tries to call her name again to wake her.

“Hold on, she’s moving,” Blaine says, leaning forward to take Angela’s hand in his, squeezing it gently. “Angela? Can you hear me?”

She moans incoherently, something that sounds more like a groan of pain than words, and her eyes blink open, darting around before settling on Blaine, who’s still holding her hand.

“Hey, there you go,” Blaine says, smiling reassuringly at her. “My name’s Blaine, Angela, and I’m first aid trained. We’re helping you out right now, alright? You took a bit of a fall.”

“My head,” Angela moans, reaching up with her free hand to feel around the gauze Blaine’s holding there. “What-“

“You smacked your head pretty good,” Jack offers, drawing Angela’s attention to him. “Can you tell me if anything else hurts?”

“Just my head,” she confirms her hand falling back to her side. “Am I okay?”

“We’re gonna have the paramedics come take a look at you,” Blaine explains, squeezing her hand again for reassurance. “You’re okay though, Angela. You can just relax.”

He talks her through the wait for the paramedics, keeping up a constant stream of chatter to distract her from the pain in her head and the fear of what’s happening. He keeps holding her hand as the medics arrive and brace her neck, gently rolling her onto a backboard so they can transport her safely out of the stands and check her over in a less hectic environment.
“Thanks,” she smiles up at him as the medics carry her towards the exit. “For keeping me calm.”

“Anytime,” Blaine replies with a smile, balling up his gloves and tossing them in the waste bag Jack holds out to him.

“Nice job, rookie,” Jack says with a smile as they head back to the control room at the end of the game, voice hoarse from cheering Notre Dame on to a victory. “You were great out there.”

“It was amazing,” Blaine breathes, still riding on the high of the win and of being able to help Angela. “All of it.”

June 1, 2016

The arrival of secondary applications brings a change to Blaine’s daily schedule. He rolls over in bed as soon as his alarm goes off, grabbing his phone to check his email for any new secondaries. If there are none, he rolls back over for another hour or so of sleep, content to wait until later in the day to check again.

If he does receive new applications, Blaine drags himself out of bed to his laptop, quickly booting it up and navigating to his email client to read about each application. He’s written more essays than he can really count, the prompts for each blurring together until he’s not sure if he’s answering the question “Why do you want to be a doctor?” or “Why is the sky blue?”

His primary application is a list of twenty-three schools, twelve osteopathic and eleven allopathic, and he’s received secondaries for fifteen of the twenty-three. The difficult task he’s been spending the summer working on is narrowing his list of schools to something more manageable, a list of around fourteen or fifteen. Father Jim has sent Blaine a list of schools he’d likely be a good match for, and Blaine’s currently working to compare his list of secondaries with that list.

His concentration is interrupted his phone ringing, and Blaine leans back in his chair to snatch it from his bed, answering the call without looking to see who it is.

“Hello?”

“Blaine? Dude, where are you? We were supposed to meet at the mall fifteen minutes ago!” Sam complains on the other end of the line, trying and failing to sound impatient and fed up. “Did you cancel on me and forget to tell me again?”

“Crap!” Blaine exclaims, looking at his watch and realizing he’s spent nearly two hours working on applications, has worked well past the deadline he’d set for himself to get ready and meet Sam at the mall so they can catch the latest Marvel movie together. “Give me maybe half an hour. I lost track of time, I just need to get dressed and I’ll be over. Did we miss the ten-fifteen show?”

“Since it’s ten-thirty, yeah, we did,” Sam jokes, and Blaine smiles as he pictures Sam

“You’re wasting our last great summer together,” Sam whines, and Blaine smiles as he pictures Sam
dramatically throwing an arm over his eyes in lament. “Nightbird and the Blonde Chameleon only have a few more missions left, you know.”

Blaine laughs, waiting for his phone to switch over to his car’s Bluetooth system before he backs out of the driveway. They’re both three years into college, nearly finished, and their friendship hasn’t changed a bit since they’ve been apart.

“Maybe the Blonde Chameleon will have some ideas for my essays,” Blaine says, flipping his blinker on as he pulls to the end of his street. “That can be our greatest mission yet: operation Get Nightbird into Medical School.”

“Dude, I’m already on that,” Sam says, and Blaine isn’t sure he wants to know where this conversation is going. “I’ve got the plans with me here, so after the movie we’re going to lunch and I’m going to let you in on the genius that is my plan.”

“Sam, does this involve bribing the admissions committee in any way?”

“Well-“

“Sam!”

“Just get to the mall, and I’ll tell you all about it.”

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November 1, 2013

“I want to switch majors,” Blaine leads with as soon as he’s sitting across from his advisor, barely even waiting for her to greet him. “Well, I want to add a major.”

“How major?” his advisor asks, leaning back in her chair as she regards him.

“I want to add pre-med. To my Vocal Performance major. I want to be Arts and Letters Pre-professional.”

“That’s very….different, from the major you’d declared coming in, isn’t it?” she asks, pulling up Blaine’s records on the computer and scanning them quickly. “Although you came in with credits from both AP Chem and AP Bio, so science has always been a strong point for you, I’d guess?”

“I was good at it in high school, yeah,” Blaine confirms, nodding. “But I never really thought I wanted to do it for my career, you know?”

“Until now?”

“Pretty much.”

“What made you change your mind?”

Blaine pauses to collect his thoughts, knows that he has to answer this question again and again if he does end up on the path he’s considering.

“I joined the first aid team on campus, FAST? I’ve been working with them since the start of the semester, and I’ve done maybe five or six events with them. A lot of the people I’ve worked with are pre-meds, but some of them aren’t.”

“Is there a particular experience with FAST that made you change your mind? What was your
lightbulb moment?”

Blaine smiles at the phrase, thinking back to that first football game, his first real experience as someone responsible for caring for another.

“My first game with them, I worked the season opener for football. We treated a girl who’d fallen during pushups and hit her head. I got to calm her down while we waited for the paramedics, after we’d assessed her. I held her hand and I just-it was kinda surreal, actually, realizing that I was the tether keeping her focused and calm. It was incredible.”

“So it was just that one experience? Or were there others?”

Blaine hesitates for a moment, sizing his advisor up before choosing his words carefully.

“When I was younger, freshman year of high school—I survived a hate crime. I was put in the hospital for about a month, and had to miss the rest of my year because of rehab and therapy. I met with a lot of doctors during that time, a lot of them I don’t remember. But the ones I do remember—the things they told me, the care they showed me has stayed with me for all these years. I want to make that kind of difference in someone’s life. I want to be there when they’re at literally their most vulnerable, the worst time they’re experiencing, and help build them back up. I want to heal.”

“You’ve given this a lot of thought.” It’s a statement, not a question, and Blaine relaxes, knows that he’s made his case successfully.

“I know this is one of the hardest things I can undertake. But I like a good challenge, and I honestly can’t see myself doing anything else now. This is the path I want.”

“Well, Blaine, let’s see about registering you for ALPP classes in the spring then, shall we?” his advisor says with a smile, quickly pulling up Blaine’s record and tilting the computer screen so he can read what’s written there. “It looks like you came in with General Chemistry credits from AP, so I’m going to check with the dean of the College of Science to see if we can apply those so you can go straight into Organic next semester. Otherwise we’ll have to put you into a Gen Chem class and you can do some catch up work over the summer if you wanted to stay on track with the rest of your year.”

They spend the next fifteen minutes hashing out a tentative spring schedule and an outline for what the next three years will look like, and Blaine leaves the office feeling lighter than he has in months.

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September 1, 2016

“Blaine, your phone is ringing!” Bryce calls from the common room into the adjoining bedroom where Blaine is sprawled on his bed reading a textbook. “You left it in here!”

“Coming, hold on!” Blaine calls back, swinging down off the top bunk and darting into the common room just in time to snatch up the phone and answer it. “Hello?”

“May I speak to Blaine Anderson, please?”

“Speaking,” Blaine answers, heading back into the bedroom and shutting the door for privacy. “May I ask who’s calling?”

“This is Lindsay Griesback from the New York College of Osteopathic Medicine. We’ve reviewed your application and we’d like to offer you an interview, Blaine.”
Blaine nearly drops the phone in surprise and joy, his hands shaking as he darts to his desk to snatch up a pen and paper for the details.

“Oh wow, okay, thank you,” he says, scribbling ‘NYCOM Interview” across the paper. “What day would I need to be there for my interview?”

“Since it’s still early in the interview season we have several dates open. The interview day consists of a tour of our academic campus, the interview itself, and a chance to meet with some current first year students over lunch so they can answer any questions you might have. Right now, we have open slots on October 4 and 5, as well as October 16 and 17. If any of those don’t work, I can look into November as well.”

“Um,” Blaine stalls for a moment, grabbing his planner and flipping to the calendar for October where he’s written exams and important dates. “October 4 would be perfect, thank you.”

“Great!” Lindsay replies, and Blaine can hear her typing quickly on the other end of the line. “I’ll put you down for the October 4 interview, and we’ll send you an email confirmation within the next few days including accommodation details and a final schedule. We look forward to meeting you in October!”

“I look forward to meeting you as well!” Blaine answers, his voice somewhat breathless as the phone call finally washes over him. “Thank you so much!”

He hangs up the call in a daze, wandering back out to the common room clutching the paper with his interview date in one hand and his phone in the other.

“You look like you just saw a litter of kittens,” Bryce says when he catches sight of Blaine’s face from his spot on the futon. “What’s up?”

“I got an interview,” Blaine says, holding the paper out to Bryce. “I got my first interview in New York in three weeks.”

“Blaine, oh my god!” Bryce yells, jumping up and tossing the paper onto the futon as he pulls Blaine into a bone-crushing hug. “Shit, man. This is insane!”

“You’re telling me,” Blaine responds with a laugh, returning Bryce’s hug. “I have to book a flight to New York and get a hotel and call my parents and figure all of this out before-”

“Are you kidding me?” Bryce asks, incredulous. “That’s what tomorrow is for. Right now, we’re taking you out to celebrate!”

“Bryce, it’s four in the afternoon.”

“Then we’re taking you down the hall to pregame the celebration, and then we’re going to Finny’s. Get dressed.”

Blaine’s half-hearted protests go unheard, and an hour and a half later he’s on his second beer as they sit in Jackson’s room celebrating. The group has grown steadily over the course of the hour and Blaine’s lost track of the number of people who’ve congratulated him and offered to buy him shots at the bar. He feels loose and happy, at peace with himself and the world for the first time in a long time.

“To Blaine!” Bryce interrupts Blaine’s train of thought with a loud toast, raising his half-empty bottle in the air. “That he doesn’t fuck the interview up, and he makes us all proud.”
“To Blaine!” the rest of the group echoes, and Blaine laughs as he polishes off the beer and grabs another.

There are still flights to book, logistics to hammer out, but for now, Blaine lets himself be pulled along to the bars as he rides a pleasant buzz, losing track of the number of strangers Bryce tells about Blaine’s interview. Six different people buy him celebratory shots, and by the end of the night Blaine is giddy and more than a little drunk, draping himself over Bryce in the back of the cab as they laugh hysterically.

He books his flight and hotel the next morning while battling a wicked hangover, sending the details to his parents before going back to bed to hide underneath his blankets.

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March 2, 2014

Blaine ends up taking General Chemistry his freshman spring in order to review the concepts, in addition to an extra Calculus course and two general education requirements and a vocal performance course. Most of the people in his Chem class are recent transfers to the pre-med program as well, and Blaine quickly finds a group to study with, as well as a lab partner.

“Wait, hold on, that’s backwards,” Blaine is saying as he leans over to scratch out a few numbers on his partner’s lab notes. “You put pKa where pH should be, and flipped the two.”

