Through the Hourglass

by gleefulmusings

Summary

Kurt travels to Salem to discover if his cancer is still in remission and to reunite with the man with whom he is in love, but Salem revolves around secrets and an unknowing Kurt is an integral component.
This will be a multichapter fiction based off my one-shot, *Hourglass*, which is a crossover between *Glee* and *Days of our Lives*. Due to the popularity of my story *Valkyrie*, in which Kurt's godmother is revealed to be Olivia Pope, I've decided to add *Scandal* as a fandom as well. Whether Olivia will end up in Salem, she will at least be mentioned.

Because this is a crossover with a soap opera, I recognize it will be a niche story. I grew up on *Days* and have fond memories of watching it with my mother and grandmother. I even named my daughter after one of the characters. That said, I don't like what the show has become and will rewrite a lot of canon just to suit my whims and my views of the characters. I disagree - strongly - with a lot of the storylines of the past twenty years. Therefore I will be hearkening back to the seventies and eighties, where I feel the show was at it's greatest. Clichés will abound, so be forewarned.
"Are you sure you're comfortable, son?" asked an anxious Burt, forcibly restraining himself from reaching over and fluffing the boy's pillows.

Kurt repressed a sigh and could barely refrain from rolling his eyes. Instead, he offered a soft smile.

"I'm fine, Dad," he insisted. "Really."

Burt gave his son a suspicious look but said nothing, returning to drumming his nails on the arms of his miserable bucket chair. His nervous eyes scanned the room. He supposed it was a step up from St. Rita's, at least in terms of décor, but all hospital rooms were basically the same. Sterile, uncomfortable, astringent, and depressing.

He thought the fake plants in this room were of better quality but needed a thorough dusting. The fluorescent lights buzzed louder than the ones back in Ohio. The sheets were scratchier, but there were more and better television stations.

He had to think of anything other than why they were there.

Kurt was amused, though not a little exasperated. "Dad, everything's going to be okay. I believe that; you should too. I've been in remission for almost a year now. This is nothing more than a checkup."

Burt prayed his son was right. He knew how very lucky they had been, how lucky Kurt was even to be alive, let alone cancer-free these last months. Of course, they had lost a lot as well.

Finn and Kurt, who had been dating in everything but name, had been the first casualty. Finn just hadn't been able to cope with the idea that Kurt might die and, though he had never officially broken things off, he had stopped calling and visiting. In a way, that was worse than a breakup, for he had allowed Kurt to linger in hope for far too long.

Burt didn't think he'd ever be able to forgive Finn for that and it had led to the destruction of his relationship with Carole. Oh, they had loved each other very much and Carole had been in agreement that Finn had been cruel, even if unintentionally. In the end, though, they couldn't see their own relationship having any kind of future. Marrying each other after their sons had dated seemed bizarre, and the idea of Carole and Finn moving into Burt's house had been all but laughable.

Once his relationship with Finn had fizzled, Kurt hadn't pursued other romances, though transfer student Sam Evans had pursued him relentlessly. Kurt had shied away, though, too afraid to fall in love with Sam, too afraid to have Sam fall in love with him, only for him to die.

Kurt now counted Sam as a good friend, but whenever they were together, it was obvious to everyone both boys were trapped by the idea of what might have been.

After Kurt's diagnosis became known among his friends, Finn had run right back to Quinn, who had decked him and then left him to Mercedes' tender mercies, with that punk Puckerman lending his assistance. At last, Finn found comfort in the welcoming arms of Rachel Berry.

Burt felt so sorry for Carole. No one should be inflicted with Rachel Berry if it could be avoided.

And then Quinn Fabray, the selfish, superficial former cheerleader who had just given her baby up
for adoption, had experienced some kind of rebirth. It started with her befriending Kurt. Burt, although initially suspicious, appreciated her efforts and could see how much the girl and his son had in common. It was almost freaky.

Then, before he knew it and without his consent, he had found himself on a date with Judy Fabray.

Quinn was known to be diabolical and Kurt was no slouch either. Burt knew his son was trying to distract him in an effort for him to focus on something other than his breakup with Carole and his son's health.

Strangely, it had worked. He and Judy were now married. Quinn and Kurt, having earlier established themselves as spiritual twins, now considered it physical. That they had been born only a few days apart lent it credence. Quinn relished the opportunity to relieve herself of the burden of her father's name and all it represented. She now answered to nothing but Quinn Hummel, vowing to keep her name even when she married.

"I wish Quinn could have come with us," Kurt said quietly, his longing for his sister heavy in his tone.

Burt patted his hand. "Me too, son, me too."

And it was true; he also wished for Quinn and Judy's presence. They had been present throughout so much of Kurt's treatment that their absence felt alien. They had been towers of strength for the Hummel men, especially Quinn, who had absolutely believed with every fiber of her being that Kurt would beat the cancer.

It was so close to graduation, however, and Quinn was determined to be the valedictorian, if only to prove to herself that it was possible; not to mention forcing Figgins to eat crow. She had easily overtaken Mike, Tina, and Rachel in the class standings; only Santana, Artie, and, surprisingly, Brittany had stood in her way. Quinn had pushed herself hard this past year, edging past Santana and Brittany, and was now only a few hundredths behind Artie.

Burt fully expected her to triumph.

"But you know you wouldn't trust anyone other than Quinn to take notes for you and turn in your assignments."

Kurt grimaced, but agreed. He was determined to remain in the top ten, and if he couldn't be valedictorian, he wanted it to be either Quinn or Artie. "You're right." He sighed. "How's the hotel?"

"It's actually very nice," Burt said, which was surprising, considering the affordable cost. He had money and truly great health insurance, but he was frugal. After his heart attack, he had been terrified he would die and leave his son with nothing: no money, no family, no hope. Despite knowing Kurt had myriad trust funds bequeathed to him by his mother, the fear was ever present.

He had started eating better, cutting back on the beer, and even working out, only for Kurt to fall victim to disease. Sometimes he wondered if Kurt was right about there being no god. He couldn't even stomach the thought of burying his son, not after burying his wife.

It was only happenstance they had discovered the cancer. Burt had hemmed and hawed about his follow-up care with his cardiologist. He took his medication religiously and had followed the other guidelines, but something about going back to St. Rita's terrified him, even if it was only for a well-visit.
Kurt had told him he was being a big baby. After the first month, Kurt had stopped coddling him and demanded Burt put his life back together. It had been an abrupt change and Burt hadn't liked it. In the beginning, he had bitched and moaned about how overprotective and suffocating Kurt had been and his son had listened. Kurt continued to do all of his chores and had taken over the bookkeeping for the shop, but decided to let Burt handle everything else.

Burt had been totally unprepared.

He didn't know how to grocery shop. He didn't know what foods to buy or what was safe for him to have. He'd had to draw up a schedule of when to take his medications, as well as their side effects and when they needed to be refilled. He hadn't a clue about the mysteries of health insurance and coinsurance and benefits and preferred providers. He didn't know how to cook for himself or do his own laundry or a host of other things which left him feeling embarrassed and impotent.

He was also ashamed, because it wasn't until after his heart attack that he realized how much he had come to rely on Kurt to take care of the everyday matters. Burt went out and made the money, and Kurt had somehow become a desperate housewife: cooking, cleaning, shopping, paying the bills, yardwork. The list was endless, and Burt had taken it for granted.

He had needed help. Desperately.

And then his son had graciously swooped in and taken back control. Nothing was said tacitly, no concessions were made, and Kurt never once said *I told you so*, though he had certainly been entitled. But Burt had learned, and there was no way he was going to go back to the way it was before. Kurt didn't deserve that onus and Burt had refused to place it on him.

Against Kurt's wishes, Burt had hired a part-time caregiver, a lovely woman named Adela who was a licensed practical nurse and home health aide. She organized his health affairs, did some light cleaning, and drove him to his appointments until he was cleared to return to work. Kurt hadn't liked someone else in *his* house, believing her presence said something about his lack of ability, but warmed to her eventually.

And then, on his last appointment with his cardiologist other than as needed follow-ups, Burt had been scheduled for an MRI. Mildly claustrophobic, though never admitting to it, he had been uneasy about crawling inside a big metal tube and laying there for a considerable length of time. An exasperated Kurt had agreed to do it first, just to show him there was nothing to fear, and his doctor had laughingly agreed.

The laughter hadn't lasted.

Islet cell carcinoma.

Pancreatic neuroendocrine tumor.

A tumor. His son had a fucking *tumor*.

Then came the flurry of bloodwork, x-rays, CT scans, MRIs, referrals, specialists, and it had all been too fast.

His son, his baby, had *cancer*.

There were good things. It had been found early. Kurt was lucky, allegedly, that his tumor was what it was, which presented in only five percent of pancreatic cancers. The other ninety-five were adenocarcinoma, which Burt knew was almost always fatal.
It had killed Kurt's mother.

There were the symptoms which had suddenly struck, predominantly stomach ulcers and hypoglycemia, which Kurt preferred to the other end of the spectrum, which included diabetes and associated hormonal problems.

There had been the surgery, which had removed most of the slow-growing tumor, but the horrifying discovery that the tumor had been in the process of metastasizing into the bone.

That led to the radiation, the chemotherapy, and all of their side effects.

Burt had thought Kurt would have lost it completely once his hair began falling out, but his amazing son continued to be only more amazing. Never once had Kurt complained; not when he was throwing up, not when he had to be carried to the bathroom, not when his beloved clothes no longer fit his increasingly-shrinking frame, and not when his friends began distancing themselves, too afraid the next time they saw him would be the last.

But Quinn had been there through it all, as had Artie and Brittany, who had brought Santana with her.

Burt would never forget the day when Santana Lopez had told his cancer-ridden son to hurry the hell up into remission, because his disease was doing nothing for his once-prized complexion.

It was only his son's hysterical laughter that kept Burt from bodily throwing the girl from his house.

When his own body had betrayed him, Burt had become sullen and thoughtless, while Kurt, on the other hand, had retained his dignity and grace. It was never clearer to him that he had been meant to learn from his son, not the other way around.

Kurt had gotten through it. He had triumphed. If he ever suspected he might not, he told no one.

And now, here they were, almost a year later. Almost one year cancer-free.

Burt prayed to every deity whose name he had ever heard that it would last.

Right, it was time to nip maudlin thoughts in the bud, because the longer he focused on them, the more unsettled Kurt became.

"So," Burt slyly began, "are you excited to see Dr. Brady again?"

Kurt blushed furiously. "That has nothing to do with anything," he hissed.

But Burt was enjoying himself. He had forgotten how much he liked teasing his son and was proud of himself for now being able to tease Kurt about boys. He had come along way with his latent homophobia and backhanded comments. He was closer to Kurt than ever before, and Eric Brady had a lot to do with that.

"He's very nicely put together," Burt said in a lazy voice. "He also looks a lot like that Dean guy on that show you watch."

Kurt pursed his lips. "You mean the one you watch? The one for which you have every season's DVD release? I'm not the only Supernatural freak in our house."

Burt nodded. That was true. He loved the show; never missed it. Good writing and acting gave it a credibility it wouldn't have had in less capable hands. It reminded him a lot of Buffy the Vampire
Slayer, but Kurt didn't know Burt liked that show. And he never would.

Kurt sighed gently and gave a soft smile. "Still, it will be nice to see Dr. Brady again."

Burt knew when to pick and choose his battles, and this was one from which he was happy to walk away. If Kurt had a crush on Dr. Brady, who cared? At least his son had good taste, though that had never been in question. Except for Finn.

He shook his head to dislodge thoughts of the boy.

The bottom line was that Brady had been good for his son. Kurt hadn't liked most of his doctors, many of whom were jaded or too busy to extend even the most basic of courtesies. Eric Brady had been an oncology fellow at St. Rita's when he had been assigned Kurt's case and was a breath of fresh air. He had been very hopeful about Kurt's prognosis and insisted the Hummel men be as well; he hadn't tolerated any less.

Brady had been a hands-on physician. Not only was he on time for every appointment, but he answered any question, no matter how insignificant. He had provided supplemental literature and peer-reviewed articles when Kurt asked for them. He called Kurt at home after every treatment to inquire about how Kurt was faring. Hell, he had even given Kurt his personal cell phone number and told him to call anytime, and had meant it.

Burt didn't know if Kurt had ever called. It wasn't his business.

He knew his boy had developed a slight crush on the doctor back then, and if Burt knew anything about boys, and he did, Brady had been a little too invested in Kurt's care. What was strange was that he didn't mind. He had been so resistant toward Kurt and Finn dating, but the idea of Kurt and Eric Brady, despite the age difference, didn't bother him too much. Perhaps part of it was because Brady had always treated Kurt as an equal whereas Finn treated him as though he were a child in need of constant minding. The reverse had been much more realistic.

There was also the very real truth that Eric Brady, despite his Midwestern upbringing, love of sports, and all around boy-next-door charisma, was an intellectual. He could match Kurt, which was something most of Kurt's contemporaries, with the exception of Artie and perhaps Quinn, could not.

He would never admit it, but part of Burt would prefer to see Kurt with an older man, someone settled and sure of himself, who knew who he was and didn't apologize for it or change to please anyone else. Finn had been so wishy-washy where his relationship with Kurt was concerned, and it had been incredibly unfair to Kurt. Sam had been much better, but Kurt had resisted his efforts with relentless zeal.

Almost at the end of Kurt's radiation cycle, Eric Brady had completed his fellowship and was offered a staff position at Salem University Hospital, located in his hometown. He had been anxious to return, as he had been away for years, particularly to reunite with his mother Dr. Marlena Evans, a world-renowned psychiatrist.

It had been surprising to learn that Sam was distantly related to the woman, some degree of cousins. Sam and Eric had actually never met, so while they were family, they weren't close. It also had been obvious Sam deeply resented Eric's presence in Kurt's life.

It had taken a few months before the transfer went through, so Eric had spent the interim with Doctors Without Borders.

Kurt had wanted, and Burt had agreed, to transfer his follow-up care back to Eric once the man
had received his privileges at University Hospital. As far as he was concerned, Kurt could have whatever he wanted. Besides, Salem wasn't much more than a two hour drive from Dayton, and maybe three or four from Lima, depending on traffic. If Kurt was well, the visits wouldn't be that frequent, so Burt saw no problem with it.

They had been warned Eric was running late. A woman named Alice Horton, apparently the town matriarch, had passed away. Her funeral was being held today and attendance was expected to be massive. She had been a longstanding and much beloved presence at the hospital and was acquainted with virtually all of its staff.

The nurse who had apprised them of this had intimated that Eric had been very close to Mrs. Horton, whom he had considered as another grandmother. His mother, Dr. Evans, had been one of Mrs. Horton’s best friends.

In the meantime, a lovely doctor named Lexie Carver had come into the room to draw some blood, explaining exactly the tests she was ordering and what she was hoping they would show. She and Kurt had hit it off like gangbusters, but then, most women tended to fall a little in love with his son.

So, for now, they were merely waiting.

Sami Brady was more than a little stunned when, arising from the pew in which she had sat for Alice Horton's service, she turned and spotted her brother Eric. She hadn't even known he was in town.

That wasn't too surprising. Despite being twins, they weren't close. Oh, they loved each other dearly and would probably kill anyone who threatened the other, but Eric had always been so much like their mother.

As for Sami, well, she didn't know which parent she took after. Certainly not Marlena. When she had been a teenager, she had wanted to be nothing like her mother. Now a mother herself, she more understood what had been done to Marlena, how time had been stolen from her. She hadn't appreciated that then, but if someone took her from her own children, Sami would've gone insane.

As for her father ... fathers ... Roman was a cop and all-around hero. She definitely wasn't like him. John had raised her practically singlehandedly and she had thrown it back in his face like the petulant brat she often still was.

She regretted that and, while they had made peace, she would always regret it. John was a decent guy whose life had been hijacked. He was also a damned good father, especially considering he had been conned into raising kids who weren't even his.

She supposed the only family member with whom she felt any affiliation was the woman after whom she was named: her mother’s own twin sister, Samantha. From everything she had heard about her Aunt Sam, the woman had been the family black sheep of her generation. Sami could definitely relate.

She had never before stopped to think what it must have been like for her mother to lose her identical twin, a part of herself, especially to violence. As much as Samantha had put Marlena through, and it had been hell, they were still sisters. She couldn't even bear to think about anything happening to Eric, even though he had always been closer to their half-sisters Carrie and Belle.

Hell, her son was closer to Carrie than to his own mother!
She supposed sometimes patterns repeated themselves and, if anyone was Marlena reincarnated, it was St. Carrie.

She didn't know why she was thinking these things and wondered if it was perhaps because of Mrs. Horton's death. Talk about coming out of nowhere. No one had really expected it, despite her advanced age and declining health. Still, Alice Horton had been so solid, so stalwart. She had seemed immortal, and that was how people thought of her.

The woman had even held the respect of Stefano DiMera.

Sami looked around the church and couldn't count the number of mourners. Most of them she knew, had known her entire life. Others she recognized from the hospital and the many charities to which Mrs. Horton had devoted her time.

There were also many she didn't know, though she recognized their names upon hearing them.

There was Sandy Horton, Alice's granddaughter through her son, Tommy, and a physician. Hortons tended to be doctors. She thought her son Will might eventually follow in the footsteps of his father's side of the family.

Melissa Horton had come back, which was no surprise, considering her son Nathan was a doctor and had been caring for his great-grandmother in her final days. Melissa's sister, Sarah, was also present. Sami hadn't seen her in years, could barely remember her. Julie was standing with Doug and Hope, and an older man Sami dimly recognized as Steven Olson and only through pictures Julie had once shown her. Most people had forgotten that Julie and Hope even had a brother.

So many Hortons were in attendance. There were Bill and Laura, who had remarried, and their children, Jennifer and Mike. Jennifer had her young children, J.J. and Abigail with her. Mike was there surprisingly with Robin Jacobs. Sami supposed their son Jeremy was lurking around somewhere.


And Sami had thought her family was complicated, although most of them were here as well: her Uncle Bo, his estranged wife Hope, their grown son Shawn-Douglas and daughter Ciara; her aunt Kayla, her husband Steve, and their daughter Stephanie; Aunt Kimberly and her husband, Shane, and their children Andrew and Jeannie, who was, for some reason, demanding people call her Theresa.

Her father was there. He had always been close to Mrs. Horton. After all, she had broken him out of jail once.

Carrie had returned, of course. She had always been closer to Alice. Carrie had always been closer to everyone. Sami guessed that was the advantage of being older. Carrie had done everything first and Sami had resented her for it. Still did, really.

She slowly approached her immediate family, all but dragging Will with her, perfectly content to use him a human shield. It suddenly struck her how much her son looked like her brother. It was almost eerie.

Predictably, Carrie was hanging all over Eric, who was holding a whispered conversation with their mother while John and Roman pretended not to resent each other. Sami overheard just enough to feel left out once again.

"You've moved back to Salem?" she asked her brother.
Eric blinked. "Hey, Sami. It's great to see you. How are you? Me, I'm just swell, thanks for asking. Oh, that's right! You didn't!"

Marlena and Carrie held their tongues, but Will snickered. Sami couldn't believe her own kid would sell her out like that.

Eric rolled his eyes and threw his arms around her. She reveled in his embrace.

He pulled back and smiled. "Yeah, I have moved back, but it's only been a few days. I haven't even gotten a place yet, so I'm staying with Mom."

Sami nodded as though this made complete sense. Why hadn't he asked to stay with her?

Oh, right. Probably because she lived in the DiMera mansion now. She could only imagine what Eric and Carrie thought about that.

"Are you going to the cemetery?" Marlena asked her son.

Eric shook his head. "I'd like to, but I think it's going to be overcrowded as it is. Besides, I have an appointment at the hospital."

"Are you sick?" asked a worried Sami.

Eric laughed. "No, I have to meet a patient."

"Patient? What do you mean?"

He stared at her. "I have to meet a patient," he said slowly. "It's what doctors do."

"Since when are you a doctor!" she demanded.

Will sighed. "Really, Mom?"

"Are you serious, Sami?" Carrie asked, rolling her eyes.

Even a shocked Marlena couldn't dismiss Sami's ignorance as she so often had.

Eric shook his head. "What did you think I was doing when I told you I was with Doctors Without Borders?"

"That you were making coffee and dodging rebel gunfire," Sami sniped back.

"You somehow missed the fact our brother has spent the past decade training to be a doctor?" asked an incredulous Carrie. "You are completely blind to anything not about yourself!"

She suddenly held up her hands. "No, not here. I won't disrespect Mrs. Horton's memory." She shook her head. "I refuse to allow myself to fall back into old patterns. Eric, I'll be in town for a few more days and I expect some quality face time," she said, kissing his cheek, before throwing her arms around her nephew. "I've missed you so much, sweetie. You've become the smart and gorgeous young man I always knew you would."

Will blushed and hugged her back fiercely. Aunt Carrie had been the first to suspect he was gay and had been nothing but supportive. He had confided in Grandma, who was just awesome. Was it weird his best friend was his grandmother? He didn't care. He knew how close Jen, Hope, and Melissa had been to Grandma Alice. His own mother ... well.
Carrie hugged Marlena. "I'll call you later, Mom."

Marlena nodded and wished her children could - even if only once - gather together without fights, silences, and nursing old hurts. She repressed a sigh.

Sami wondered when Carrie had started calling Marlena Mom. She supposed it made sense; Marlena had spent more time raising Carrie than Anna ever had. Carrie had also been the last one to stop calling John Dad, even though everyone knew she still considered him as such. She had never turned away from John like Sami had. Eric had been, at most, indifferent.

"How did I not know you were a doctor?" Sami whispered to Eric.

His eyes softened. "I don't know."

"I thought you had gone back to school for photography," she murmured. "I thought that was always your dream."

He shrugged. "It was a passion and still is, but it was never going to be a profession. I tried my hand at fashion photography and it wasn't for me. Photojournalism is further eroded with every newspaper and magazine that folds. The truth is that I always wanted to be a doctor."

"You never told me," she said accusingly.

He frowned. "I never told anyone, Sami. I didn't think I would actually be able to do it. We both know I barely got through college. Carrie was always the brain."

Sami grimaced. That was true, at least as far as Carrie was concerned. Carrie was not only had more common sense than most people, but she was also the intellectual. Neither Roman nor Anna had been, so she didn't know where Carrie got it from. She supposed it was her mother's influence. It had always felt like Carrie was more Marlena's daughter than Sami herself was.

Eric's insecurity regarding his own intelligence was surprising, considering it was untrue. He was smart as hell and always had been.

The past and omnipresent resentment bubbled up once more. At least Eric had actually gone to college, she simmered. Belle had gone back and graduated after marrying Shawn-Douglas and having Claire. Carrie had aced college and then later went on to law school, graduating at the top of her class.

No, Sami was the only child of Marlena Evans or Roman Brady not to have earned a degree. Well, except for Cassie and Rex. But she didn't know where they were, nor did she care.

"But I finally decided to stop running from it and being afraid to try," he continued. "So I tried, and, to my surprise, I not only loved it but was good at it."