“I do that every time,” Jaclyn whines, ripping out the page and starting a new one, taking an extra moment to double check the numbers. “Henderson and Hasselbach are my number one enemy.”

“It’s actually not too terrible, if you do most of the practice problems he gave us for homework. I was messing them up for the first few tries, too, and then it started to make sense.”

“So how do you generate the pH titration curve from all of this?” Jaclyn asks, flipping through her lab manual to try to find instructions. “Does this even tell us anything about that?”

“Well, kinda. Mainly that equation is so we can determine how the pH will change based on the concentration of acid or base we added. But the pH curve goes with what we determined in lab, remember?”

“Oh, right, okay. So it’s this graph we need to use, yeah?” Jaclyn flips backwards in her lab notebook a few pages, producing the rough graph she’d sketched during their titration experiment. “This is the midpoint here, right?”

“Yup, and that’s pKa,” Blaine confirms, showing her his own notes. “Which goes with the question they asked in the manual about endpoint and midpoint and what they stand for, see?”

“Finally, yeah,” Jaclyn says with a laugh, scribbling down her answers and checking them with Blaine’s for accuracy. “Are we done?”

“I think just about, yeah. Have you done this week’s homework set yet?”

“I started it, but I haven’t been able to finish it. I’ve been having trouble entering my answers in WebAssign.”

“Yeah, same,” Blaine agrees, taking his laptop from his backpack and powering it up, navigating to the Chemistry homework submission site. “Want to work on them now, get them out of the way?”
“Can we go to dinner after? All this talk of acid is making me want an orange, really badly,” Jaclyn jokes, eliciting a snort from Blaine. They settle down to finish the ten-question set, both of them submitting their answers before heading to dinner, Jaclyn sneaking an extra two oranges out of the dining hall in her sweatshirt pocket as they leave.

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October 4, 2016

“Blaine Anderson?”

Blaine stands up when the woman at the door calls his name, motioning for him to follow her back through the door she’d entered from. She offers her hand when he reaches her, introducing herself as Doctor Michaelson.

“We’re right in here, Blaine,” she says with a smile, holding the door to a small conference room open so Blaine can enter ahead of her. There’s one other person in the room, who introduces himself as Doctor Williams, and Blaine takes the seat directly across the table from his two interviewers.

“So, Blaine, how are you this morning?” Doctor Michaelson asks, flipping Blaine’s file open on the table and looking it over. “Did you have a safe trip out?”

“I did, actually. I flew in last night from Chicago.”

“You’re at Notre Dame?” Doctor Williams asks, noting Blaine’s chart. “Fighting Irish?”

“Yes sir. Are you a fan?”

“My dad was a big Notre Dame football fan when I was growing up,” Doctor Williams says with a smile. “Every Saturday was Notre Dame day at our house.”

“We were actually Ohio State fans at my house,” Blaine says with a laugh and a shrug. “No one’s really sure how I ended up in South Bend.”

Both interviewers laugh, and Blaine feels himself relax a little, comfortable with the rapport he’s setting up with them.

“I see here you’re a vocal performance major? Why do you like to sing?”

“I was always a performer, even as a kid,” Blaine starts, offering a smile to his interviewers. “My parents have videos of me putting on shows with my older brother in our garage. I sang throughout high school, too, in two different show choirs. It seemed natural to keep studying it in college.”

“But you don’t want to be a performer as a career?”

“I actually thought I did, for awhile. I was originally applying to performing arts schools here in New York, actually, when a series of events my senior year set me thinking about what I really wanted to do, how I wanted to do it.”

“You declared as a vocal performance major going into school, though, right?” Doctor Michaelson confirms, flipping up a page of Blaine’s file. “And declared pre-med later in your freshman year?”

“I did. When I started at Notre Dame I thought I still wanted to do some kind of performance, at least for awhile. It wasn’t until I joined the First Aid team and started thinking about what had led me to where I was that I started really thinking about pre-med.”
“So you’re a recent convert to medicine, then?”

“Well, I have a bit of a...history, I guess, with medicine. I’ve spent a lot of time in hospitals, and I think without realizing it that shaped a lot of my personality. I spent some time shadowing a doctor my freshman year at the hospital near campus before I really committed to the decision.”

“So why do you think osteopathic medicine is the right choice for you?” Doctor Williams asks, making a few notes on Blaine’s chart. “What brought you to apply to DO schools?”

“I actually didn’t realize at the time, but one of the doctors I worked with while I was recovering in the hospital my freshman year of high school was a DO. She was probably my favorite person during that time. I was having a lot of residual pain from the—well, I had a pretty severe head injury, and the pain was getting to a point where it would debilitate me for days, not hours. Doctor Andley actually did a bit of OMT on me, and it helped with the pain immensely. When I started looking at applying to medical school I decided to look into what being a DO meant, versus what an MD meant. I fell in love with the idea of treating the entire patient, as well as the focus on preventing illness and finding health, instead of looking for illness.”

“You’ve really put some thought into this,” Doctor Michaelson says with a smile, jotting another note on Blaine’s file. “Let’s talk about some other stuff. What books have you read recently?”

The rest of the interview passes quickly, Blaine answering the questions they throw at him with ease. He feels confident when he leaves the interview room after forty minutes, shaking both of his interviewers’ hands and taking their business cards so he can send thank-you notes. He’s already participated in a campus tour and lunch with older students, so he’s free to go, heading back to his hotel for a bit of site-seeing before his flight leaves later in the evening.

The idea of calling Kurt briefly crosses his mind, but Blaine pushes it away, instead going on a solo adventure through Central Park.

He’s found his perfect school, his perfect city.

Now he just needs them to accept him.

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April 25, 2014

“This fall, we’re offering an EMT-B training course for members of FAST,” Lizbeth says as they’re packing up the first aid kits in the control room, Blaine taking inventory of their supplies as they work. “I think you should look into it, Blaine. You’d be great.”

“What’s it involve?” Blaine asks, adding bandages to the bag he’s currently filling before putting it away in the supply closet.

“It’d be a full semester course, meeting all day on Saturdays. FAST will help cover some of the cost of books and certification. We’ll be having an interest meeting on Friday if you want to come out.”

“That sounds really great, actually,” Blaine says, finishing up the last kit. “Do you know how much it’s going to cost?”

“Possibly around a thousand for certification and shadowing costs, as well as clinical experience hours. We’ll have final costs at the meeting, as well as information on registration.”

“Sounds great!” Blaine walks with Lizbeth from the arena, waving goodbye as they split to go to
their separate dorms. As he walks, Blaine enters the information for the meeting into his phone calendar, setting a reminder for himself.

The day of the meeting, Blaine shows up ten minutes early out of habit, grabbing a seat near Lizbeth as they wait for the presenter. They share small talk about Blaine’s Gen Chem final coming up, Lizbeth offering Blaine tips for the best ways to study. A few other FAST members file in, and at five exactly a young man dressed in a paramedic’s uniform shows up, quickly setting up his powerpoint presentation.

“Hey guys,” he starts, introducing himself as Kyle Brunswick, a medic with the Notre Dame Fire Department. “So you’re all interested in EMT-B training, right?”

A murmur of agreement passes through the crowd, and he clicks to the next slide.

“So what exactly is an EMT-B, and how do you train to become one? That’s what I’m here to tell you, right? So let’s get started.”

Kyle flips quickly through a few introductory slides, explaining the role and duties of an EMT-B, how it differs from a paramedic or other first responder. He briefly outlines the course schedule, highlighting the clinical hours that students will be expected to complete both on the rig and in the emergency room, and then opens the floor for questions.

Blaine’s the first to raise his hand, already eager to get started.

“So how much will this cost, tuition and certification and everything?”

“The way it stands right now, we’re looking at about a thousand dollars a student, to cover the cost of preceptor fees, books, certification, and class time. In past years, FAST has helped to defray that cost with some of the club funds, so that’s probably an option this year as well. Good question.”

“Would we be able to work anywhere, or just on campus?” a girl in the back of the room asks, her hand in the air to grab Kyle’s attention.

“Unfortunately, our certification is only for the state of Indiana. So you’d be able to work here on campus, in the community, elsewhere in the state. However, the license won’t necessarily transfer to another state, but that’s something we’d be able to discuss at a later date with the proper authorities and licensing boards.”

“How much will we actually get to do, if we’re out on a call on the rig?” another girl asks from the center of the room. “Like, if we’re riding along with a paramedic, how much experience do we actually get?”

“It depends on the call, the day, the place you’re working. We’ve had some pretty interesting calls here on campus, for sure, and our EMT-Bs have always been able to help out on those within the specifications of their training. So it depends, really. Any other questions?”

When no one responds, Kyle closes out the PowerPoint, pulling a stack of papers from his bag and placing them on the table.

“These are applications for the course. If you’re interested, go ahead and take one home, and try and send it back to the address on the bottom there by the end of the month, and we’ll be in touch about the program, okay?”

The meeting ends, and Blaine grabs a packet, slipping it into his leather messenger bag and making a note to fill it out later.
“So you’re in, aren’t you?” Lizbeth asks with a teasing smile, nudging Blaine with her shoulder.

“Definitely considering it,” Blaine answers with a wink. “We’ll see if I can scrounge up the time.”

Lizbeth chuckles, taking her own packet from the table and slipping it into her back pocket as they leave the meeting room, heading for their respective dorms.

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October 25, 2016

The call comes as Blaine’s walking back from Biochemistry to the dorm, his phone vibrating in his pocket and startling him. He takes a moment to fish it out, his heart rate doubling when he sees a New York area code.

“Hello?”

“May I speak to Blaine Anderson?”

“This is he,” Blaine replies, his steps slowing as he grasps the phone tightly.

“Mr. Anderson, this is Lindsay Griesback from the New York College of Osteopathic Medicine. I’m calling to let you know that the admissions committee has reviewed your file, and in conjunction with your interview, would like to offer you a seat in the Class of 2020.”

“Oh my god,” Blaine breathes, his eyes involuntarily pricking with tears as his brain struggles to process the news. “You mean-”

“Congratulations, Mister Anderson. You’ve been accepted to the NYCOM Class of 2020.”

“Is this real?” Blaine blurts out, clapping a hand over his mouth when he realizes he’d spoken aloud. “Oh my god, I’m so sorry-”

“No worries,” Lindsay says, her voice light. “I’ve heard far stranger things when delivering these calls in the past.”

“I just can’t believe this is actually happening,” Blaine whispers, aware that he’s come to a full stop in the middle of the quad, frustrated students darting around him as they try to get to and from classes. “Thank you, Ms. Griesback.”

“My pleasure, Blaine. We’ll be sending you an acceptance packet within the next two weeks with the details you need to secure your seat and deposit, as well as any other information you’ll need about matriculation. We hope to see you here in August.”

“Thank you so much, wow,” Blaine says, smiling when she congratulates him again before hanging up to call other students. Blaine remains frozen in the quad for a long minute, his phone still in his hand as he tries to process. “Oh my god.”

“Hey, Blaine! You’re holding up the entire quad, man, what’s-”

Jackson and Bryce catch up to Blaine quickly as they head back to the dorm from their Economics class, Bryce cocking his head to the side as he takes in Blaine’s demeanor.

“Blaine?” Jackson asks, voice betraying his concern at Blaine’s inability to talk. “What-”

“Oh my god!” Bryce exclaims, punching Blaine on the shoulder. “You got in!”
Blaine simply nods, still unable to trust his voice due to the lump in his throat, and Jackson whoops loudly, shaking Blaine’s shoulder somewhat violently as he cheers.