Sami didn't have it in her to offer her usual snark or withering comments. This wasn't the time for snide remarks or wailing about how she had never found her own calling. She hadn't seen Eric so happy in years. Hell, she hadn't seen Eric in years. Maybe that would have been different had she stopped trying to control his life when he had still lived in Salem. She thought about what her life might have been like had Eric stayed. Probably a lot better, she surmised.

"I'm happy for you," she said, "and I'm proud of you."

He smiled at her.

"We don't really know each other anymore, do we?" she asked. "We're twins, but we don't know
each other."

"And we're both at fault for that, Sami."

She blinked, startled by his admission of his own guilt.

He nodded. "I should have actually called you rather than texted. I should have visited rather than emailed. You have four children, only one of whom I know, and I haven't seen Will in years. I should have asked you what was going on in your life rather than hearing second and third-hand accounts from other people. I should have been here when you had your children. But I wasn't, and that's on me."

"And me," she said softly. "I was so busy with so many very unimportant things that I neglected one of the most important people in my life."

"I know you didn't want me to leave Salem," he said, "and I know you were furious when I did, but I had to get out, Sami. I had to find out who the hell I was. My entire life here, I was the son of Roman Brady and Marlena Evans. I was the brother of Carrie Brady." He stared into her eyes. "You understand that."

She did, all too well.

"But I don't think you ever understood that I was equally known as Sami Brady's brother. I was the boyfriend of Nicole Walker or Greta von Amberg. I was never just Eric."

She startled. No, she hadn't known. Perhaps she hadn't wanted to know. Suddenly prompted to consider her many, many past escapades, she winced with the realization that some of the blowback must have landed on her brother. He had kept silent about it and supported her until he could stand it no more.

"Now I'm Dr. Eric Brady." He grinned. "I really like him. I hope you will, too."

She smiled.

Burt had stepped out into the lounge to grab a quick cup of coffee and stumbled upon an unwelcome blast from the past.

"Anna?"

Anna Fredericks Brady DiMera looked up and couldn't believe her eyes. "Burt?" she whispered. He swallowed heavily and pasted a smile on his face. "What are you doing here?"

She raised a brow. "I live in Salem. I did for several years before we knew each other, and I've returned to be with my husband and my daughter, when she's in town." She smiled, eyes nostalgic. "And how is Kurt?"

Burt's mouth went dry.

What was he supposed to tell her? The truth? That Kurt was a patient? That he had fought cancer and was now in questionable remission?

What if she demanded to see him? Realistically, he knew he couldn't stop her.
He should have told Kurt years ago, but after Suzanne had died, he had been too afraid to do so. He didn't know why; it wasn't as though it were some great secret or something of which he was ashamed.

Still, he had never found the words to tell his son that, even though he and Suzanne were Kurt's parents, he had been carried and birthed by a surrogate. Namely Anna.

What if Kurt wanted to know her? What if he wanted to meet Anna's daughter? Would he think of Anna as another mother? Would he consider Carrie as his sister?

He wished Judy and Quinn were here.

He wished Kurt had never gotten sick.

He wished he hadn't kept so many secrets where Kurt was concerned.

Most of all, he wished they had never come to Salem.

Lexie Carver entered Kurt Hummel's hospital room and forced a smile.

"How are you doing?" she asked in an overly cheerful voice.

His brow furrowed. He knew phony when he heard it.

"Where's your father?"

Kurt pursed his lips. "What's going on?" He looked pointedly at the large folder in her hands. "Are those my test results?"

"We should probably wait for your dad," she said evasively.

He raised a brow. "Excuse me, but I believe I am entitled to know about anything regarding my own health. My father will be soon enough, so you can start talking now. Did something show up in my bloodwork? Is the cancer back?"

"No," she said emphatically. "All signs point to you still being in remission."

"Then what's the big mystery?" he asked with exasperation.

She didn't know what to tell him. She didn't know how to tell him.

How was she supposed to say that she had reviewed all of his reports for the entirety of his treatment, that she had entered that information into his new electronic file at University Hospital, and that his DNA profile had detected a match against another in the system?

How was she supposed to tell him Marlena Evans was his biological mother?

“Kurt has cancer?” asked a stricken Anna through her fingers.

“He’s been in remission almost a year now,” Burt said gently. “There’s no reason to think it’s back.”
Her face moved through a series of expressions not easily identifiable. “Why are you in Salem?” she finally asked.

“Kurt’s oncologist is really good. He’s a good boy. Saw Kurt through the worst of it. Kurt wants him to continue his care and I’m certainly not going to argue.”

She gave an absent nod. “Well, University Hospital is among the best in the Midwest.” She shook her head and blinked. “Who’s the physician? I might be familiar with them.”

“Eric Brady.”

She stared. “What? Since when is Eric a doctor? Since when is Eric even old enough to be a doctor? How am I old enough to have lived to see Eric Brady become a doctor?”

Burt chuckled. “Same old Anna.”

Her eyes narrowed. “Watch who you’re calling old, Mr. Receding Hairline.”

He just laughed harder.

“Oh, I’ve missed you, Burt. I’ve thought of you and Suzanne a lot of the years. Is she here too?” Her heart clenched when she saw the despair appear in his eyes. “Oh, no,” she whispered, shaking her head. “Oh, Burt, I’m so sorry!”

He offered a wobbly smile. “They say time heals everything. It’s a lie.”

She nodded. “May I ask what happened?”

“Cancer,” he bit out. “Same type as Kurt’s, but more insidious.” He dropped his head. “Kurt was six. He never got over it.” He sighed. “It was just me and him for a very long time. Then, a few months ago, I got remarried. A wonderful woman named Judy. I think you’d like her, Anna. She has a daughter Kurt’s age. Quinn. Smart cookie who doesn’t take any shit. She and Kurt are like twins.”

She smiled. “I’m happy for you.”

He turned his head and blinked rapidly. “I just … I need him to be okay, Anna. If I lost him, I couldn’t go on.”

“I understand.”

“How are you and Carrie doing? Last time we talked, things were a little … fragile.”

“We’re good, mostly. We don’t see each other often, but stay in regular contact. She’s in town for Alice Horton’s funeral. We’re having dinner tonight.”

“I heard about the funeral. She must have been some woman.”

“I don’t think there’s anyone who ever met Alice Horton who didn’t respect her. She was a good woman, very strong, but also the most compassionate person I’ve ever known. She had a long life and, though we’ll all miss her, this world is a much better place for her having been a part of it.”

He nodded.

“What’s Kurt like?”
Burt grinned. “Honestly? A lot like you.”

Her eyes widened. “Really?”

“Smart as hell, even more clever than that, glamorous and sophisticated. He speaks a stupid number of languages. Top student. Head cheerleader. Sings his ass off. Loves fashion. You’re his favorite designer.”

She blushed, eyes sparkling with happiness. “Burt, I want you to know I never considered him mine. I was so happy to be able to help you and Suzanne. I know you said I could stay in contact, but my life was so crazy then.” She shook her head. “I didn’t want any of my mess to fall on Kurt’s shoulders.”

“We never told him about you,” Burt admitted. “We had always planned to, once he was old enough to understand, but then Sue died and … it was very hard for a long time, Anna. Lima has not been kind to him.”

She frowned. “Why?”

“Kurt’s gay. We knew when he was three. Everyone knew. A lot of people didn’t like it.”

She unleashed a thunderous scowl.

“It was horrible,” he murmured, “the things people said and did to him. But he’s strong, Anna. He’s so strong. He fought. He never backed down. He never let them get the best of him.” His jaw worked furiously. “He always won until …”

She covered his hand with hers. “I can’t even imagine how difficult this must have been for you. Every time I look at Carrie and think of everything she’s been through, all I feel is gratitude that she’s survived.” She nodded to herself. “And so will Kurt. From what you’ve told me, he won’t demand less.”

He laughed and then fumbled for his phone when it signaled a new text. Grabbing it from his pocket, he looked down. “Kurt wants me to come back to the room. Says that doctor Lexie has news.”

She raised a brow. “Lexie is my sister-in-law. She’s an excellent physician. Go, Burt. Take care of your son.”

He stood and regarded her for a long moment. “Why don’t you come with me? Kurt knows how thankful I am to have him in my life. I think it’s time he met the person who made that possible.”

“This is ridiculous,” Kurt complained. “I know you believe you’re protecting me from something, but this is my health. I have a right to know what’s going on!”

“You absolutely do,” Lexie agreed, “but you’re still a minor …”

“I’ll be eighteen in a month!”

“… which doesn’t change the fact that you’re still a minor,” she said sternly. “I have an obligation to disclose this information to your father.”

“That doesn’t preclude you from telling me about it right now!”
She knew he was right and it forced her to reconsider her actions. It was apparent she wasn’t dealing with a typical teenager. This young man was obviously incredibly intelligent and articulate. He was also right and she was very much skirting the line of unprofessionalism. There was no feasible reason for her to withhold information about him from him.

In truth, she was so shocked by the test results that she could barely process them, let alone trying to explain them to this boy and his father. Especially since she had the unwelcome suspicion her own father was involved in this fiasco.

She was startled from her thoughts and her irate patient by the door opening.

“Dad!”

“What’s going on, son?”

Kurt looked past him and stared.

“Hello, Lexie.”

“Anna? What are you doing here?”

“Dad!” Kurt hissed. “That’s Anna DiMera. The Anna DiMera! The most important fashion designer since … since ever!” He gave a rapturous sigh. “Oh, she’s beautiful. How lovely she is.”

Then he realized his idol could actually hear him. His face was a furious blush as his eyes searched for something to stare at other than her.

Anna was instantly transported back in time, back to when she first offered to carry a baby for Burt and Suzanne, her best friend from boarding school. She remembered with joy the day she found out the procedure took and she was actually pregnant.

How she had reveled during those months. Her pregnancy with Carrie had been fraught with fear and anguish, while hers with Kurt was nothing but bliss. She had welcomed every change to her body, which thrummed with excitement from the new life coursing through her veins. After giving birth, she hadn’t thought twice about handing Kurt to his real parents. It had been her great privilege to carry him and, while she loved him dearly, she had always known he wasn’t hers.

And then, though she hadn’t known, Suzanne died. The updates about Kurt had fallen away and she had fallen out of contact with the family. She had thought of them often, but her life had become so insane, so dangerous, she wanted none of it to touch them. Her marriage to Tony had floundered, the specter of Stefano always loomed on the horizon, and trying to maintain her business amongst the rising fashion houses of Europe had been paralyzing. Then that nightmare with André.

She had always hoped to be reunited with them again one day, but not like this. Not because the boy she had birthed was hoping his cancer was still in remission. Oh, she was so angry this had happened to him, that someone so young had been put through so much, but she also knew he had the strength and perseverance of his parents and, perhaps, just a little bit of her own.

Burt smiled and waved her over, much to Lexie’s confusion and consternation. “Kurt,” he said, taking his son’s hand, “there’s someone very special I want you to meet. I know you recognize her, have even idolized her, but this should be done properly. Kurt Hummel, this is Anna DiMera.”

Anna smiled warmly and held out her hand, humbled when his shook and gently took it in his own. “It’s my great pleasure to meet you, Kurt,” she said finally, tears in her eyes.
He suddenly sat up, eyes bright, and wrapped his other hand around hers. “Ms. DiMera, the pleasure is all mine. I can’t tell you how much this moment means to me. I … you and your work have been a constant source of inspiration for me for as long as I can remember.”

He swallowed as his jaw worked furiously. “In a world that has often been a dark and lonely place for me, you showed me there is still beauty within it, that it was so much larger than I had been led to believe. You lit a spark in me. You gave me hope.”

Her breath hitched as her tears began to fall. “That,” she whispered, “that is the kindest, loveliest, most generous thing anyone has ever said to me. Thank you.”

He blushed again and averted his eyes.

Burt wiped his own and cleared his throat. “Kurt, I don’t think I ever understood just how much Anna meant to you. If I’d had any idea, I would have initiated this meeting a long time ago.”

Kurt slowly turned toward his father, brow furrowed in confusion. “You know Ms. DiMera, Dad?”

“Kurt, please call me Anna,” she quietly interjected.

Burt nodded. “I’ve known Anna for a long time, as did your mom. They went to boarding school together and were best friends.”

Kurt gaped, head whipping back and forth between them. “Really?”

Anna nodded. “Suzanne was the sister I never had. I absolutely adored her.”

“Then you must know Aunt Liv.”

A shadow fell over her eyes. “Olivia and I were friends, yes.”

Her history with Olivia Pope was not germane to this discussion, however, and she sincerely wished Kurt would not press for details. It rankled that Olivia had stayed part of Kurt’s life, and obviously an integral one given that she was addressed as family.

She was saved from further explanation when Eric Brady breezed into the room.

Anna had to admit he was a stunning man, a gorgeous combination of the best of his parents. She was chagrined that he was now indeed a man, not the tiny baby she remembered Marlena birthing along with his twin, the odious Sami.

Honestly, she didn’t know what the hell was wrong with that girl!

Eric was tall and lithe, but obviously muscular. He had close-cropped dirty-blond hair and lovely eyes which couldn’t seem to decide if they were green or hazel. His mouth was full and quite lush. Strong chin and jawline, reminiscent of both his parents.

Anna didn’t know him well, but she knew he’d had a rather strange life and struggled to find his place in the world. Apparently he had finally chosen medicine. It was an unusual profession for Bradys, Kayla being the exception, and she wondered if he had been influenced by the close bonds his family maintained with the Hortons. If not them, certainly Marlena.

Eric unleashed a blinding smile and prowled over to his charge, not even registering Anna and Lexie’s presence, and going so far as to push Burt aside.
He grabbed Kurt’s hand and leaned down. “And how is my smartest and most beautiful patient?” he purred, his deep baritone rumbling pleasantly.

Kurt blushed again, though he grabbed Eric’s hand just as strongly. “Hi, Dr. Brady.”

Eric clucked his tongue and ran his fingers through Kurt’s bangs, pushing them up off his face. “I mean, hello Eric,” Kurt said in a stronger voice, eyes sparkling.

“That’s better,” Eric said, winking. “I’m sorry I couldn’t get here before, but the funeral ran long and there were some … family issues to contend with.”

Lexie and Anna realized he was referring to Sami. They rolled their eyes.

“You shouldn’t end sentences with prepositions,” Kurt scolded.

It was then Eric’s turn to roll his eyes, which he did rather dramatically. “What can I say? Your gorgeous face makes the rules of grammar just fall out of my head.”

Kurt giggled.

Anna raised her brows.

Burt was very smug.

Lexie was horrified.

Eric and Kurt were so enraptured with each other, Burt decided to take measures into his own hands. He was happy he had correctly discerned Eric’s interest in his son. He wasn’t sure he was completely comfortable with it – Eric was almost ten years older than Kurt – but neither could he deny that they looked good together.

“It’s good to see you, Doc,” he said, clapping a hand on Eric’s shoulder. “Dr. Carver here was just about to tell us Kurt’s test results.”

Eric blinked and looked over his shoulder. “Oh, hey, Lexie,” he smiled. “Sorry, I didn’t see you there.”

“You were obviously busy,” she said, brow arched.

“And you need to watch your tone,” he bit back.

Burt smirked in approval. This was part of the reason he liked the Doc. Eric had always fought for Kurt. He had refused to allow anyone or anything to stand in Kurt’s way, including Kurt himself.

Lexie scowled and blushed, shuffling the folders in her hands.

Eric continued to eye her for another moment before at last nodding in satisfaction.

“Anna!” He kissed her cheek. “It’s been a while. You’re just as stunning as ever.”

She gave a throaty laugh and returned the kiss. “And you’re just as smooth as your father.”

He grinned.

“You know Anna, Doc?” asked a surprised Burt.
“Sure,” he said, bobbing his head. “Anna was Dad’s first wife and is the mother of my sister, Carrie.”

“Your grammar is improving,” Kurt noted.

Eric winked again. “Most likely due to your luminous presence.”

“Are you two dating?” Anna asked.

Eric and Kurt looked askance at each other before Kurt tried to withdraw his hand. Eric refused to relinquish it.

“I’ve been counting down the seconds until his eighteenth birthday,” Eric drawled. He smirked and glanced down at his watch before looking back at Kurt. “One million, eight hundred fourteen thousand, four hundred.”

Kurt stared up into his eyes and unconsciously licked his lips.

“Shades of Bo and Hope,” Anna murmured to herself. “And what do you have to say about this, Burt?” she asked with interest.

He shrugged. “If my kid’s going to be a young groom, at least he’ll be marrying a doctor.”

Kurt squawked and looked up at his father with surprise and horror. Burt laughed.

“Do you mean that, Burt?” asked a very serious Eric.

Burt’s mouth fell open in obvious surprise. “Do you?”

“I’ve been in love with your son for two years. I’ve waited for him for two years. If he wants me to wait longer, I’m happy to do that, but I’d be even happier to make it official right now.”

Lexie looked about ready to faint.

“Eric,” Kurt softly interrupted, “I haven’t even graduated high school yet.”

“I can count down the seconds for that, too.”

“We haven’t even kissed.”

“I’m a doctor. I have plans to remedy that.”

“What about college?”

“Is this why you applied for early decision to Salem University, son?” Burt softly asked. “It’s a good school. Not as good as you deserve, but nothing is, including this one,” he said, nodding at Eric, “but if they’re both what you want, I won’t stand in your way.”

Kurt gave him an incredulous look.

Burt patted his son’s head. “We’ve both learned this past year just how short life can be. You grab happiness where you find it and don’t let go. Fight for it. Your mom and I married young and I’ve never regretted it.”

Kurt’s eyes bugged as Eric dropped to one knee.

Anna thought this was perhaps the most romantic thing she had ever seen and was happy to be
part of it.

“Stop!” Lexie shrieked. “You can’t do this!”

Eric slowly rose and turned furious eyes upon her. “Who the hell are you to say what we can or can’t do?” he hissed.

“This!” she shouted, waving the chart in her hand. “This says you can’t!”

He rolled his eyes and dismissed her, turning back to the man who had occupied his thoughts and fantasies these past years. Nothing, not even cancer, was going to stop him from claiming the man he loved. If Kurt was sick again, they would deal with it together.

He leaned down, desperate to press his lips to Kurt’s own.

“Eric, he’s your brother!”
Secrets & Lies

Eric felt Kurt’s arms begin to push him away rather than draw him close and, in his confusion, Lexie’s words penetrated his hazy mind.

“What did you just say?” he said through clenched teeth. He whirled around to face her. “I don’t know what the hell is wrong with you, Dr. Carver. That was not only the most ridiculous sentence I’ve ever heard, but also the most unprofessional.”

“Why would you say something like that?” Burt roared at the now flustered Lexie.

She had eyes only for Kurt. “This was why I wanted to wait before telling you the results. I had no idea Dr. Brady would return so soon.”

Kurt tilted his head and glared. “As Eric said, that is not only the most ridiculous sentence I’ve ever heard, but also the most offensive. I don’t know what those test results showed, but they’re obviously flawed. The lab simply made a mistake.”

Eric laughed. “And just how is it, Dr. Lexie, that Kurt is my brother? My mother had an affair with Burt? My father had one with Kurt’s late mother? Kurt is right, of course. It’s a mistake, something which any person with a single firing brain cell would know.”

He stalked forward and snatched the file from her hand. “Get out.”

“You don’t understand!” Lexie protested.

Against her better judgment, Anna decided to wade into these dicey waters. “Burt, as I said, Lexie is an excellent physician. I’m sure the tests are wrong, but that the lab’s fault, not hers. She’s just going on what she’s been told.”

Burt blew out a slow breath and gave a gruff nod. “That doesn’t mean she had to blurt it out like that, especially at that particular moment!”

He was furious. His boy finally had grabbed some happiness for himself and some foolish doctor had to ruin it because of some faulty test.

“I had them run it twice,” Lexie said quietly. “There’s no doubt.”

“The sample was either contaminated or it belongs to someone else,” Eric insisted.

“Does that mean you do have a brother out there somewhere?” Kurt whispered.

“I … I don’t know,” he admitted, “but if I do, it’s not you.”

“Why was a DNA test even run?” Burt demanded. “It’s not necessary.”

“It’s standard procedure,” Eric said, doubt forcing its unwelcome way into his mind, “in case Kurt might need a bone marrow transplant, even though a transplant isn’t protocol for his particular type of cancer.”

He shook his head to clear it. “What about the cancer? Is it back?”

“No,” Lexie rushed to say. “Kurt is still in remission.”
"Thank god," he muttered. "Oh, thank god." He grabbed Kurt’s hand in his, forlorn when he realized Kurt wasn’t returning the grip. "Hey now, you don’t honestly believe that DNA test, do you? It’s contaminated. It has to be.”

“You sound like you’re trying to convince yourself more so than me,” Kurt murmured.

Eric shook his head and dropped to his haunches. “Kurt, this is stupid. There’s no reason to believe the results. First of all, I know my parents. Second, I’m sure your father would have mentioned if he’d ever met them.”

He looked up at Burt, silently beseeching him.

“The Doc’s right, son. I’ve never met Marlena Evans or Eric’s father.”

“Roman Brady,” Eric quickly supplied.

“Wouldn’t know them if I saw them on the street,” he continued, “and your mother and I were faithful to each other. Always, Kurt. I’ve never doubted that and never will. So I don’t give a shit what that test says. It’s wrong. You’re my son.”

Kurt was silent for a long moment, ignoring his father and Eric’s anxious stares. Instead he looked at Lexie. “If the test shows Eric and I are brothers, than obviously it also states the parent we allegedly share. Who is it?”

“Kurt!” exclaimed an exasperated Eric. “Don’t give this nonsense credence it doesn’t deserve.”

Kurt ignored him and continued to stare at Lexie. “Well?”

She sighed. “Marlena. The test shows Marlena Evans is your mother.”

Eric exploded.

“Honey, are you okay?” Judy asked. “You seem upset.”

“I miss Kurt,” Quinn said. “Mom, I can’t explain it, but I just feel like there’s something wrong.”

Judy didn’t want to hear it. She had almost lost the boy she considered her son and didn’t even want to posit the idea the cancer might have come back. “All signs point to Kurt still being in remission. I refuse to think otherwise until Burt calls.”

Quinn shook her head. “Not that, something else. Kurt needs me, I know it.”

“Your father and brother will be back in less than two days,” Judy said. “We just have to be patient until then.” She forced a smile and kissed her daughter’s cheek before leaving the room.

Quinn rolled her eyes. She knew her mother was more worried than she was letting on, but was determined to put on a brave front. Well, that was all well and good, but not Quinn’s style.

Once again she regretted not going with Dad and Kurt to Salem. Yes, she wanted to be valedictorian – she wanted it badly – but it certainly wasn’t more important than Kurt’s health. Not to mention she was sick and tired of fielding phone calls from their worried friends, all of whom were anxious for updates that Quinn simply didn’t have.

“Screw it.”

She jumped off her bed and headed toward her desk, waking up her laptop.
“All of my papers are written and assignments completed,” she said to herself. “I don’t need to be there personally to hand them in. All of the teachers know what Kurt is going through. If they won’t excuse my absence, they can deal with Sylvester.”

Nodding, she attached several files to an email which she sent to the Coach, explaining why McKinley High just wasn’t worth her attention at the moment. If there was one person in all the world for whom Sylvester held any modicum of respect or affection, it was Kurt. Quinn knew the woman would go to bat for her because it meant supporting Kurt.