“Blaine Anderson’s gonna be a doctor!” Bryce cries out to the quad, causing a few people to turn and offer half-hearted congratulations as Blaine blushes.

“Christ, man, did you get the call like, a minute ago?” Jackson asks, taking the phone from Blaine’s hand and attempting to scroll through the recent calls. “Tell us everything.”

“We need a bonding session, right now,” Bryce declares, grabbing Blaine by the elbow and leading the way back to the dorm, trusting that Jackson will follow. “Mainly we need to plan how we’re celebrating this tonight because my best friend of all time is going to be a doctor!”

Blaine laughs as Bryce and Jackson march him back to the dorm, their antics more over the top than usual.

“Guys, what-”

“We’ve had a bottle of champagne stored in Jackson’s room for weeks waiting for this moment,” Bryce says by way of explanation, swiping them into the dorm. “It’s time to pop that baby open.”

“You what?”

“I bought it when you were in New York for the interview. You’ll return the favor when we get into law school, obviously.”

“ObVIOUSLY.”

When they reach Jackson’s single he goes straight to the fridge, pulling out a bottle of pink sparkling wine, much to Blaine’s amusement.

“Seriously?”

“It was on sale at Walmart, don’t judge,” Bryce chastises, taking the bottle from Jackson. “Besides, since it’s fake we don’t need to pop the cork, it’s a twist off.”

“Classy,” Blaine deadpans, smiling as Bryce twists the lid off and pours three glasses, handing one to Blaine and Jackson each.

“To Blaine!” Bryce toasts, raising his plastic cup in salute.

“To Doctor Anderson!” Jackson adds, clinking his cup against Blaine’s and taking a long sip. “Now let’s get this party rolling, yeah?”

They end up finishing the bottle between them over the next twenty minutes, making plans to invite people over to Bryce and Blaine’s room after dinner for a party. They pool their money and send Jackson to the store for more beer while Bryce and Blaine head to the student center to stock up on snacks, coming back with five bags of chips and a pound of gummy candies.

Jackson meets them back at the room with three cases of cheap beer and another bottle of sparkling wine. They spend a few minutes before dinner rearranging furniture, grabbing chairs from Jackson’s room down the hall and shoving extra furniture into their bedroom. The party ends up starting around nine, nearly a dozen people piling into the room, offering Blaine high fives and handshakes.

Jaclyn arrives last, her own smile dazzling as she runs up to hug Blaine.
“I got the call, too!” she cries, throwing her arms around him. “I got in!”

“Congratulations!” Blaine cries, returning her hug with enthusiasm. “Hey, Bryce, grab Jaclyn a beer, we’re celebrating her, too!”

Bryce cheers, already halfway through his third beer as he grabs one from the fridge, lobbing it to Jaclyn. She catches it with ease, setting it down on the window sill to let it settle before she attempts to open it.

“Bryce is having fun, isn’t he?” she asks Blaine with a laugh, watching as Bryce dances over to the stereo to turn it on.

“He’s a little excited, I think,” Blaine agrees, wincing when the stereo turns on much louder than he anticipated. “Bryce, man, you should probably turn that down a bit,” he calls over to his roommate, motioning to Jackson to adjust the volume.

“Karaoke!” Bryce calls in response, dragging Blaine over to the stereo and pressing a hairbrush into Blaine’s hand. “Come on, Mister Vocal Performance!”

“I don’t-”

“Song!” Jackson calls, getting a few of their other friends to join him. “Song! Song!”

“I-”

“Come on, Blaine!” Jaclyn laughs, shaking him gently by the shoulder. “Sing something!”

“Alright, alright,” Blaine concedes, laughing as he grabs the iPod to pick a song, scrolling quickly down to an older Katy Perry number, flushing as the notes to “Firework” flood over the small speakers they have attached to their stereo.

“Blaine, could you pick something a little more gay?” Bryce asks teasingly, cracking open another beer. “I don’t think we were all aware yet that you’re into dick.”

“Oh shut it,” Blaine shoots back, grabbing his beer to take a long swig before jumping into the first verse. He makes it to the chorus before Bryce grabs an empty beer can to start singing along, his voice off-key and overly loud as he jumps in.

“Baby you’re a firework!” he scream-sings, throwing an arm over Blaine’s shoulders. “Come on let your colors burst!”

Blaine bursts into laughter as Bryce starts to jump up and down, yelling the “oh-oh-ohs” into Blaine’s ear.

“How you doing, buddy?” he asks, wrapping his arm around Bryce’s waist to steady him. Bryce leans into Blaine’s side, jumbling the words of the next verse as he tries to remember them.

“I’m great!” he exclaims, nuzzling against Blaine’s cheek. “You’re so soft, Blaine. Why don’t we cuddle more?”

“Oh my,” Blaine laughs, putting down his hairbrush as the song ends, all but carrying Bryce over to the futon. “Cuddly drunk! Bryce is back, is he?”

“Mmmhmm,” Bryce mumbles, sighing happily as he snuggles into Blaine’s side. “Cuddly.”

Blaine laughs as Bryce closes his eyes, a sleepy smile on his face. The rest of the room laughs, all too
used to Bryce’s antics under influence of alcohol.

“Watch out, Blaine, he might try to kiss you again if you let him get that close,” Jackson teases, snapping a picture of Bryce snuggled against Blaine on his phone. “It’s a shame he’s straight unless he’s drunk, otherwise I’m pretty sure the two of you would be married already.”

Blaine snorts, the jolting of his shoulders disturbing Bryce, who rolls off his shoulder and ends up sprawled across the futon, his legs in Blaine’s lap.

“I think we’d kill each other if we were married,” Blaine snorts, knocking Bryce’s legs off so he can stand to grab another beer. “I barely manage to live with him as is.”

“ Heard that.” Bryce mumbles from the couch, taking advantage of Blaine’s absence to stretch out and take up the whole futon. “You love me.”

“Debatable,” Blaine teases, handing Bryce another beer as he opens his own, taking a long sip. Bryce tosses a middle finger in Blaine’s direction, sitting up so he can open his own beer.

The rest of the night passes in easy conversation, Bryce getting significantly more clingy as time wears on. He ends up draped over Blaine at one point while a few of their other friends are singing karaoke with the makeshift hairbrush microphone, attempting a choreographed dance to an NSYNC song.

“Let’s play a game!” one of the girls, Katie, says around eleven, holding up an empty wine bottle. “Let’s play Spin the Bottle!”

“Are we in high school?” Jaclyn snorts, crushing her can and lobbing it into the recycling bin.

“Obviously,” Katie laughs, motioning for everyone to circle up as she places the bottle in the middle of the floor. “Let’s go. Bryce, come on!”

“Yup,” Bryce mumbles, rolling off the futon onto the floor. “Blaine’s first, his party.”

Blaine sighs resignedly, reaching forward to spin the bottle. Memories of his last high school experience with Spin the Bottle come to mind, but he closes his eyes as the bottle spins, hoping against hope this won’t end in embarrassment. He opens his eyes when Jackson laughs out loud, clapping him on the back as he looks at where the bottle points.

“C’mere, roomie!” Bryce calls, leaning across the circle to pull Blaine by the lapels of his shirt, pressing their lips together in a messy, wet kiss. Blaine gasps when Bryce kisses him, swallowing his shock as he kisses back.

Damn, boy,” Katie whoops, clapping as Bryce wraps an arm around Blaine’s lower back, pulling him flush against him. “Get it!”

Blaine closes his eyes, smiling into the kiss as Bryce keeps kissing him, the two of them unable to break apart. Some part of Blaine realizes that this should be awkward, but he feels so comfortable around Bryce that he ignores that part of his brain.

“Annnnnnd that’s enough,” Jackson says, pulling them apart by the shoulders. “Get a room, y’all.”

Blaine and Bryce finally break apart, both of them giggling and bright red as they realize what they just did.

“That’s been four years in the making,” Bryce jokes, squeezing Blaine’s forearm. “That was pretty
nice, not gonna lie.”

Blaine snorts, flipping backwards onto the floor as he keeps laughing.

“And on that note, it’s Jaclyn’s turn,” Katie says, rolling the bottle towards Jaclyn as Blaine keeps laughing on the floor.

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March 3, 2015

“Hey, newbie, you ready to roll?”

Blaine smiles as his supervisor, Andrew, finishes answering the call, grabbing the supply bag as he follows the older man out to the ambulance.

“What is it?” he asks, climbing up into the passenger seat while his partner gets ready to drive.

“Female student passed out in one of the dorms, but that’s all we know. We’re heading over to Lyons now.”

“Did she hit her head?”

“Her friends called it in, didn’t really have any other information for us except that she was unconscious. We’re more or less going into this one blind.”

Blaine nods, sitting back in the seat for the short ride from the firehouse to Lyons Hall. They jump out of the rig when they pull up to the back of the dorm, Blaine grabbing the supply bag while Andrew goes around back for the gurney and backboard, bringing them along just in case. The rector of Lyons Hall meets them at the door, directing them downstairs to the basement kitchen, where there’s a small knot of freshman girls who were clearly studying, their books forgotten on the table as they crowd around one of their friends, sprawled on the floor, stirring feebly.

“Hey guys, can we give her some room?” Blaine asks, motioning for the girls to step to the side so that they can reach the girl on the floor. “What’s her name?”

“Lauren,” one of the other girls answers, her face white and terrified. “Is she okay?”

“We’re here to check her out to make sure, so if you guys could give us some room to work that would be great,” Andrew says, leaving the gurney at the door as he drops to his knees next to Lauren, motioning for Blaine to grab the BP cuff from the bag.

“Lauren?” Andrew asks quietly, placing himself directly in her line of sight as he puts a hand on her shoulder, steadying her. “How are you feeling?”

“Did I pass out? Why am I on the floor?”

Andrew explains quickly that he and Blaine are medics, there to assess her and help her out while they see if she might need a trip to the hospital. Lauren nods, closing her eyes as she lets her head fall back against the ground.

“She’s coming to, doesn’t really seem disoriented,” Andrew mentions to Blaine as the latter sets up the cuff, quickly and efficiently measuring her blood pressure.
“Her pressure’s a bit low, 100/70,” Blaine tells Andrew, removing the cuff and putting it to the side as he takes her pulse. “Pulse is normal, though.”

“Did anyone see what happened?” Andrew asks as Blaine continues assessing her vitals, making notes on the clipboard they’ve brought along. “Did she fall and then pass out? Hit her head?”

“She mentioned that she caught her foot under the chair and that she felt like she was going to pass out, but we thought she was being dramatic,” one of the other girls mentions, and Blaine moves to Lauren’s feet to check for injuries. “Then she was on the floor. She was kinda shaken a bit, but she started waking up almost right away.”

“Lauren, can you tell me if your foot hurts at all?” Blaine asks, grateful that she’s wearing flip-flops so he can easily see if there are any visible injuries. “Do you remember which foot it was?”

“My right,” she says, pointing at that side. “It doesn’t really hurt, but I feel kinda dizzy still.”

“Keep lying down for a bit,” Andrew advises, keeping his hand on her shoulder to keep her from standing. “Your blood pressure needs to come back up a bit and that should help you feel better.”

“There’s no significant bruising on the foot or ankle, and there doesn’t seem to be any swelling or tenderness, either.”

“Did anyone see if she hit her head?”

“She kinda just fell out of the chair, so I don’t think so?”

“Does your head hurt at all?” Blaine asks, coming back up to Lauren’s side so he can shine a penlight in her eyes. “Besides the dizziness, anything bothering you?”

“No really,” she confirms, jerking away from the light. “I felt a little like throwing up when I woke up but I’m okay now.”

“At this point, it’s kinda up to you if you want to go into the ER for an assessment,” Andrew says, helping Lauren sit up so that she can lean against the wall. “I’d recommend going in for possibly an EKG and an X-ray of your foot so we can see what’s going on, but since you’re awake and lucid you’re allowed to refuse care.”

“Do you think I need to go to the hospital?” she asks, looking from Andrew to Blaine. “I mean, is there a chance there’s something seriously wrong? I have a Chem exam in the morning, I can’t miss it.”

“I’d recommend you get checked out, yeah,” Blaine says, jotting notes on the chart. “But like Andrew said, it’s up to you at this point. You’re over eighteen, right?”

“I’m nineteen, yeah.”

“I’d feel better if you got checked out,” Lauren’s rectress says from the corner of the room where she’s standing, making sure no one comes to gawk while watching over Lauren. “We can email your professor about your test in the morning, explain to him that there were extenuating circumstances.”

Lauren hesitates, chewing on her lip as she thinks. After a long moment, she nods, looking back at Blaine.

“I’ll go, yeah.”
Blaine works on filling out the paperwork as Andrew helps Lauren stand.

“Do you have a coat?” Blaine asks, looking around the room for something she can use to keep warm. “Or shoes?”

“I’m her roommate, I’ll go grab them from our room,” one of the other girls says, darting from the room. Blaine helps Lauren sit on the chair she’d fallen out of, keeping a hand on her upper arm to steady her when she sways slightly from dizziness. After a few minutes, her roommate comes back with Lauren’s coat, shoes, and purse, helping her roommate bundle up before they head outside.

“She should I go with you, just in case?” she asks, looking hesitantly from Lauren up at Blaine and Andrew. “I mean, is it okay?”

“You can ride up front with me,” Andrew confirms, helping Lauren stand again with a hand on her elbow. “Blaine’s going to ride in back with Lauren and take a few vital signs and measurements on the way to the hospital.”

“We’ll meet you all there,” the rectress says, following behind as they go out the back door of the dorm so Blaine can help Blaine climb up into the ambulance. “St. Joe’s?”

“Yup, if you park out front you can go into the ER through the main entrance, just tell them you’re there for a patient brought in by ambulance.”

They close the door to the ambulance, and Blaine helps Lauren settle on the bed, motioning for her to fasten the seatbelt as he busies himself grabbing a blood glucose test.

“I’m just gonna give you a little stick on your finger here, so we can get a measure of your blood sugar, and then I’ll be done poking you for a bit,” Blaine explains as he wipes her finger down with an alcohol swab, quickly and efficiently pricking her finger and taking a drop of blood into the meter. “That’s pretty normal, that’s good,” he says, jotting the number down on the chart and tossing the disposable needle in the sharps container.

“So you think anything’s wrong?” Lauren asks, her eyes tracking Blaine as he moves around the back of the ambulance, grabbing a few extra supplies and making notes of what he takes. “Like, should I be worried?”

“Honestly? It seems like a pretty basic fainting spell, but since you hit your foot it’s a good idea to check for any breaks. Better safe than sorry, right?”

“Right,” Lauren agrees, settling back as Blaine takes another blood pressure and notes it, offering her a blanket to drape over her legs since she’s only wearing a pair of Soffee shorts. “I’m just a little bummed I’m missing the exam. I’m nervous his make-up will be a lot harder than the original.”

“Who do you have?” Blaine asks conversationally, sitting back on the running board as they head to the hospital. Since Lauren is stable and awake, with no need for constant monitoring, he feels comfortable leaving her be for now, since she’ll be poked and prodded again when they reach the hospital.

“Um, Seth Brown? It’s our second Orgo exam, and I’m pretty nervous.”

“I took Orgo over the summer with him, actually!” Blaine says, smiling reassuringly at her. “Dr. Brown is a great guy, and an incredible professor. He’ll absolutely understand when you explain the circumstances to him. Don’t even worry about it.”

“You’re a student?”
“I’m in my sophomore year, yeah. Premed.”

“Me too. I mean, it’s not like anyone takes Orgo for fun, right?”

“You’d be surprised,” Blaine jokes, bracing himself against the wall of the ambulance as they take a sharp corner. “I’ve met a few strange kids in my time, that’s for sure.”

Lauren snorts, stretching her legs out in front of her and gently rolling her ankles, wincing when the right one pops slightly.

“Still doing okay?” Blaine asks, watching her face carefully for any sign of pain.

“Just a little sore, but I think that’s mostly from falling.”

“We should be there in a minute, and the ER shouldn’t be too busy this time of night. You’ll hopefully get right in and out as quickly as possible.”

Even as he speaks, the ambulance slows to a stop, indicating that they’ve arrived at the emergency room. Andrew kills the engine and jumps out, walking around to help Lauren’s roommate climb down from the cab before he goes to the back to let Blaine and Lauren out.

“You want to walk her in to sign in?” Andrew asks, offering his hand to Lauren to help her climb carefully down onto the ground. “I’ll finish up our paperwork?”

“Sounds good,” Blaine agrees, gently taking Lauren’s elbow so he can lead her into the ER waiting room, guiding her to the admissions desk and speaking briefly with the nurse, who hands him a clipboard and pen and motions to the chairs set off to the side.

“This is our stop,” Blaine jokes, settling Lauren in the chair and handing her the clipboard. “Go ahead and fill these out and turn them back into the desk, and they’ll get someone to see you as soon as possible, okay?”

“You’re done?”

“As soon as we turn in our paperwork and relay the information we have to the staff, yup, we roll out. You’ll be fine, though,” Blaine reassures her with a smile. “Good luck on that exam, okay? And don’t sweat it. You’ll do great.”

“Thank you so much for your help,” Lauren says, shaking Blaine’s offered hand as he turns to leave. “Seriously, though, and thanks for not laughing at the girl who dropped a chair on her foot.”

“We all have a little bit of clumsy in us,” Blaine says with a wink. “Take care of yourself, okay?”

He waves as he heads back to the admission desk to meet Andrew, who’s just come in to file the proper forms. After they finish their paperwork and sign off, they head back to the ambulance, Andrew yawning widely as they walk.

“Night’s almost over, and then the graveyard will be coming in,” he says as they climb back into the cab, heading back towards campus. “What a night, right?”

“Never a dull moment,” Blaine says with a smile, reaching to fiddle with the stereo as Andrew drives, finally settling on the only Top 40 station in town.

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August 4, 2017
“This is so surreal,” Blaine whispers as the taxi pulls up to the school, a large number of people milling around outside the academic center, clearly waiting for the ceremony to start. “I can’t believe this is actually here.”

“I knew you’d do it,” Cooper says from the front seat, quickly paying the driver and jumping out of the car to open the back door for their mother. “You’re my little brother, you naturally kick ass at everything you attempt. It’s an Anderson trait.”

“If only,” Blaine quips, following his mom out of the car and straightening his tie when they’re out on the pavement. “You wish that was an Anderson trait.”

“I’ll have you know that I’m considered wildly successful in the voice acting industry,” Cooper huffs, and Blaine’s unable to tell if he’s actually frustrated or just pretending. “I’m the most sought after actor for children’s television.”

“Yeah, because you’re the voice of Squeaky the Squirrel,” Blaine teases, hiding behind his mother when Cooper swats at him.

“Boys,” Leona Anderson chastises, slipping her arm into Blaine’s, shooting Cooper a look. “Behave. You’re both far too old to be acting like this.”

“I’m only twenty-four!” Blaine cries in indignation, turning to his mother in mock hurt. “He’s nearly forty!”

“I’m much closer to thirty than forty, little brother,” Cooper corrects, flashing a dazzling smile at one of the young women hurrying past them to enter the building. “I’ve got seven years until you’ll need to put me in a nursing home.”

“Cooper Jay!” Leona gasps, smacking him on the back of the head. “I’ll have you know that both your father and I are well into our fifties and neither of us is in a nursing home yet.”

“Kidding, I’m kidding,” Cooper says, throwing his hands up in surrender. “I won’t make Blaine put me in a nursing home until I’m at least forty-nine.”

Blaine laughs, throwing his head back as Leona sputters at Cooper. Within seconds all three Andersons are laughing, doubled over and unable to catch their breath as they do. Blaine’s the first to recover, straightening up and wiping at his eyes as he tries to breathe evenly.

“We should probably head in there,” he says, nodding towards the doors to the academic building. “The ceremony starts at 9, and we still have to check in.”

“Lead the way, Doctor Anderson,” Cooper says, gesturing widely in front of him as he pretends to march behind Blaine.

“For someone who has ten years on me, you really act like a child sometimes.”

Cooper makes a show of following Blaine, insisting on calling him Doctor Anderson every time Blaine opens his mouth, much to Blaine’s embarrassment and frustration. He finally manages to check in, sending Cooper and Leona into the auditorium to find seats while he joins his classmates to get ready for the procession.

With a name early in the alphabet, Blaine is one of the first to be called to the stage to receive his white coat, the dean setting it gently on Blaine’s shoulders. He smiles out at the crowd as he shakes the dean’s hand, quickly spotting Cooper standing in the aisle to cheer his name. Waving, Blaine pumps a fist in the air in celebration and blows a kiss at his mom, quickly heading off the stage as the
next name is called.

The whole thing lasts less than a minute, but time seems to slow as Blaine walks off the stage, dressed for the first time in his coat, the name of his school embroidered on the breast pocket. He’s heard that this is one of the best moments, finally getting to put on that white coat, that symbolizes everything he’s worked so hard for.

It’s better than he imagined it, really, and he can’t stop smiling as he joins his classmates in the audience to wait for the end of the ceremony. They’re a class of one hundred and twenty, and almost every face walks off the stage wearing a smile identical to Blaine’s. When they finally reach the last name in the alphabet, the dean takes the microphone to address the students, delivering a speech on the importance of the profession of medicine and the integrity of medical practice.

After the ceremony is over, Blaine heads outside with the rest of his class to meet up with his mother and Cooper, getting lost in the crowd until he hears Cooper’s voice shout across the clearing.

“Congratulations!” Leona effuses when Blaine finally walks up to them, pulling him into a hug and kissing his cheek. “I’m so proud of you, baby.”

“My little brother, the medical student!” Cooper offers as his congratulations, joining in on Leona’s hug even though he’s nearly a head taller than both Blaine and Leona. “So Blainey, I have this spot on my leg that-“

“Coop, no offense, but even if I could I wouldn’t analyze your rash,” Blaine says in disgust, making a face at the suggestion. Cooper laughs, waving his ankle in Blaine’s direction before he nearly unbalances, causing Blaine to laugh as well.

“I wish your dad had made it,” Leona says when Cooper and Blaine have settled, resting her hand on Blaine’s elbow. “He’s so proud of you, you know?”

“I guess he’s proud now that I’ve finally made something worthwhile of myself, huh?” Blaine can’t stop himself from asking, regretting it immediately at the shadow that crosses Leona’s face. “I didn’t mean that, mama.”

“He’s trying, Blaine. He’s been trying, you know that.”

“I know,” Blaine says, putting his hand over his mother’s to squeeze it reassuringly. “I know he is.”

“Speaking of, didn’t dad give you something for Blaine?” Cooper interrupts, clearly uncomfortable with the tone of the conversation. Leona exclaims, her eyes lighting up as she rummages in her purse and produces a small white envelope.

“Something to get you started,” she says as she hands it to Blaine, motioning for him to open it.

He pulls out a small congratulations card, signed in his father’s handwriting, and a check for a thousand dollars.