She quickly packed an overnight bag, programmed University Hospital into the GPS on her phone, and thundered down the stairs.

“Study group at Sam’s!” she called out to her mother. “Be back later!”

“Be careful!” Judy shouted back.

Quinn hustled out to her car, slamming the door behind her.

A smirking Judy sauntered out of the kitchen, drying her hands on a towel and shaking her head.

“She’s just like her brother.”

Marlena had returned to University Hospital after the funeral to try and get some paperwork done. She and John planned on going away for the weekend, where they could continue to mourn Alice away from the Horton family. As much as they had loved her, the family needed to grieve together, not try to make others feel better.

She dropped by the nurses’ station to pick up her messages and wait for John. They would order in lunch, then John would make some business calls as she cleared her desk. She quickly flipped through the messages, discerning none were from patients, and turned when the elevator doors opened. She smiled when John stepped out, Kayla just behind him.

She kissed her husband and greeted Kayla.

“Do they really have you working today?” she asked.

Kayla sighed. “I traded shifts with Nathan. He shouldn’t be expected to work after burying his great-grandmother. He should be with Maggie and Melissa.”

Marlena’s eyes filled and she nodded. She still couldn’t believe Alice was gone.

They all turned when screaming erupted from the nearest exam room.

“What on earth?” Marlena wondered.

“Maybe someone just got some bad news,” John said.

“This is bullshit!” a man screamed. “I don’t even know Marlena Evans and I sure as hell never slept with her!”

“What?” John asked. “Did I really just hear that or am I going insane?”

“If you are, we both are,” Kayla said.

“I’m about to be completely inappropriate,” Marlena said, pushing past them and storming toward
John and Kayla quickly followed and stood just behind her as she threw open the door.

“What is going on here?” Marlena demanded. She then looked at the occupants and frowned. “Eric? Anna?”

Anna sighed and closed her eyes. “Oh, Marlena. No. Just … no.”

“Well, this is just swell,” seethed a bitter Eric. “It’s not enough you had to spoil my proposal, Lexie, but to drag my mother into this?”

“I didn’t know she was here!” Lexie squawked.

“Proposal?” asked a stunned Marlena. “Eric, you proposed to Lexie? She’s married!”

Eric burst into hysterical laughter.

“And who is that has never met or slept with my wife?” asked a steely John.

Burt flushed.

“I can’t believe this,” Eric muttered. “I can’t believe I have to do this now, especially like this.” He shook his head. “Mom,” he said, struggling to sound somewhat calm, “this is Kurt Hummel, the man with whom I want to spend the rest of my life.”

Marlena blinked and looked at Kurt. He certainly was a lovely boy. He was also very much a boy. He looked no more than sixteen, yet her son had proposed to him? And why was he in a hospital bed? Was her son his doctor? Because that was entirely inappropriate. And given Eric was an oncologist, that could only mean this poor child had cancer.

Wait.

Eric was gay?

She put a hand over her eyes. This was more than she could deal with at the moment. She was missing Alice dreadfully; Sami and Carrie had fought at the cemetery, with Will once again caught in the middle; and propriety demanded it was far too early to start drinking.

Screw propriety. She was all for throwing caution to the wind and pouring herself a nice, fat bourbon. Or perhaps she should just write herself a prescription for Oxycontin.

Eric sighed. “Yes, Mom, I’m gay. I’m sorry I never told you, but I’ve never told anyone in the family. I’m not embarrassed or ashamed, I’m just …”

“Very private, I know,” Marlena said. “I’m not angry, Eric. I’m certainly not upset. All I’ve ever wanted for you is your happiness and it’s taken you a very long time to find it. Now that you have, that’s all that matters.”

Burt liked this woman. She just had a wall of shit dumped on her, but her first priority was her kid. He totally respected that and her.

“I’ve known Kurt for two years. I fell in love with him the moment I laid eyes on him, but he was too young and I was too scared he wouldn’t love me back. Yes, I am currently his physician, but now that I know he wants to be with me, we’ll find another oncologist if he needs one.”

“If he needs one?” asked a hesitant Kayla.
Eric beamed. “It’s official. Kurt is still in remission. Today’s his one year anniversary.”

“And that is wonderful news,” Marlena said, genuinely relieved.

“Congratulations,” John said warmly to Kurt, “to both of you.”

Eric smiled. “Thanks, Dad.”

John startled. It had been so long since Eric had called him that.

Eric shrugged an unsure shoulder. “You raised me. I love my parents, but you’re my dad. I didn’t even remember Mom and Dad when they came back and, yeah, I’m furious at Stefano for that, for taking away my parents.”

He swallowed. “But he also gave me you. I can’t think of a better dad. You’re the one who took care of me and cleaned up after me. You’re the one who taught me to ride a bike and helped me with my homework and taught me to defend myself when Sami would hit me.”

“Sami hit you?” Marlena asked.

“She knew I would never hit her back. She was always the dominant twin.”

“Just like her aunt.”

He nodded. “From everything I heard about Aunt Sam, yeah, that fits. I was more passive. I just … Sami always had to fight. She always thought everyone was against her, Carrie especially. I didn’t have it in me. The things Sami would do, all of her stupid and ridiculous escapades, I wanted no part of them, so I would close my eyes and pretend they weren’t happening. As long as I stayed out of her line of sight, or fire, I could just be myself.”

“Sami’s been through a lot too, Eric,” Kayla said gently.

“And I’m not arguing otherwise, Aunt Kayla, but you also can’t argue that she didn’t bring a lot of it on herself.” He held up a hand, knowing Kayla had always defended Sami because she was a fellow rape survivor. “Not what Alan did to her, of course. That was a sick and twisted thing. No one ever deserves to be raped. So ask yourself this: did Sami ever pay for raping Austin? Because that’s exactly what she did.”

Kayla looked away. She couldn’t argue that truth.

“She drugged him, got him into bed, and had sex with him while he was unconscious. She then went running to Carrie and crowed about it. She didn’t care that Austin and Carrie were in love, that they wanted to get married. Oh, no. Sami decided that, because she wanted Austin, she should have him, Carrie be damned. Then she slept with Lucas not long after, got pregnant with Will, and tried to pass the baby off as Austin’s. That’s despicable.”

“Yes,” Marlena sighed, “it was, and it is indefensible.”

“You know what’s also indefensible, Mom? That Sami told Carrie she wished Alan had raped her instead. Because if he had raped Carrie when he tried, he never would have gone after her. Who says something like that? Who even thinks something like that? Carrie is our sister. Who would wish their sister to be raped?”

Anna gasped, clutching her chest and fumbling, until she was caught by Kurt. He steadied her and gripped her hand tightly.
“Jesus Christ,” John muttered, shaking his head.

Kayla looked ready to vomit.

“She really said that, honey?” asked a furious Marlena.

Eric waved a hand. “What hasn’t she said, Mom? Look at how she treated John. He did nothing wrong. Nothing! Stefano kidnapped Dad and held him prisoner for fifteen years. Then he kidnapped John, stole him from his family, brainwashed him, and put him in Dad’s place. He let the entire family think John was Dad.

“And you know what? John was a great dad! There was never a moment, not one, when he wasn’t there for us: me, Sami, and Carrie. I never forgot that, Carrie never did, so why did Sami? For years, after Dad was gone and we thought you were dead, it was just us and John. He did everything for us. He was everything to us.

“Then you and Dad came back and, for Sami, it was like John was responsible for all of it. She put all the blame on him, not Stefano.” Tears sprung to his eyes. “John never did anything but love us. How could she forget that? How could she be such a … such a miserable bitch to him?”

“Hey, son,” John said soothingly, “all of that’s water under the bridge now.”

“No, it’s not,” Eric volleyed. “Sami has always said whatever she wanted, done whatever she wanted, and because life has been cruel to her, she’s gotten away with far too much. She’s always been horrible to Carrie, for no other reason than that Carrie was the firstborn. She only ever saw me as an extension of her, and when I wasn’t interested in being that, she had no interest in me except to try and manage my life.

“She’s why I left Salem. I had to get away from her before she destroyed me. I know I haven’t always done right by her, but how much more of myself am I expected to sacrifice for her? I love her, god knows I love her, but I … I really don’t like her.”

He flushed with shame and embarrassment.

“Christ, son,” Burt said, wrapping his arms around the man, “you’ve really had a time of it, haven’t you? I’m so sorry. You didn’t deserve it, not any of it.”

Eric choked on a sob and turned around in Burt’s arms, hugging him fiercely.

As Marlena and John watched this stranger comfort their son, stroking his hair and his back, they came to realize just how badly they had neglected and failed Eric. Sami and her schemes had kept them so busy over the years, with Carrie inadvertently caught up in them, they had virtually ignored Eric because he was always the stalwart one, the dependable and responsible twin.

“She’s why I stayed away from Salem for so long,” Eric mumbled into Burt’s chest. “She’s why I fell out of contact with my family. You should have heard her at Grandma Alice’s funeral. In the middle of the church, she expressed her doubt that I was actually a doctor. She tried to pass it off as surprise and hurt that I hadn’t told her, but that’s not what it was.”

“What was it?” Burt asked.

“Disbelief. Jealousy. Anger. Take your pick. I saw it in her eyes, the shift. Suddenly I was no longer her twin, I was Carrie the Sequel. I had betrayed her by becoming a doctor like our mother is. She always said I was so much like Mom and she hated that about me. She’s always been angry that I didn’t hate Carrie, that I didn’t hate Mom and Dad and John.”
He pulled back and looked into Burt’s eyes. “How could I ever hate them? They’re my family.”

Marlena put her hand over her mouth and closed her eyes, though the tears continued to fall. John, and especially Kayla, felt utterly useless. Lexie was completely mortified. Her father had done this, ruined these people’s lives, for no other reason than that he could.

“Eric,” Burt began, “none of that matters anymore. You’re an adult. You get to choose your life and who you allow into it. You don’t owe your sister anything. I don’t care if she finds it hard to believe you’re a doctor. The fact is that you are one, and a damn good one. You saved my boy’s life. I will forever be in your debt for that, but never confuse that gratitude as to being why I support you and Kurt.”

“Really?”

Burt smiled. “Really. You’re a good man, son. I knew it the moment you walked into that hospital room in Dayton. You said Kurt would live. You demanded it, wouldn’t settle for less, and you were right. You kept him sane. You kept me sane. Kurt’s a pretty good judge of people, that’s why he doesn’t like any of them …”

Eric laughed.

“… but he liked you. He liked you as a person long before he fell in love with you. That love has nothing to do with your sister or this Stefano guy. You deserve love, Eric, and I’m glad you found it with my boy. He’s waited a long time for someone like you. You are, and I say this with complete honesty, the only man I think is truly worthy of him.”

Eric’s mouth worked for a long moment, struggling to form words. “You … you don’t know what that means to me. That you trust me so much with someone so precious.”

Burt snorted. “Hell, yeah, I do. Otherwise I’d be chasing you across the state line with my gun.”

John leaned over and whispered in his wife’s ear. “I like that guy.”

“Look at how Kurt looks at Eric,” she murmured. “He’s thoroughly besotted. I’m actually scared what that boy would do to Sami if she tried to come between them.”

“You should be,” Kurt said, voice ringing like a bell. “I won’t allow her to hurt him again. I won’t allow anyone to hurt him.”

“Kurt,” Eric quietly interjected, “you don’t know everything about me …”

“Just as you don’t know everything about me. You’ve seen me at my most vulnerable, Eric, but you’ve never seen me at my best. I could take Sami apart with ease, but I’ll settle for leaving her off the guest list.”

“You … you still want to marry me?”