“Mama, I-“

“You can, and you will,” she says, patting Blaine’s hand when he tries to hand the check back to her. “We insist.”

“Thank you,” Blaine whispers, his eyes welling up with tears as he looks at the number again. “I’m gonna-I’m gonna go call dad real quick.”
Blaine walks away from his mom, clutching the check and card in one hand and his phone in the other as he dials his dad’s office number. It rings for a few long moments, and Blaine resigns himself to the fact that he’ll need to leave a message yet again, when John Anderson finally picks up with a gruff “Hello?”

“Dad? It's, uh-it’s Blaine. I got your card.”
Chapter 3

August 28, 2017

“As osteopathic physicians, we seek to treat the patient as a whole, not as a disease or a sum of parts,” the professor begins the lecture with a few slides on the history of osteopathic medicine, and Blaine sets his pen down as he sits back to just listen instead of take notes. “We use everything the modern allopathic physician uses to treat disease—drugs, surgeries, and medical interventions—but we have a hidden tool up our sleeves that allows us to connect more fully with the patients we treat.

Osteopathic manipulation, though on the surface similar to chiropractics, was developed by Andrew Taylor Still in an effort to work with the body itself to promote healing. While modern osteopathy strays from Still’s original premises—that diseases were caused by disjointed bones or the like—the basic premise is still there. Throughout this course, we’re going to teach you to be comfortable using your hands, to be comfortable touching each other in order to promote healing, and we’re going to teach you to be comfortable with your own bodies as well as those of your patients.

This is a course where we learn by doing, not by listening, and it is vital that you attend any and all labs that you are scheduled to attend. Additionally, the easiest way to get comfortable with the techniques is practice. You’re all strangers right now, but within a week you’ll be practicing adjustments on each other while you’re watching TV.”

Blaine laughs with the rest of the class, already feeling at ease with the professor and the people he’s sitting near. Much of what they’re learning he’s already found out on his own through his pre-interview research, but it’s always nice to hear it a second time.

“Now, osteopathic medicine is founded on four central tenets. First, that the body is a unit comprising mind, physical body, and spirit. Second, we believe that the body is inherently capable of self-healing and self-regulation. Thirdly, that structure and function are reciprocally related. That is to say that function affects structure, and conversely, structure affects function. And finally, rational patient treatment must be based upon a solid understanding of the first three principles.”

Blaine quickly scribbles down a shorthand version of the tenets, starring them in his notes for further review as the professor switches to the next slide.

“Now what does this mean for you? Well, most simply, it means that we’re going to teach you to be the kind of physicians who look at everything in a patient’s life in order to provide the best treatment. You may think you’re prescribing something that will absolutely work, when in reality? That patient will never be able to comply with your treatment plan. Over the next four years, and into your residencies, we hope to teach you to consider every aspect of your patients’ well-being: their social status, economic status, personal history, family life, work life, past health history. All of this plays a role into how a patient achieves health.

Now, let’s try an exercise. I want you to reach out both of your hands, one palm up and one palm down, to your sides. As soon as you’ve done that, I want you to take your hand that’s facing downward, and put it on the arm of the person next to you.”

A ripple of nervous laughter cross the classroom as they all do as told. Blaine definitely feels self conscious as he grips his partner’s forearm, his own being held by the girl sitting next to him.

The professor smiles out at them all sitting awkwardly, hands hovering over each other’s arms.
“Now I want you to start feeling your partner’s arm. Just lightly, as gently as you can. You want to be touching just the most superficial layer, the skin, and you want to be thinking about what it is you’re actually touching. How does the skin feel under your fingers? How does it move? If you press a tiny bit deeper, into the subdermal layer—how does that feel different? Spend a little time exploring your partner’s arm, varying the pressure and force you’re using. Think about what it is you’re feeling, experiencing. Let’s take five minutes.”

Blaine starts to gently rub his partner’s arm, something that would feel incredibly ridiculous if the rest of the room wasn’t doing exactly the same thing. He closes his eyes, focusing all his attention on what he feels beneath his fingertips, as instructed. Pressing a little deeper, he notices that the tissue starts to stiffen, becomes less elastic. He moves a bit further down his partner’s forearm, makes note of the different quality of skin as he reaches the hand.

“And you can all let go now,” the professor says, chatter filling the room as people let out relieved and uncomfortable sighs, quickly jerking their hands away from each other. “So let’s talk about what it is we just did. These—” and he pauses to wiggle his fingers out at the room—“are your greatest tool in medicine. There is no substitute for being able to use your hands to understand and feel what is normal and what is not. With a simple touch, we can determine if something is swollen or not, if there’s unnatural tension, if there’s something out of place. With these same hands, we can do our best to attempt to right whatever we understand is wrong.”

The professor pauses to look at his watch, clicking through his last few slides quickly.

“Let’s take a ten minute break, then we’re going to be back in here to start our first lab session on anatomical landmarks and what they mean, okay?”

Blaine relaxes back in his seat, introducing himself to the girl who’d been palpating his arm, one of the few people he hasn’t yet met in their class.

“What do you think of OMM so far?” she asks as Blaine stretches in his chair, the vertebrae in his lower back popping as they stretch.

“I think the idea of it all is actually really cool,” Blaine replies, grabbing his water bottle from his bag on the floor. “And those patients who came to talk to us yesterday really seemed to have gotten better, or at least had their symptoms eased with OMM, so that’s really cool.”

“Have you ever had OMT done on you?” she asks, shaking her head when Blaine offers her a cracker from his pack of Wheat Thins. “Like, in practice or anything?”

“I’ve never officially had it done, no. You?”

“My family doctor was a DO, she used OMT in her daily practice, so a few times when I was younger and pulled something or strained something in sports she’d use it to help. It actually really worked a lot of the time. I’m definitely excited to be learning more about it, that’s for sure.”

“Absolutely,” Blaine agrees, turning back towards the front of the room as the professor returns, pulling up another set of slides to begin his lab lecture.

“Now, landmarks are something that you’re going to need to get used to feeling on your patients. Let’s pair up in groups of two or three, and every group can come up and find a table so we can start.”

August 31, 2017
“I’m going to fail everything,” Jaclyn moans as she drops her head into her textbook, the soft thud seeming to reverberate in the quiet library. “I literally cannot fit this much information into my brain. I thought studying for the MCAT was terrible.”

“Lesser men than us have done it,” Blaine offers, flipping through his print outs with a frown as he attempts to locate a Biochemistry slide. “Or at least that’s what I tell myself every day I try to drag myself out of bed to come live in the library.”

“I actually can’t believe they expect us to know all of this. And then in third year it all goes out the window -- is knowing Chargaff’s rule really going to matter when you’re coding a patient in the ER?”

“Since we have to pass the boards, I guess it does,” Blaine says, finally locating the slide he’d been searching for and scanning it for the information he’d needed. “Although talk to me again in third year and I’ll probably be singing a different tune.”

“Have you looked over the histo lab for tomorrow yet?”

“I haven’t even finished looking over the lectures from the week, so nope. I’m still stuck on Kreb’s cycle, I cannot for the life of me get this down.”

“Hold on,” Jaclyn says, digging in her bag and producing a stack of flashcards. “How have I not shown you these yet?”

“What are they?” Blaine asks as Jaclyn spreads the cards across their table, setting them in a particular order.

“It’s the glycolysis and citric acid cycle pathways, each step and enzyme has its own card. I use them to practice piecing the pathways together, it’s helped me a ton while I’ve been studying.”

“You’re a genius,” Blaine says with appreciation, coming around the table to lean over Jaclyn’s shoulder and look at the cards. “This is amazing.”

“It’s something my big showed me at the beginning of the year, actually. She said they’d bring them to dinner and stuff like that and would sit there making the pathways whenever they had a big enough table. Got them some strange looks, but it worked. She got honors in Biochem last year.”

“Are you gonna bring these to study group on Friday?”

“Definitely. Are we still meeting at Luke’s?”

“Seven o’clock, yeah. I think we’re ordering Thai this week, and Angela is baking brownies.”

“That woman is a saint. I’m pretty sure her baking is the sole reason I’m still alive right now.”

“It’s the sole reason I’ve gained ten pounds since we started school, but no one’s counting,” Blaine teases, laughing. “It’s worse than the freshman fifteen.”

“The med school fifty, more like it,” Jaclyn quips, tapping her pen against the table as she looks over the cards, shifting two of them into their proper places. “Does that look right to you?”

“Shouldn’t phosphofructokinase be over there?” Blaine asks, sliding the labeled card to the position he’d indicated. “Or am I wrong?”

“Nope, you’re right. Good catch.”
“Have you done a set for the electron transport chain?”

“Not yet. Do you want to do those? It’s really easy, just grab some index cards and I used different colors to distinguish the different steps.”

“I’ll do those for Friday, sure. Thanks for this, Jac. This is awesome.”

“No problem. Now, should we focus on that histo lab so we don’t have to spend four hours in there tomorrow?”

Blaine nods in agreement, pulling up the slides on his laptop as he shuffles his notes to locate his histology packets.

“So we’re looking at renal, right?” he starts, pulling up the first slide and turning the laptop towards Jaclyn. They spend another five hours together in the library, methodically working through every histology slide and reviewing Biochemistry one more time before calling it a night, Blaine unable to stop yawning as they walk out to their respective cars.

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November 2, 2017

“Have you looked over Lipstein’s lectures yet?” Jaclyn asks as she holds the door of the coffee shop open for Blaine, tugging her scarf off as they join the end of the line. “I feel like we covered that shit years ago at this point.”

“I can’t believe that’s the only course giving us a comprehensive final,” Blaine says in agreement, stepping up to order his Venti mocha with an extra shot. “Of all the courses they pick Biochem.”

“I mean, our anatomy practical is comprehensive but at least that makes sense, right? Why do we need to go all the way back to September just to remember how to string some DNA together to make a protein.”

“The worst will be when we get those questions wrong,” Blaine grumbles as they slide into a recently empty booth, already pulling out their laptops and notes to get organized. Jaclyn spreads two binders on the table in front of her while Blaine pulls up a PowerPoint on his laptop. “Then we’ll feel really stupid.”

“I’ve felt stupid every day since the end of orientation,” Jacyln quips with a smile, drawing a laugh from Blaine. “It wouldn’t be a new feeling at this point.”

“The beauty of medical education,” Blaine offers, leaning down to grab his messenger bag from the floor to find a pen. As he’s straightening up to set to work, he catches a glimpse of a familiar profile in the line for drinks, pausing his hand in its adventure around the bottom of his bag as he tries to discreetly get a closer look.

“Blaine?” Jaclyn asks, leaning over the table to see what he’s doing. “You lose something down there?”

Blaine blinks, and can no longer see the man he’d been trying to get a better look at, chalks it up to exam stress and far too much caffeine. He’s transcribing notes from his written PowerPoint slides to his laptop when he finally catches another glimpse of the man, and his heart seems to beat wildly when he realizes it wasn’t a hallucination.

Kurt Hummel is leaning against the bar while he waits for his drink, engrossed in a document on his
phone and one earbud in as he listens to music. Blaine’s taken aback at how grown Kurt looks, how much he’s seemed to mature in the five years they’ve been apart. He realizes he’s staring when Jaclyn kicks him in the shin, looking at him pointedly.

“See something you like over there?”

“Uh-actually-“

“Blaine, it’s study time, not flirt with the cute guy at the coffee bar time. What’s going on?”

“That’s my ex, actually,” Blaine offers as an explanation, shrugging as Jaclyn’s eyes go wide. “I haven’t seen him in five years.”

“Kurt?” she asks, all too aware of the history behind the relationship. Blaine nods, and Jaclyn offers him a small smile, reaching over to close his notebook.

“Jac?”

“You should at least go say hi to him, B. The books will still be here when you get back, and you’ll kick yourself if you don’t.”

“I can’t.” Blaine shakes his head, turning back to his notes and trying to focus. “God, what would I even say? Hey, Kurt, long time no see? Remember that time you broke my heart and stopped talking to me and all but dropped off the face of the earth? How’s work? Anything exciting happening?”

“You could start with ‘hi’,” Jaclyn teases gently, nudging him with her foot. “Go, B. I’ll buy you one of those biscotti cookies you love so much if it goes terribly and you need to cry on my shoulder.”

Blaine chews on his bottom lip for a long moment, glancing back over his shoulder at Kurt who’s still waiting for his drink, his phone returned to his pocket. Taking a deep breath, Blaine snaps his laptop shut and stands, jamming his hands into his pockets as he walks up to the bar.

“Kurt?”

Kurt starts when he hears his name, looking up to find the speaker.

“Blaine?”

Kurt’s shock is visible on his face as he tugs the earbud from his ear, barely noticing when the barista slides his coffee over to him. Blaine offers a half-shrug and a smile, reaching over to grab Kurt’s cup and hold it for him while Kurt shoves his earbuds into his pocket, accepting the cup from Blaine.

“What are you doing here?” Kurt asks, a little breathlessly, eyes raking over Blaine as if he thinks he’s hallucinating. “I mean, it’s been—what, four years?”

“Almost six, actually,” Blaine fills in, grabbing Kurt by the elbow to tug him gently out of the way as another customer steps up to grab their coffee order. “I moved to New York just last August, actually.”

“God, Blaine,” Kurt breathes out, offering Blaine a smile. “You look really good.”

“I look like I’ve been living in a library, actually,” Blaine corrects, winking to let Kurt know he’s kidding. “But thanks for the compliment. You look—well, you look incredible, as usual.”

“Working for Vogue has its perks,” Kurt admits, offering Blaine a sweeping view of his outfit with a bit of a flourish. “It helps when your boss loves you, too.”
“So you’re still working for Vogue, then?” Blaine asks for clarification as they slide into an empty two-seat table tucked into the corner, Blaine waving at Jaclyn to let her know he’ll be awhile.

“I’ve moved to the actual published magazine now, but yes,” Kurt answers with a smile. “I’ve gotta say, Blaine, I was a little surprised not to see your name on the incoming first year list back when you graduated. Did you end up at Tisch?”

“No, I actually-I went to Notre Dame. I withdrew most of my applications after we-well, I just realized I didn’t want to be in New York, not anymore. I ended up in Indiana.”

“At a Catholic school,” Kurt says with an air of incredulity, sipping his coffee as he looks at Blaine over the lip of the cup. “At one of the most conservative schools in the country. Where they hate people like you. People like us.”

“I didn’t ask for your approval, Kurt,” Blaine says quietly, and the tension between them is palpable. “You made it clear that you didn’t need mine anymore when you cut all contact with me after you broke up with me.”

“Blaine-“

“Look, Kurt, I get it, okay? The long distance thing didn’t work, and it was making us both miserable. I guess I’m just not sure why you didn’t try to call me after, you know?”

“It’s a two-way street, Blaine,” Kurt answers, his voice barely audible. “You didn’t try to call me either.”

“I guess we both made mistakes we wish we could take back.“

“I asked Finn what happened to you, actually, back when you didn’t come to New York and I couldn’t seem to find you. He didn’t mention you’d gone to Indiana.”

“Sam and Tina were really the only people who knew,” Blaine clarifies with a shrug, taking a long sip of his coffee. “I didn’t really want anyone to question why I was doing it.”

“Why did you?” Kurt asks, fixing Blaine with a pointed look as he sips his mocha. “To stay away from me?”

“To give myself a chance at a new beginning,” Blaine says instead with a half-shrug. “To give myself a new start.”

“Did it work?”

“I’m happier than I’ve been in a long time, Kurt.”

“I’m really glad,” Kurt says with a smile, and Blaine can hear the genuineness of the sentiment in his voice. “You look happy, Blaine. More comfortable.”

“I am,” Blaine sighs with a contented smile, his hand curling around his coffee cup. “I’ve learned so much these past few years.”

“You never told me what you’re up to, did you? Are you singing still? Acting?”

“I’m in med school, actually,” Blaine answers, and Kurt nearly chokes on a sip of mocha, spluttering as Blaine hands him a napkin.

“What?”
“I’m about halfway through my first year of medical school.”

Kurt is entirely speechless as he works his mouth, trying to form words to respond. Blaine breaks out into laughter at Kurt’s shocked expression.

“Surprising, isn’t it?”

“I just—medical school. God, Blaine. I feel like you’re an entirely different person from who you were in high school.”

“People change as they grow up, Kurt,” Blaine says with a hint of sadness in his voice. “You know as well as I do.”

There’s another awkward silence between them, longer than the others, before Blaine pulls out his phone, sliding it over to Kurt.

“Let me get your number again, yeah? I really should get back to studying for finals, but I’m heading back to Ohio for Christmas break, and we should catch up if you’re around. Or when I get back, either one.”

“Yeah, sure,” Kurt answers, taking Blaine’s phone and quickly typing in his number, hesitating before saving it under his full name. “I’ll send you a text so you have mine. I’m not sure how long I’ll be back in Ohio, we’ve got a cover spread due right after the new year but we’ll definitely catch up when we’re both back and settled, yeah?”

“It was really great seeing you, Kurt,” Blaine says as he stands up, shifting awkwardly on his feet as though torn between pulling Kurt into a hug and offering a handshake.

“You too, Blaine. Really.” Kurt takes the decision away by stepping in towards Blaine, wrapping his arms around Blaine’s back and pulling him in for a brief, comfortable hug.

“Take care of yourself,” Blaine whispers as they break apart, the familiarity and warmth of the hug washing over him. “I’ll talk to you soon, yeah?”

“Good luck with finals,” Kurt says by way of response, offering his hand in a wave as he leaves the coffee shop, looking over his shoulder at Blaine, who continues to stand next to their recently vacated table, momentarily stunned into inaction.

“Blaine?”

Jaclyn’s voice is louder than he’d expected, right next to his ear. He jumps slightly, shaking himself as he turns to face her.

“You coming back to the table?”

“Yeah, I’ll be just—I’m gonna run to the restroom, okay? I’ll meet you back there.”

Jaclyn hesitates for a moment, searching Blaine’s face before he turns away.

“You sure you’re okay, B?”

“I’m fine,” Blaine waves away her concern, striding towards the bathroom. “Totally fine.”

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November 23, 2017
“Now boarding flight 7823 to Columbus. Passengers needing extra assistance, please proceed to the gate.”

Blaine slings his backpack over his shoulder as he stands, making his way closer to the gate to get ready to board. He’s on the last flight out of JFK, and the plane is overbooked because of the proximity to the Christmas holiday. He hasn’t had any contact with Kurt since they ran into each other in the coffee shop, though Blaine has pulled up Kurt’s number several times, his finger hovering over the “Call” button while he worked up the nerve.

There was some talk of a New Directions reunion party over the break, but since Puck wasn’t able to fly back from LA, the planning hasn’t gone anywhere, and Blaine’s not sure if they’re actually all going to get together. As it is, he’s only going to be back in Lima for the week surrounding Christmas Day, so that he can fly back to the city on New Year’s Day to get a head start on his lectures for second semester.

He’s hoping to find a moment to drop by the Hummel-Hudson house regardless, because it’s been several years since he’s seen Burt and Carole and he’d love to catch up with them, even if Kurt’s not going to be home. They’ve kept in touch over the years since high school by emails and the occasional phone call, and Blaine’s eager to fill them in on everything he’s accomplished.

His row is called to board, and Blaine falls into line behind a young girl clearly on her way home from college, dressed head to toe in NYU sweats. Smiling, Blaine hands his ticket to the gate agent and files onto the plane, locating his seat and settling in for the flight. He shoots a text to Cooper that he’s boarded and about to take off before powering down his phone and sliding it into his bag.

Blaine naps the entire flight, the exhaustion of the semester catching up with him. When they touch down in Columbus, the woman in the seat next to him has to shake Blaine awake so that they can disembark. Apologizing, Blaine grabs his bag and falls quickly into the line of people heading off the plane and into the airport proper.

Cooper is waiting at the baggage claim, and he pulls Blaine into a lingering hug, grasping the back of Blaine’s head as he holds him.

“Coop, this is a little weird,” Blaine says, patting Cooper awkwardly on the back. “People are starting to stare.”

“I’m working on a new emotional piece, about brotherly love. Let me have this moment, Squirt, c’mon.”

Blaine sighs, letting his arms fall to the side as Cooper continues to hug him for a full three minutes. Finally, Cooper lets go and steps back, and Blaine can see that he’s struggling not to laugh.

“Coop, I can’t believe you!” Blaine exclaims, swatting at Cooper’s head. “There is no new piece, is there?”

“Nope, just wanted to see how long I could embarrass you for this time, Squirt. That’s a record-three and a half minutes of utter silence.”

“It’s like you grow backwards in age,” Blaine mutters as they walk over the baggage carousel to wait for his bag. “Next thing we know they’ll be making a movie out of your life.”

“As long as they let me play myself instead of Brad Pitt, sign me up!” Cooper says, helping Blaine lift his bag off the carousel and leading the way out to the car. “I’m significantly better looking than he is. And more talented.”
“Maybe in your dreams,” Blaine retorts, smiling as they continue the banter all the way to the car and most of the way home, Cooper pulling off into the diner they used to eat Sunday breakfasts at when they were kids.

“Cooop?”

“I’m starving, let’s get some food and then we’ll head home, yeah?”

“Pizza burgers?”

“Is there anything else?” Cooper asks, holding the door to the diner open so Blaine can lead the way.

“I haven’t eaten one of these in years,” Blaine says when they finally get their food, two overly large, greasy hamburgers topped with pizza sauce and mozzarella cheese. “This looks disgusting.”

“It looks amazing, now eat your burger,” Cooper says through a mouthful of his own, exaggerating the motion of his jaw as he chews. Blaine makes a face of disgust, gingerly cutting off a portion of his own burger and chewing on it thoughtfully.

“See?” Cooper asks, starting in on his fries. “Delicious.”

“It’s pretty good,” Blaine agrees, cutting off his second bite. “Not as good as I remember, but not terrible.”

“Of course it’s not terrible,” Cooper says, tossing a french fry at Blaine, who ducks just in time to miss being hit in the forehead.

“You’re seriously a child, Coop. I thought you’d have grown up by now.”

“You take all the fun out of life, you know that Blaine? Just wait until you see the Christmas present I got for you.”

“I’m terrified,” Blaine deadpans, although he is mildly concerned that Cooper got him something dangerous, like the baby python he’d gotten Blaine for his eighth birthday.

“You love me,” Cooper shoots back, polishing off his fries and reaching across to Blaine’s plate to steal half of his. “Now finish. Mom and Dad were expecting us home half an hour ago.”

“Cooper!”

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January 22, 2018

Three weeks after the start of the spring term, Blaine finally works up the courage to call Kurt and ask him to meet for coffee. They agree to meet at the same shop they’d met in before, five minutes from the medical school and a subway stop away from the Vogue office. On the day of the not-date, as Blaine had taken to calling it when asked where he was going, he spends an agonizing forty minutes trying to decide on a bowtie and cardigan combo, even though a small voice in his head reminds him that they’re just friends, catching up after years apart, and he doesn’t need to impress Kurt with his wardrobe.