“Are you high? Of course I’m going to marry you. Ten year age difference? Not a problem. Let’s face it, Eric, I’m smarter than you. I’m smarter than everybody. It was never a question of me keeping up with you, but of everyone else keeping up with me.”

Eric grinned like a fool.

“Yes, you’re worldlier than I am, but that doesn’t bother me. I’m a virgin and proud of it. I’ve waited because I made a promise to myself long ago that I would only share that part of myself with a man I loved and trusted absolutely. That’s you. I’ve waited my whole life for you. And no
one, not some Italian madman or batty twin sister, is getting in the way of that.

“I know Stefano DiMera. He doesn’t scare me. Had I known what he had done to your family, things would be very different right now.”

“You … you know my father?” Lexie interrupted.

Kurt nodded. “I know his reputation and, yes, I’ve met him. He doesn’t scare me. What scares me is the idea I’d die never having known love, of leaving my father alone.” He looked up at Eric. “But you saved me from that. Never think I can’t or won’t save you.”

“How do you know Stefano, Kurt?” John asked.

Kurt smirked. “My grandmother is Katrine Valois. Her half-sister is Helena Cassadine. They love me very, very much.”

John and Marlena gasped.

“Stefano DiMera isn’t so stupid as to cross either of them, and he certainly wouldn’t risk a war with Auntie Helena, who, by the way, has close ties to Victor Kiriakis.”

He laughed. “Don’t look so scared, sweetheart,” he said to Eric. “They would never hurt me. They would never allow any harm to come to me, or to you.”

“Uh, okay.”

“So let’s examine the facts. I’m still in remission. That’s a definite win. We’re engaged. Even though I didn’t officially say yes, it’s a fait accompli. More winning. We’ll talk about the ring later, because there will be one. I’m going to graduate and move here to Salem for college. You’re going to continue to be a superstar physician and will help me with my MCATs and then medical school.”

"You plan on becoming a doctor?" asked a delighted Marlena.

Burt stared. This was news to him.

Kurt smiled warmly at her. "I do." He then looked back at Eric. “If anyone, and I do mean anyone, tries to interfere with us or attempts to hurt you, it’s not a question of me punishing them, but of how long and in what state I’ll allow them to linger until I deal with them.”

"Whoa," John breathed. "That was scary." He frowned. "It was also weirdly sexy."

“Hell,” Kayla muttered, “I want to marry him.”

“What about the test?” Eric whispered.

“The test is wrong.”

“What test?” Marlena asked.

Anna stood up and sighed. “That is the argument you witnessed when you came in. Apparently Lexie ran a DNA test along with Kurt’s other bloodwork.”

Marlena nodded. “That’s standard protocol for oncology patients.”

Anna sniffed. “It came back with a match against someone here in Salem. That person is you. According to the test in Lexie’s hand, you’re Kurt’s mother, thus making him Eric’s brother.”
“That’s the most ridiculous thing I’ve ever heard,” Marlena said flatly. “The sample must have been contaminated.”

“Which is what we’ve all been telling Lexie,” Eric interrupted.

“Eric,” Lexie said softly, “you’re a physician. You know how accurate it is.”

“I also know about false positives, which is what this is.” He threw up his hands. “Look at Kurt’s birthday, Lexie. You, Mom, and John were all in Salem then. Do you remember Mom being pregnant eighteen years ago? Because I don’t. How about you, John?”

“Absolutely not,” the man replied.

“See? Mom is not Kurt’s mother. She and Burt have never met.”

“Nice to meet you, by the way,” Burt drawled, throwing Marlena a wave. She grinned. “I like you. Let’s grab coffee later.”

“How about vodka?”

“Better. Much better.”

“Marlena,” Lexie said, “you know my father. You know what he can do, what he has done.”

“I understand and concede your point, Lexie,” Marlena said, “but Belle was my last pregnancy. I think I would remember if I had another child.” She smiled at Kurt. “Especially one so handsome.”

She was utterly charmed when he blushed and shyly ducked his head.

“And Cassie and Rex?” Lexie said softly.

Marlena froze before throwing a panicked look to John.

“No,” he insisted. “Not again.”

“Who are Cassie and Rex?” asked a confused Anna.

“My other brother and sister,” said a reluctant Eric, “also twins.”

“Excuse me?”

He sighed. “Stefano stole Dad’s sperm and Kate Roberts’ eggs. He created embryos and implanted them in Mom while he was keeping her in that coma.”

“I’m sorry, what?” Burt asked. “What kind of science-fiction bullshit is this?”

Anna turned horrified eyes on Marlena. “My god, I had no idea. That’s … that’s just reprehensible. I’m so sorry he did that to you, Marlena! That’s an obscene violation.”

Marlena looked away and said nothing.

“He kept you in that coma for years, Marlena,” Kayla said. “I find it more than plausible that he might have stolen your eggs during that time and implanted them in someone else.”
That son of a bitch,” John hissed.

“No,” Marlena denied. “If Stefano had done that, he would have told me. He’s too vain and smug not to have told me.”

“He also plays the long game,” Lexie muttered, “and always strikes when you least expect it.”

“Or he simply might have rigged this test,” Kurt announced.

They all stared at him.

“Would that really be so surprising?”

“Not at all,” John drawled.

“That’s more along the lines of what I expect from Stefano,” Marlena admitted. “Something devastating and designed for maximum impact.”

“I wish it were that simple,” Lexie said. She sighed. “I’m sorry Kurt, Mr. Hummel, but there’s more.”

Quinn skidded to a halt in the driveway, surprised to see Santana, Brittany, and Sam leaning against Kurt’s Navigator.

“ Took you long enough,” Santana complained.

“What are you all doing here?”

Santana just rolled her eyes as Sam delivered a most unimpressed look.

Brittany stared at Quinn. “Kurty is finding out whether or not his cancer has come back. Where else would we be?”

“Look, I love that you guys love Kurt so much, but we haven’t heard anything yet and I have someplace I need to be.”

“Yeah,” Sam agreed. “Salem.” He nodded toward the ground, where Quinn saw three more suitcases. “We’re coming with you.”

“That’s unnecessary.”

“He’s our best friend, Quinn,” Brittany growled. “We’re going.”

“How was the service?” EJ asked his wife as he laid aside his newspaper. He knew how much Alice Horton had meant to Sami. He also knew to approach the subject delicately.

Sami frowned. “Weird. Horrible. I don’t even know.”

“What happened, Samantha?”

She scoffed and crossed to the bar to pour herself a drink. “Well, let’s see.” She threw the drink back and poured another. “Carrie was there, of course. I’m sure you can guess what happened.”

“Oh, dear.”
“There’s that British understatement I love so well.”

He gave her a wry grin. “I know there’s more. Your sister gets under your skin like no one else, but I can only imagine how hard this day was for you.”

“It wasn’t good,” she agreed. “So many Bradys and Hortons. It took me a moment to realize how little we had to say to each other. My own twin is a stranger to me.”

His brows raised. “Eric? Eric was there?”

“Yes.” She threw back the second drink. “He’s moved back to Salem. He’s staying with my mother. Apparently he’s also a doctor. I didn’t know any of it.”

EJ frowned. He was at a loss as to how to comfort her. He had never met Eric, who had departed from Salem long ago. As far as he knew, not even Stefano had a file on the man, which suggested a complete lack of interest on his part in Eric Brady.

“Well,” he said brightly. “That’s a good thing, right? That he’s moved back, I mean. You can get to know each other again.”

She snorted. “I don’t see that happening. He tried to hide it, but I saw the resentment he holds for me. What really pisses me off is that he has cause. I just didn’t realize it before. He was nice, even loving, but I knew he couldn’t wait to get away from me.”

She sighed and collapsed into the nearest chair. “He said something to me today, something I should have seen before. He told me that part of the reason he left Salem was because people only saw him as the son of Marlena Evans and Roman Brady, the brother of Carrie Brady. And, hey, I totally get that.”

She dropped her eyes. “But then he said he was also known by some only as the brother of Sami Brady. That hurt, EJ.” She sighed again and leaned back in the chair, staring up at the ceiling. “All of the things I’ve said and done … I knew they were wrong, but what I wanted just always seemed so much more important than other people’s feelings.

“When I was doing them, I never stopped to think the impact my actions would have on other people. I never really cared about Mom or Dad or John. I know that sounds awful, and it is, but it was like I had tunnel vision and the only thing I could see in front of me was getting what I wanted. At the end of the day, though, despite all the lies and schemes, I never got it.”

“That was a long time ago, Samantha,” he said quietly.

“No it wasn’t,” she said sharply. “I appreciate what you’re trying to do, EJ, but let’s not fool ourselves. I’m not a good person. Neither are you. That’s part of the reason we’re together.” She pinned him with her eyes. “But what about our children?”

He frowned. “What do you mean?”

“I’ve always seen the looks people give my parents and Carrie, how sorry they are for them because they’re related to me. Never once did I stop and think how many times Eric must have received those same looks, the same well-intentioned but hurtful words.

“And Will. You didn’t know him when he was younger. You never saw how parents would look at him on the playground and then pull their children away from him because he was my son. Because they knew the things I had done.”

She shook her head and tears appeared in her eyes. “I don’t want that to happen to Allie, Johnny,
and Sydney. I don’t want them to pay for our sins.”

“That won’t happen.”

“Oh, really? How many brothers and sisters do you have, EJ? Can you even keep count? And how many are dead? How many were murdered because of what Stefano has done to people? Renée was murdered by André who, as it turns out, was Stefano’s son all along. He’s dead now, too. Megan was murdered. Benjy was murdered. Peter is in jail. Who the hell even knows where Kristen is. Lexie wants nothing to do with the DiMera name, though I know she loves you and, for some godforsaken reason, your father.”

“What is your point?” he said tersely.

“I don’t want people hurting my children because I was a bitch!” she shouted. She laughed hysterically. “Let’s face it, EJ. My brother and sister left Salem and moved halfway across the world to get away from me.

“John loved me so much and tried so hard, and I threw it back in his face. I know he’d be there for me if I needed him, but that’s only due to his sense of honor and obligation. My father is perpetually disappointed in me, and my mother … well. She’s forgiven me for everything because that’s who she is, and I cringe that I ever thought her softness translated to weakness. If there’s one thing she’s not, it’s weak.”

“Your mother is a formidable woman,” he agreed.

“And I never saw that because I refused to look. All I saw was my own bitterness and resentment because she hadn’t been there for me. It wasn’t her fault. Your father did that. What if he decides to do the same to me? What if he keeps me in a coma for years and my children grow up not knowing me? I don’t want them to turn out like me.”

“That would never happen.”

“You can’t guarantee that. I appreciate your words, but we both know they’re hollow.” She stood and poured another drink. “And I can’t seem to stop myself from making the same mistakes. I fought with Carrie at the cemetery, with words and hands. I goaded and antagonized her until she just couldn’t stand it anymore.”

She laughed. “When am I going to learn? I foolishly believe Carrie is so meek and mild, but whenever I back her into a corner, she comes out fighting and always kicks my ass.” She rubbed her jaw. “The girl has a killer right hook.”

“She struck you?”

“I wasn’t going to stop otherwise. I knew it and she knew it. Stupidly, I’d once again convinced myself that people would side with me against mean old Carrie. That’s never happened. I think I’m so clever, but everyone’s always seen right through me.”

“What was the subject of your disagreement?” he asked, wanting to derail her train of thought.

“Will. She knows something about Will, but she won’t tell me. Whatever it is, I think Mom knows too. He confides in them, he always has, but never in me. He loves me, but he doesn’t trust me. He doesn’t trust me to protect him, to put him first. He doesn’t trust that my love for him is unconditional. Given what he’s witnessed over the years, I can hardly blame him. You can’t even imagine what that feels like, when your own child is afraid of you, and I truly hope you never have to.”
After two hours, Quinn pulled over for a pit-stop just outside Dayton. Santana followed Brittany to the bathroom as the latter often got lost in public places.

“How are you?” Quinn softly asked Sam.

“I’ll be fine, as long as Kurt’s all right.”

Quinn hesitated.

“Just say what you feel you need to say,” said a tired Sam.

She sighed. “I want you to be happy, Sam. If I thought that might happen for you with Kurt, I’d be your biggest supporter.”

“But you don’t think it will.”

“I’m sorry, honey, but you need to let it go.”

He frowned. “You know something.”

She bit her lip and turned away.

“Tell me, Quinn,” he pleaded.

“Eric is going to propose today. I’m fairly certain Kurt will say yes.”

Sam blanched, curling back into his seat and closing his eyes. “Kurt’s too young for that.”

“No, Sam. The one thing Kurt has never been is his age. He almost died last year. He loves Eric, but never believed Eric could love him in return. If Eric proposes, I really don’t see Kurt saying no.” She arched a brow. “Do you?”

“Damn Finn,” Sam seethed.

Quinn gave a quick nod. “It’s not completely his fault, but he bears some responsibility. If he hadn’t treated Kurt the way he had, I think Kurt would have been more open to a relationship with you. The timing was just … off.”

Her eyes grew cold. “I love you, Sam, you’re the best friend I’ve ever had, but Kurt is my brother. His happiness is more important to me than anything. If you get in the way of that, you need to be prepared for what will happen.”

He looked away. “Would it really be so bad to see him with me?” he whispered.

“Sam, stop being ridiculous. I know what a great guy you are and I know you’ll find someone worthy of you. When you do, I’ll be having a long talk with this person and making sure they understand what’s expected of them.”

He couldn’t stop his grin. “Thanks for looking out for me.”

She shrugged. “Like I said, I love you.” She sighed again. “Of course I think you and Kurt would have been wonderful for each other, but it just wasn’t in the cards. You may be Eric’s cousin, but you’ve never even met him. You haven’t see the way he looks at Kurt.”

“Which is how?” Sam demanded.
“Like Kurt his entire world. Like he can’t even imagine the possibility of life without him. Like he would kill anyone or anything that threatened him. Doesn’t Kurt deserve that? Doesn’t Kurt deserve someone who will fight for him?”

She held up a hand. “Not that you wouldn’t, I’m not implying otherwise, but it’s over now, Sam. You have to accept that or you won’t have Kurt in your life at all. Is that what you want? Not to have even his friendship?”

“No,” he murmured, slowly shaking his head, “of course not. I’d rather have him as a friend than nothing at all.”

“Then you need to let that be enough.”

The immediate members of the Horton family gathered back at Alice’s home, where they had unconsciously segregated themselves according to generation. Even so, there was still a wide range of ages within their groups.

Jennifer sat at the kitchen table, slowly nursing a cup of cooling tea. She had thanked Julie for making the pot, though she had barely refrained from saying it tasted nothing like Grandma made it.

She repressed a sigh and closed her eyes. It was strange, she thought, sitting here in her grandmother’s house without her grandmother. Oh, she could feel Alice’s presence, by now it had soaked into the very walls, but the glaring absence hurt her heart. She tried to take solace in her many cousins, but she felt as though she had when she was a teenager: out of place and a little expendable.

Hope and Melissa were just enough older than her that, though they all loved each other fiercely and were as close as sisters, she felt like a third wheel. They had been best friends since they were children and had almost always been referred to as a singular unit. After Melissa had moved to Europe before finally settling in Nashville, Jennifer and Hope had grown extremely close. But now, back here in Grandma’s kitchen, she felt like the pesky little cousin all over again.

“How are you doing, honey?” Melissa asked gently, placing a hand on hers.

Jennifer offered a weak smile. “All right, I suppose, given why we’re here.” She sighed. “I was just thinking about Abby and JJ. I feel so sad they’ll never know Grandma the way we did. I just hope they’ll remember her.”

Melissa nodded. “I know. I regret I stayed away from Salem for as long as I did. Even though Nathan cared for her these past months, I know he missed out on a lot by not having a closer relationship with Grandma.”

Hope said nothing. She knew how devastated her son Shawn-Douglas was by Alice’s death, but she was also grateful he had been as close to Gran as he had been. Ciara would probably not even remember her great-grandmother. And Zack … every Horton funeral just drove home the fact once more that her second son was dead.

“How’s Aunt Maggie doing?” Hope asked, nudging Melissa’s shoulder.

“How’s Aunt Maggie doing?” Hope asked, nudging Melissa’s shoulder.

“About as well as can be expected. Losing Grandma so soon after Dad … I don’t know. I think having Nathan here has helped.”

“Is he going to stay in Salem?” Jennifer asked.
“We haven’t discussed it. After his breakups with Melanie and then Stephanie, I think he was only staying to take care of Grandma. Salem has never felt like home to him.”

Hope nodded. “Where is he?”

Melissa smiled. “With Sarah.” She shook her head. “It’s so strange. Sarah is my sister but sometimes I forget just how much younger she is. When she moved in with me, she was still a teenager and resented that I took it as my responsibility to finish raising her. Then she helped me raise Nathan. It’s hard for them to figure out what exactly their relationship is: aunt and nephew, or siblings.”

“Melissa …” Jennifer began, unsure how to continue.

Her cousin gave her a sardonic smile. “You want to know who Nathan’s father is. I would have thought an investigative reporter would have figured it out by now.”

Jennifer stared.

Hope rolled her eyes. “Oh, come on, Jen! Isn’t it obvious?”

Jennifer looked back and forth between them. “Pete?” she asked in disbelief. “Pete Jannings?”

Melissa smirked. “Why are you so shocked? He was my husband.”

“I never knew you had gotten back together.”

“We didn’t,” Melissa said shortly. “We met up accidentally one night in Atlanta and things happened.”

“Does he know about Nathan?”

Melissa raised a brow. “Does he know he has a son? Of course he does! I would never keep my child from his father, Jennifer. Nathan and Pete have a great relationship and Pete is a very good father.”

“Oh,” Jennifer said stiltedly. “Well, that good!” She paused. “No chance for you and Pete, then?”

Melissa smiled and shook her head. “We’re still great friends and, sure, there are some days I wonder if we could have made it, but I don’t think so. We’re just too different. Still, I’ve never regretted marrying him and part of me will always love him.” She shrugged. “And we got a terrific son out of it.”


Jennifer nodded. “Surprisingly, yes. I don’t know how long it will last, so I’ve just been enjoying it.”

“Where is he, by the way?” Melissa asked. She would never be completely comfortable with Jack given their history, but even she couldn’t deny how much he loved and adored her cousin.

“He’s at the square with Diana.”

Melissa blinked harshly. “Diana Colville? She’s in town?”

Jennifer shrugged a shoulder. “She wanted to pay her respects. She and Grandma always liked each other.”
“Diana is a lovely woman,” Hope said. “I’m sorry I missed her. Was she at the church?”

“Briefly, but then she saw John and Marlena. She didn’t want to poke old wounds. She still can’t really posit that John isn’t Roman.” She waved a hand. “At any rate, she wanted to talk to Jack about creating a new digital paper. I think it could be wonderful, if they manage to work out the details.”

“I was surprised to see Eric,” Melissa said. “I still remember him as a toddler. I didn’t even recognize him! Will had to tell me who he was.”

“Eric’s mostly stayed of Salem,” Hope said, “and I really can’t blame him.”

“Don’t get me started on Sami,” Jennifer griped. “I know Julie has some weird friendship with her, but I don’t want to know about it.”

“My sister was a lot like Sami when she was younger. I think she’s trying to mentor her.”

Jennifer snorted. “Sami needs all the help she can get.”

“I don’t really know Sami,” Melissa said, “but from what I’ve heard, I find it hard to believe she’s the child of Roman and Marlena. I mean, Carrie …”

“And that’s part of the problem,” Hope interrupted. “Sami has always been compared to Carrie and grew up in her shadow. That can be a lot to deal with.”

“Sorry,” Jennifer said insincerely, “but nope. Carrie is one of the kindest, most decent people I know. That Sami’s always resented her is no one’s fault but Sami’s.” She smirked. “After Mike escorted Robin and Jeremy to their car, he made a beeline for Carrie. I really hope they get back together. He was never happier than when he was with her.”

“I thought Carrie was married to Austin?” said a surprised Melissa.

“They divorced last year. They tried to make it work, but were never really right for each other, not after everything Sami did to drive them apart. Austin is a good friend and I love him dearly, but Mike’s my brother. I want him to be happy, and I love Carrie.”

She shrugged. “Besides, you’ve never had Sami as a sister-in-law. After everything she did to Lucas, don’t expect me to feel sorry for her.”

“How’s he doing?” asked a concerned Hope.

Jennifer dropped her eyes. “Not well,” she admitted. “After Aunt Maggie, he was closest to Grandma.”

Melissa nodded. “I saw him and Mom talking earlier. I’m glad they have each other and are looking out for one another.”

Hope frowned in worry. “You don’t think Aunt Maggie will start drinking again, do you?”

“No,” Melissa said, sighing. “She fell off the wagon after losing Dad, but only briefly. Lucas was a tremendous help to her.”

“Any why is my brother an alcoholic?” Jennifer demanded. “Sami.”

“She’s not the only reason,” Lucas said, pushing in the kitchen door, “but she was certainly a driving force.” He leaned down and kissed his sister’s cheek before turning to smile at his cousins.
“I know it’s stupid to ask, but how are you all doing?”

“About as well as you,” Hope said, giving him a tired smile.

“I doubt that,” he said quietly. “I love Grandma only slightly less than I do my children, but she was in your lives much longer. She helped raise each of you. You don’t have to pretend with me.”

Hope choked on a sob and Lucas was immediately at her side, pulling her into his arms. A moment later, he had done the same with Melissa. He held them both and whispered soothing words as they released a little of their grief, keeping his eyes trained on his sister the entire time.

“I’m so glad you’re my brother,” Jennifer whispered. “We’re lucky to have you.”

“No,” he said, sniffing, “I’m the lucky one. I was a mess until I became part of this family. If I’m in any way a decent person, it’s because of all of you.”

“How’s Will?” Hope asked, dabbing her eyes with a handkerchief.

He sighed and helped both she and Melissa back into their chairs before going to the counter and pouring himself a cup of coffee.

“Devastated,” he said, “not that he’ll ever tell me. Or anyone, for that matter. Will holds his emotions very tightly to his chest.” He sighed. “He’s also mortified by the scene Sami caused at the cemetery.”

“What was that about anyway?” Jennifer asked.

Lucas paused and then quickly glanced at the kitchen door and then the back door, before taking a seat at the table. “This goes no further than us, okay? Your word.”

“Of course,” Melissa said. “You can trust us.”

Jennifer and Hope both nodded.

“That includes Will,” he added. “When or if he decides to share this, you must never let on that I told you. He would never trust me again.”

“It’s that serious?” Hope asked. “He isn’t sick, is he?”

Lucas shook his head. “No, thank god. Look, this isn’t something he’s spoken about with me. I’m not sure why, but it kills me to think it’s because he’s scared of me or that he believes I’d want nothing to do with him. And that, right there, is Sami’s influence.”

They stared at him.

He sighed. “I think Will is gay.”

Jennifer’s eyes widened, but Melissa merely rolled hers.

“Is that all? So what?”

Lucas laughed. “Thank you for that.”

“He hasn’t told you?” Hope asked.

“No. If he’s told anyone, it’s Carrie, and maybe Austin.” He shook his head. “Austin’s my brother, but we’re not close and never will be. That aside, he’s been incredibly kind to Will,
treated him as his own son. I’ll always be grateful for that.”