Eventually settling on a pale blue bowtie to offset his black sweater, Blaine pulls his coat on and heads out to the shop, at least fifteen minutes earlier than their planned meeting time. He’s only mildly surprised to see Kurt already waiting for him at a table in the back corner, two cups of coffee
on the table in front of him.

“You always were early for our dates back in high school,” Kurt says as Blaine sits down at the table, taking the cup Kurt pushes towards him. “Two creams and two sugars with a dash of cinnamon.”

“You know my coffee order?” Blaine asks, teasing, drawing a shy smile from Kurt.

“One of the only things I seem to know about you lately,” Kurt says with a shrug, taking a long sip of his own coffee. “How was your holiday?”

“Nothing too exciting. Cooper came home from LA for the week, decided that we needed brother bonding time that we haven’t had in years. He took me to the aquarium.”

“Isn’t he nearly forty at this point?” Kurt laughs, clearly imagining Blaine tagging along after Cooper at the Columbus aquarium. “And a little old for that?”

“You know Cooper. He’s never too old for antics.”

“Kurt?” Kurt acknowledges, looking down at his fingers as he fidgets with the lid of his cup. “Kurt-” Blaine starts, making an aborted attempt to reach across the table, thinking better of it and grabbing his cup instead. “What are we doing? We never had to make small talk, even when we barely knew each other.”

“Things have changed,” Kurt offers weakly, refusing to meet Blaine’s eyes.

“Have they?”

“We’re a lot older than we were.”

“We’re only twenty-four, Kurt. That’s not old.”

“We were seventeen when we met. That’s seven years, and we haven’t seen each other for almost five of those. I just-I don’t know, something just feels different.”

Blaine drinks his coffee quietly, thoughtfully, before speaking.

“You know, I spent forty minutes trying to pick an outfit today,” Blaine says after a while, a small smile on his face. “I haven’t taken that much time to get dressed since my interview for med school, when I had to keep pausing to wipe my hands on a towel to avoid getting sweat on my suit.”

Kurt laughs, tentatively at first before he catches sight of Blaine’s goofy smile, and he dissolves into practical giggles, hiding behind his hand as he struggles to catch his breath.

Blaine reaches out to grasp Kurt’s wrist gently, catching Kurt’s attention.

“We haven’t changed, Kurt. We’ve just grown up a little bit.”

“I’ve really missed talking to you all this time,” Kurt says quietly after a moment, slipping his wrist from Blaine’s grasp so he can rest his hand atop Blaine’s. “That first year, the number of times I almost called you because I saw something that reminded me of you were insane.”

“Why didn’t you?” Blaine asks, and there’s the smallest hint of hurt in his voice. “I would’ve answered.”
“I was embarrassed,” Kurt admits, shifting uncomfortably in his chair. “I didn’t want to admit that I had made a mistake, letting you go.”

“I cried for probably three days, you know,” Blaine says quietly, almost a whisper. Kurt’s hand tightens on top of Blaine’s and he bites his bottom lip, making an effort to let Blaine finish. “But honestly? I don’t think I’d be where I am today, right now, if it hadn’t happened.”

“What do you mean?”

“I started to think, really think, about why I had done all the things I did in high school-transferring to McKinley, running for class president, all of it. I started to realize that yes, some of that was because I wanted it, but the main reason I did all that? To be with you, for your happiness and our happiness together. I hadn’t really spent much time thinking about what I wanted since before I was in high school, since before I came out.”

“Can I ask how you ended up at Notre Dame? I mean-I never would’ve guessed you’d stay in the Midwest, let alone at a religious school.”

“They had a great vocal performance program, better than Ohio, and the football tradition definitely played a part. Mainly, I just visited and fell in love. I couldn’t see myself anywhere else. Sam helped me finish my applications; he was probably the only person I told before I got in.”

“I guess I always just assumed you wanted to perform like I did. Which, now that I think about it, is really funny since neither of us is performing anymore.”

Blaine laughs, popping the lid off his cup to stir the last dregs of his coffee, draining it quickly.

“Who would’ve ever thought, huh?”

“How did you end up here though? I mean-I never thought you were a science person, and now you’re in medical school.”

“I actually joined a first aid team at school my first year there, and started volunteering at events and games and getting some experience. A lot of it just felt so natural to me, and I was pretty good at calming people who were hurt or scared down, getting them to focus on me while we helped them or treated them so that they weren’t so terrified. I switched major tracks halfway through freshman year.”

“And you like it?”

“I love it,” Blaine breathes, and his eyes light up. “All of the science classes, the knowledge of how things work and fit together, what makes our bodies move and function the way they do? It’s incredible. And I still get to perform, on weekends and stuff. We have a few groups that perform at school events or parties, it’s awesome.”

“You talk about medicine like I talk about fashion,” Kurt observes with a smile. “It’s really cool, actually. Now you need to tell me about what you’re doing in school, because honestly? I have no idea how medical school works.”

They finally settle into easy conversation, the initial awkwardness of the meeting vanishing as Blaine regales Kurt with stories of gross anatomy lab and OMM lab, details how many hours they spend weekly studying in the library. When Blaine’s finished, Kurt talks about how he’s moved up the ranks at Vogue, how he manages an entire section of the magazine now and loves what he gets to do. By the end of two hours, it’s like they’ve never been apart, and when Blaine heads home to get some studying done before eating dinner, he feels a weight he’d never realized had settled on his
“Is that your phone?” Jaclyn asks, looking up from her textbook. “Vibrating?”

“I had it on silent, I thought,” Blaine says with a shake of his head, picking up his notes to try and find it. “I don’t think it’s mine.”

“It’s not mine,” Jaclyn replies, holding hers up. “Isn’t yours still in your bag?”

“Maybe? Hold on.” Blaine ducks under the table to dig in his bag, finally producing his cell phone just as the call finishes vibrating and goes to voicemail.

“Guess it was mine after all,” he says, frowning when he sees the name on the caller ID. “I should probably return this, can you watch my stuff while I go outside?”

Jaclyn nods, already back to reading her notes while Blaine excuses himself from the table, stepping out into the hallway to call Kurt back. The phone rings four times before Kurt finally answers, breathless.

“Blaine, thank god,” he all but sobs into the phone, making Blaine instantly on edge.

“Kurt? What’s wrong? Are you okay?”

“Blaine, I didn’t know who else to call, and you’re in med school, I thought-”

A thousand thoughts run through Blaine’s mind at Kurt’s words, and he clutches the phone more tightly, a lump in his throat as he replies.

“Kurt, are you hurt? What’s going on?”

“I fell, Blaine. I was on top of the counter trying to reach the top cabinet, my foot slipped and I hit the floor and I can’t get up. Blaine-”

“I’m on my way, Kurt, just hang on, okay? Don’t move, in case you broke something. Did you hit your head?”

Blaine is already halfway to the street to hail a cab when he realizes he left Jaclyn at their table with his stuff, expecting his return. He sends a quick text to her that an emergency has come up, and asks her to take his things back to her place while he climbs in a cab and relays Kurt’s address to the driver.

“I didn’t hit my head,” Kurt moans, his voice tight with pain. Blaine feels his heart speeding up at how lost Kurt sounds, how desperate. “It’s my ankle, I can’t stand up and-”

“Just stay where you are, okay? I’m maybe ten minutes away, I’ll be there soon. Is your door unlocked?”

“Yeah, it’s open. Blaine-”

“Do you want me to stay on the phone until I get there, or are you okay if I hang up now?”

“You can hang up, just please hurry, Blaine. It hurts.”

“I’m almost there, okay, Kurt? Just hang on.”
They end the call and Blaine quickly replies to Jaclyn’s text, reassuring her that he’s okay but he won’t be back for at least a few hours. He spends the rest of the short cab ride in nervous anticipation, his mind running through dozens of scenarios, each of them worse than the last. What if Kurt’s unconscious when he gets there? Bleeding? Should he have called an ambulance?

He throws money at the cab driver, telling him to keep the change as he darts out of the cab and into Kurt’s building, taking the stairs up to the third floor as quickly as he can. He pushes Kurt’s door open, heart pounding as he anticipates what he’s about to see.

Kurt is sprawled on the kitchen floor, holding his ankle in front of him at an awkward angle. He’s been crying, evidenced by the tears on his face and his red eyes, and he’s paler than usual, trembling slightly as he looks up at Blaine.

“God, Kurt,” Blaine mutters, dropping to his knees at Kurt’s side, hands hovering over his injured ankle. “What happened?”

“I slipped on the towel on the counter,” Kurt sobs, adjusting his grip on his ankle as Blaine looks him over, searching for other injuries. “I fell off and landed on my ankle, twisted it.”

“It’s definitely a little swollen,” Blaine says, gently pressing at the joint while Kurt whistles. “You can’t put weight on it?”

“I only tried once, and it buckled under me. Oh god, it’s broken, isn’t it?”

“It’s actually probably just a severe strain or sprain,” Blaine says, his own heart finally slowing down as he gently rotates Kurt’s ankle, feeling for tenderness and stiffness. “I don’t think you’ll need the emergency room, but you’ll be off your feet for a few days at least.”

Kurt flushes with embarrassment, letting his head bang back against the floor.

“Oh my god, I feel so stupid,” he moans, hissing when Blaine rotates his ankle in the other direction, gently probing around Kurt’s foot. “I panicked and I called you of all people and made you come running here for a sprained ankle.”

“Hey,” Blaine says, reaching forward to tip Kurt’s chin towards him, brushing away a stray tear that’s sliding down Kurt’s cheek. “You were scared, and you’re definitely hurt. You don’t need to be embarrassed.”

“But a sprained ankle, Blaine. Of all things.”

“Ankle sprains can be incredibly painful,” Blaine says helpfully, standing up to rummage in Kurt’s freezer for an ice pack. “And difficult to walk on. Why don’t we get you up and settled into bed so we can ice your ankle, okay?”

“God, this is so stupid,” Kurt mutters as he takes Blaine’s arm, putting most of his weight on Blaine as they make slow progress to Kurt’s bedroom. “I can’t believe I called you for this.”

“I’m glad you did,” Blaine says quietly as he helps Kurt lower onto the bed and settle back against his pillows. Blaine busies himself with propping Kurt’s foot on another pillow, setting the ice packs against it and pulling a spare blanket up over Kurt’s form.

He busies himself checking the positioning of Kurt’s ankle and adjusting the ice, neither of them speaking for a while as Blaine works.

“Do you have an Ace bandage in your first aid kit?” Blaine asks after he settles back, looking up at
Kurt. “Or a compression bandage?”

“I’m not sure, but probably? I keep that stuff in the bathroom, the shelf above the toilet. You can go check.”

Blaine does, coming back with two Ace bandages and some ibuprofen. He hands Kurt the pills with a small glass of water, waiting for Kurt to swallow them before setting the glass and the bandages on the bedside table.

“You should leave the ice on for about twenty minutes, and then leave it off for another twenty. You want to keep the swelling down as much as possible. You also want to wrap it, not too tightly, to help stabilize it and relieve some of the pain.”

He stands awkwardly next to the bed, hands in his pockets as he shifts from foot to foot.

“I guess, since you’re okay, I’ll just-”

“Stay,” Kurt says quietly, so softly that Blaine almost misses it. “I mean, if you-you can stay, if you want. I’d like that.”

“Okay,” Blaine responds, nudging Kurt over so he can sit on the bed next to him. Kurt smiles, resting his head on Blaine’s shoulder with a content sigh.

“I’m glad I found you again,” he says softly, closing his eyes as he rests against Blaine’s shoulder. “I’m glad we found each other.”

“Me too,” Blaine whispers, resting his arm around Kurt’s shoulders. As Kurt drifts off to sleep, Blaine presses a chaste, gently kiss to Kurt’s temple, holding him close. “I’m glad I found you again, too.”

February 12, 2018

Kurt wakes up the next morning, his ankle throbbing in pain and completely alone in his bed. Frowning, he flexes his foot and rolls his ankle gently, simultaneously looking around the room for any sign of Blaine. After a long moment, his ears pick up the sound of someone puttering around the kitchen, and he can smell the coffee brewing.

Settling back against his pillow, Kurt reaches to the bedside table for another dose of ibuprofen, washing them down with the glass of water Blaine had left there the night before.

“You’re awake,” Blaine says softly at the door, holding two mugs in one hand and a plate with apple slices and English muffins in the other. “I made some breakfast, I wasn’t sure-”

“It’s perfect,” Kurt says, taking one of the mugs from Blaine and setting it on the bedside table so that Blaine can settle on the bed, the plate balanced on his lap.

“Milk and two sugars, I figured you still took it the same way?”

“Hasn’t changed in twelve years,” Kurt confirms, taking a long sip of his coffee. “It’s perfect.”

“How’s your ankle?” Blaine asks, offering Kurt one of the English muffins, taking an apple slice for himself. “Still in pain?”

“I took a little more Advil just before you came back in here,” Kurt says, motioning towards the
bedside table as he takes a bite of the muffin. “I haven’t looked at it, though.”

Blaine sets aside his own coffee mug, leaning down to gently unwrap the Ace bandage to look at Kurt’s ankle. He hisses in sympathy when he sees the bruising and swelling, gently probing around the bone to check the injury.

“It’s definitely sprained,” he says after a moment, gently re-wrapping the ankle. “It’s pretty bruised and swollen, and you’re going to have some trouble walking on it for awhile, at least. Is the pain manageable?”

“For now. Do you think I’ll be able to walk?”

“I’d keep off it for a few days, rest as much as possible. It’s mostly going to cause you pain, but I’d say if you still can’t bear weight on it by tomorrow afternoon I’ll take you to the doctor to get some X-rays and a pair of crutches.”

“You’re really something, you know that, Blaine?” Kurt says with a gentle smile, patting the bed next to him so Blaine can climb back up.

“I’m glad I can help. I’m glad you called me yesterday.”

“To be fair, I honestly thought I’d broken something,” Kurt says with a laugh, making Blaine smile.

“I’m happy to take care of you,” Blaine replies with a smile, pulling Kurt into his side. “I’ll always be here if you need me.”

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February 20, 2018

A week later, Kurt asks Blaine to dinner as a token of his appreciation. He’s still walking with an exaggerated limp, a tiny shadow of pain crossing his features if he puts a bit too much pressure on his ankle, but he’s mostly healed, and he smiles brightly when he answers the door to Blaine, standing there with a bouquet of red and yellow flowers and a wide smile on his face.

“You didn’t have to bring me flowers, Blaine,” Kurt admonishes, taking the bouquet and rummaging in a cabinet, producing a vase that he fills with water at the sink. “But they’re beautiful.”

“You got me a similar bouquet when I got the role of Tony, remember? I figured they’d brighten up your apartment a bit, since you’ve been so immobile over the last week.”

“They’re lovely, Blaine. Thank you.” Kurt sets the vase on his kitchen counter, fussing with the flowers for a moment until they settle in the vase to his satisfaction. “Shall we?”

“Where are we heading?” Blaine asks as he follows Kurt from the apartment, out to the street where they head towards the subway.

“It’s a surprise,” Kurt says, swiping his MetroCard and crossing the turnstiles, waiting just on the other side for Blaine to do the same. “Shall we?”

“Absolutely, Mr. Hummel,” Blaine says, silly, taking Kurt’s elbow as they walk both as a show of affection and to quietly offer support in case Kurt has difficulty navigating the platform. The short ride passes in easy conversation, and Blaine follows as Kurt leads him off the train and up the stairs of the station. They emerge on a street Blaine doesn’t recognize in a neighborhood he’s never been to, and he sticks close to Kurt as they navigate the street, eventually ending up at a small Italian
restaurant tucked in between two apartment buildings.

“How on earth did you ever find this place?” Blaine asks as they walk inside, Kurt giving his name
to the maitre’d, who leads them to a quiet table in the back and hands them menus. “This is so out of
the way.”

“Rachel and I stumbled upon it our first year at NYADA, actually, while we were busy getting lost
all over the city. It was a bit out of our price range at the time, but we ended up coming in anyway,
and we never regretted it. They make all their pasta by hand, and it’s probably some of the best
Italian food I’ve eaten outside of the trip I made to Milan a few years ago.”

They order a bottle of wine and a pasta dish each, though they end up sharing off of each other’s
plates. Blaine practically moans around his first bite of gnocchi, his eyes closing as he savors the
flavor of the sauce and the pasta itself.

“That good, right?” Kurt teases, taking a bite of his own carbonara as Blaine continues to savor his
gnocchi.

“Kurt this is unbelievable,” Blaine agrees after he swallows, spearing another dumpling with his
fork. “Oh my god.”

“Wait until you try their tiramisu, Blaine. To die for.”

Dinner takes nearly two hours, but neither of them notices as they enjoy the wine and food, finishing
the meal with tiramisu and steaming cappuccinos, talking easily the entire time. When the bill comes,
Kurt refuses to let Blaine pay, pulling his credit card from his wallet and handing it to the waiter
while waving Blaine’s away.

“This is my way to thank you for all your help last week,” Kurt says when Blaine protests, pressing
the card back into Blaine’s hand. “It’s fine, Blaine.”

“Thank you,” Blaine relents after a moment, offering Kurt a smile. “This was amazing.”

“Absolutely.”

They leave the restaurant hand in hand, neither of them willing to call what they’d just been on a date
despite the closeness they feel. Kurt rests his head on Blaine’s shoulder when they reach the subway,
sighing contentedly as they ride the few stops to Kurt’s apartment.

They part at Kurt’s door with a quiet goodbye and a promise to see each other again soon when Kurt
hesitates, one hand on the door frame. He quickly leans in, placing a soft, gentle kiss on Blaine’s lips
with a smile.

“You’re going to be an incredible doctor, Blaine. I just wanted you to know that.”

He waves goodbye as he shuts his apartment door behind him, Blaine practically floating to the
elevator and out to the street.
Epilogue

March 3, 2028

“Blaine, Kayley Williams is back for her follow up, I put her in room three to wait for you. Are you almost done with the chart on Mitch?”

“I’m just entering his latest labs, let me finish that and then you can access it. Is Kayley’s mom here?”

“Not today. Kayley’s quiet, too, so I’m not sure what’s going on.”

“Thanks, Liv,” Blaine says as the nurse files the papers in her hand into the proper folders, mumbling her response around the pen cap between her teeth. Blaine quickly finishes entering the data on the chart, closing out of the EMR system and grabbing his stethoscope from the desk before heading over to room three.

He knocks gently on the door before entering, mildly surprised to see Kayley sitting on the chair by the window instead of on the exam table.

“What’s going on, Kayley?” he asks, grabbing the rolling chair from the desk and sliding it over next to her, sitting on it backwards as he waits for her response. “You seem a little mellow today.”

Kayley sighs, shrugging her shoulders and looking out the window in order to avoid both the question and Blaine’s eyes.

“Did something happen?” Blaine asks, watching Kayley closely to gauge her reaction. She offers a noncommittal grunt in response, but her nose scrunches up as if she’s trying to avoid crying, and Blaine picks up on it, leaning over to grab the box of tissues on the counter to hand to her.

“Your mom?” he asks, not really expecting an answer as she pulls out a tissue and wipes furiously at her eyes. He’s surprised when she nods, turning back around in her chair to face him.

“She called me a freak last night,” Kayley whispers, balling up the tissue in her hand and chucking it at the trash can, letting out a stream of curses when it misses. Blaine hands her another tissue, waiting for her to ball that one up, too, and let it fly. “She says she didn’t mean it, but we were fighting and-“

“And it just came out, right?” Blaine guesses, all too familiar with that type of argument. “Is that why you’re here alone?”

“I didn’t want her with me today,” Kayley says with a nod, taking another tissue from the box and starting to shred it to pieces. “I can’t deal with her, not today.”

“I’ve said from the beginning, Kayley. This is your life, and your medical decisions. You have the final say in everything that happens, not your mom. You’re seventeen.”

“You’re really good at calming me down,” Kayley says, deflecting from the topic at hand as she works to separate the already shredded tissue into smaller pieces. “How do you do that?”

“Years of practice and a pretty understanding boyfriend,” Blaine says with a wink, drawing a smile from Kayley. She stands up to drop the torn tissue into the trash, picking up the ones that had missed when she’d tossed them and throwing them away as well. She heads back to the exam table instead of the chair, sitting up on the papered table and fixing Blaine with a stare.
“Can we just get this done?” she asks, kicking her feet listlessly against the cabinets below the table. Blaine nods, pushing away from the chair and walking over to her, taking his stethoscope from his pocket as he does so. He quickly evaluates Kayley’s vital signs, noting on her chart that everything’s normal before continuing with his physical exam.

“Any new side effects you’re noticing from the increased dose?” he asks as he palpates Kayley’s lymph nodes, feeling for abnormalities. “Or are you tolerating it pretty well?”

“Nothing out of the ordinary, really,” she offers, breathing in deeply when Blaine instructs her to. “It’s too soon for any of the changes to happen though, right?”

“Well, you’ve been on estrogen for five years now,” Blaine says, slipping his stethoscope back into his pocket and retrieving his chair so he can sit down to face Kayley. “You’re not going to see any dramatic changes anymore, not like when you were younger, but there should be more pronounced changes over time, yes.”

“Am I?” Kayley asks, the question completely out of the blue and making Blaine pause.

“Are you what?” he asks, trying to confirm what she’s asking him.

“Am I a freak?” Kayley whispers, her fingers gripping the paper on the exam table nervously, her eyes trained on Blaine’s shoes so she doesn’t have to meet his eyes.

“Hey,” Blaine replies, hooking a finger under her chin to tip her face up so he can meet her gaze. “Have I ever said that to you?”

“No,” she says quietly, miserably, her voice small.

“You’re not a freak, Kayley. It doesn’t matter what people think you should be doing—what matters is that you are doing what’s best for you. Are you?”

“Yes,” Kayley says emphatically, meeting Blaine’s eyes with fire in her own. “I’ve never felt better about myself than this past year.”

“Then that’s all that matters in the end,” Blaine offers with a smile, holding out a hand to help Kayley jump down from the table.

“You’re kinda an awesome doctor,” Kayley tells him as they walk out to the reception desk so Blaine can file her paperwork. She smiles at him as he signs off on her chart, offering a fist bump to her as she hands over her mother’s credit card to pay for the copay.

“I’m glad I can help,” he says sincerely, reaching over the desk to pull out a roll of stickers they keep for the youngest patients. “Besides, what other doctor would give you a My Little Pony sticker when you’re about to graduate high school?”

Kayley laughs, taking the sticker from Blaine and affixing it to her backpack, next to her collection of LGBT acceptance pins and the tiny trans* pride pin she’d gone out to buy with her allowance after her first appointment with their office five years earlier. She hesitates for a moment, before wrapping her arms around a startled Blaine.

“You saved my life, Dr. Anderson,” she says softly when he returns the hug, smiling at her. “Thank you.”

“You saved yourself, Kayley,” Blaine whispers in her ear before they separate. “I just helped you figure out how.”
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