He wiped his eyes. “It kills me that he hasn’t confided in me, that he thinks I’d disapprove.” He shook his head. “He’s my son. I don’t care if he’s gay. I just want him to be happy.”

“You’re really okay with it?” Jennifer asked.

Lucas looked at her and frowned. “Why? Aren’t you?”

She held up her hands. “Honey, I’m on your side here. More importantly, I’m on Will’s side. If you’re fine with him being gay, then good! But if you’re unsure, talk it out here, with us, before Will comes to you.”

He smirked. “Don’t forget sis, I went to an all-boys boarding school.”

Her mouth fell open and she punched his shoulder. “Get out!”

He laughed. “I had, well, let’s call them dalliances. Nothing serious, either physically or emotionally, I just prefer women. If Will is gay, I want him to be proud of himself and not feel he has to hide who he is to please other people. And I reserve the right to kill any potential boyfriend.”

Hope nodded. “You can borrow my gun.”

They laughed.

“You’re worried about how Sami will react to this, aren’t you?” Melissa quietly whispered.

He arched a brow. “Wouldn’t you be, if you were me? She’ll either find a way to make it all about herself or go on a tearing rampage because Carrie knew first.”

Jennifer groaned. “Both scenarios are all too plausible.”

“The best thing we ever did for Will was sending him to live with Carrie and Austin those years. Sami agreed with it at the time but, as much as she loves Will, it's pretty obvious he takes after Carrie. He's just like her: kind and sweet and decent. Carrie’s going back to London tomorrow, so Will won’t have her support when he decides to start telling people. I know that Carrie would get here on a moment’s notice, but I really hope that Will approaches Marlena first.”

“We all know that Sami will resent Marlena knowing, and she certainly won’t listen to or follow any advice her mother offers, but Marlena will be an accepting presence Will desperately needs right now. I’ll deal with Sami if I have to.”

“And I’ll help you,” Jennifer swore.

“We all will,” Hope added. “Will is family, Lucas. We do for family. Otherwise, what the hell’s the point of living?”

Melissa turned and smiled at her. “You sound just like Grandma. Well, after a few sherries.”

Judy Hummel walked around her empty house for lack of anything better to do. She dreadfully missed her husband and children. In between praying for Kurt’s health and Quinn’s safety, her thoughts turned darker, wondering what awaited them in Salem.

She knew she should have gone with Burt and Kurt. She should have driven Quinn herself rather
than allowing her daughter to go off with her friends.

She paused in her steps and looked in the mirror. Even though the scar had been surgically removed years ago, she still felt like it was there, branding her, a constant reminder of her shame.

She had given up a lot, most of it bad, but had gotten so much more in return. Her marriage to Russell had been a disaster from the outset, but it had given her Emily and Quinn, her greatest accomplishments. Then she had found Burt, and then happiness and a son in Kurt.

It had been a long, hard road to get to this point and she wouldn’t trade it for anything. She also had no desire to retread old ground.

She would never return to Salem.

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Quinn had to admit she was glad the others had decided to accompany her, particularly when they arrived at University Hospital and the bitch in Admissions tried to deny her. She wasn’t about to allow some uppity nobody with a degree in officiousness to keep her from her brother.

As she stood at the desk and made cold but vague threats, Brittany burst into tears on cue, Santana began growling promises of retribution in Spanish, and Sam laid on the Southern charm so thick it couldn’t be cut with a ceramic knife.

Finally the clerk threw up her hands and gave Kurt’s room number, just to get them out of the lobby. Quinn made a mental note of the woman’s name, so that she might later torture her at her leisure, before boarding the elevator.

They arrived at the oncology ward seconds later. Quinn thought it appropriate Oncology shared floor space with Psychiatry. Kurt had briefly seen a counselor after his diagnosis and the process had been a tremendous help to him.

Quickly looking at the signs, she made a beeline down the hall, not caring if the others were keeping up with her. She threw open the door, only to stop and stare at the many people within the room, of whom she recognized only three. She immediately dismissed the others before running to greet her father with a kiss and hug, smiling and shaking hands with Dr. Brady, and then falling on Kurt’s bed and snuggling up to her brother.

“Hey,” she whispered, kissing his cheek. “I missed you.”

“I’m glad you’re here,” he said quietly, taking her hand in his.

She frowned at the upset in his tone and again looked around the room, this time in search of a target and/or victim.

“What the hell is going on here?”
Sam was only dimly aware of the conversations happening around him. All he could do was stare at Eric Brady and Marlena Evans. He had never met Eric yet somehow recognized him as family. He had only ever seen pictures of Marlena and her twin, Samantha, taken when they were very young, but he knew it was her.

They were both very beautiful.

It certainly wasn’t difficult to discern why Kurt had fallen in love with Eric, who was that rare combination of man who was ruggedly handsome yet also pretty. He was about six feet tall with a set of impressive shoulders. His body was strong, solid; muscular, but not a gym rat. His face, however ...

It reminded Sam of sculpture, it was so perfect. High cheekbones; large, wide set eyes of a color almost as unique as Kurt’s own; a full mouth that appeared in a perpetual pout; strong jaw and perfect nose.

It all conspired to make Sam feel very insecure.

Marlena was a stunningly beautiful woman who easily looked twenty years younger than her actual age. He couldn’t even imagine what she must have looked like then. She radiated confidence and competence, but there was also a breathtaking compassion that made him just want to hug her and never let her go.

He shook his head to clear it and again looked around the room.

Santana was in deep conversation with a tall man dressed all in black who had a dangerous air about him, yet Sam sensed he was also kind. Brittany was throwing questions at a female physician who appeared helplessly confused. Sam knew they were buying Kurt time.

Eric knew that Kurt needed a moment with his sister, so he stepped back, his gaze sweeping the space which felt like it was getting smaller and smaller. His eyes fell on Sam, who gulped nervously.

He gave the boy what he hoped was a gentle, welcoming smile. They had never been properly introduced. Eric only knew of him through Kurt, who had been told by Sam that they were actually cousins. Eric wasn’t even sure how, but there was so much about his mother’s family he simply didn’t know. Aunt Sam had been murdered a few years before he and Sami were born.

Marlena didn’t really talk about Aunt Sam too much; it was just too painful. Samantha had been killed accidentally, her murderer believing it was actually Marlena he had strangled.

Eric couldn’t even posit it, losing a family member so violently, let alone his twin. As many problems as he had with Sami, his mind simply couldn’t contemplate her being taken from him in such a fashion. He also knew that, like Sami, Samantha had done terrible things. She had always been mentally unstable and horribly jealous of Marlena, going so far as drugging and institutionalizing her, pretending Marlena was Samantha herself.

Samantha had also been an addict, and while that didn’t excuse her behavior, it mitigated some of the circumstances precipitating it. Marlena had forgiven her as she forgave everyone, and they had gotten to a good place in their relationship before Sam had been killed.

Eric knew his mother had suffered, and continued to suffer, tremendous guilt for surviving.
He had lived with his mother’s parents for several years in Colorado, but they were just as loath as his mother to discuss Sam.

His mind then glommed onto an unwelcome realization, a scant possibility he wished to ignore yet couldn’t. He filed it away and would deal with it later.

“You’re Sam, aren’t you?” he asked warmly.

Sam shyly ducked his head and nodded.

Eric crossed to his mother and, wrapping an arm around her waist, guided them toward the boy.

“Mom, there’s someone very special I want you to meet.”

Marlena blinked in surprise and then nodded, straightening her posture and smiling at the handsome young man before her.

“This is our cousin, Sam Evans.”

Marlena flinched at the name, she couldn’t stop herself, and John was soon at her side to lend support. The look of sorrow on the boy’s face suggested he understood her reaction.

“It’s nice to meet you,” Sam said softly, holding out his hand.

Marlena stepped forward, lips trembling, bypassing his hand and raising a shaky one of her own to cup his face. She ignored the tears streaking down her face. She didn’t know precisely how, but this boy was family. She could feel it in her veins. She leaned forward and kissed his forehead. She then gently pulled back and began wiping his tears.

“I know you probably don’t know me,” Sam said, “and that’s okay. Dad said you might not.”

“And who is your father?” she whispered, taking his hands in hers.

“Scott Evans. He … Trista was his elder sister.”

Her breath caught in her throat and she closed her eyes, lost in the memories of Trista Evans, one of the kindest, most innocent and gentle souls she had ever known. Trista had been raised with her and Samantha. Uncle Robert and Aunt Virginia had been so very young when Trista was born, they hadn’t been able to afford a child or college and left Trista with her aunt and uncle, heading into the Deep South to be migrant workers. They had sent whatever they could spare to her parents to help care for Trista, along with a constant stream of letters. Trista had missed them desperately, but never once doubted their love for her. Then she had been murdered by the Salem Slasher, only a year after Samantha had been taken by the Strangler.

Marlena hadn’t seen her aunt and uncle since Trista’s funeral, and they had never made mention of another child. Perhaps they had felt it wasn’t safe, or maybe they had just been left so raw and broken after Trista’s death they had held Scott closely to them out of a need to protect.

“Dad was born the same year Samantha was killed,” Sam said. “Even though he had never met either of you, he still felt close to you. You were the only family he had. He never even got to meet Aunt Trista. After she was murdered, he vowed to name his firstborn after them, so that their stories would live on in the next generation of Evanges.”
He grinned self-consciously and shrugged. “So that’s who I am. Samuel Tristan Evans.”

Marlena took his face in her hands. “I see so much of her in you. Your skin, your eyes. You’re every bit as handsome as she was beautiful.”

He flushed spectacularly and looked down at the floor, not resisting when Marlena drew him into a hug. He didn’t know why he was crying. He didn’t understand the sob that broke free from his chest as she began gently rubbing his back.

“Dad was actually adopted,” he said. “He’s an Evans by blood, but from a distant branch in Tennessee. After years of migrant work in the South, Grandpa and Grandma finally settled in a small mining town. They met a young girl named Amelia Evans. After talking with her, they realized she was a cousin.”

Marlena pulled back and shook her head. “I don’t think I’ve ever heard of her.”

“As I said, it was a very distant branch. When Grandma and Grandpa met her, she was fourteen and heavily pregnant.” His face turned blotchy with anger. “She had been raped by the local pastor. Her parents disowned her.”

Marlena closed her eyes as John and Eric whispered obscenities.

“So she moved in with Grandma and Grandpa in their one room tin shack. She, uh, she died in childbirth. She was just too young and her body wasn’t ready. Plus, Dad was an Rh baby. Maybe with better medical care … but, anyway, after she died, Grandpa and Grandpa adopted Dad.”

“Do you have any pictures of your father?” Marlena asked. “I’d very much like to see him.”

Sam smiled and dug out his cell. He opened his photo album and began scrolling.

“Here he is,” he said, holding out his phone. “That’s my mom, Savannah, and Stacy and Stevie, my brother and sister.”

Marlena cooed at the picture, John smiling over her shoulder.


Sam shrugged. “Dad was transferred last year, so we moved up from Tennessee. I met Kurt at school. He’s my best friend.”

“And how is your father doing?” Marlena asked.

“Sam,” Kurt said quietly, “you don’t have to say anything you don’t want.”

Sam looked at him with pained eyes.

“Now what does that mean, son?” Burt asked warily.

“It means just what he said,” Quinn said firmly. “Sam’s business is his own.”

Santana and Brittany held their tongues.

Sam finally smiled. “It’s okay. Thanks, Kurt, but you don’t need to protect me. They’re … they’re my family.”

“We are,” Eric said, placing his hand on Sam’s shoulder, “and we’re here for you.”
Marlena nodded.

Sam sighed. “Dad was laid off about four months ago. Mom lost her job not long after.” He scratched the back of his neck and looked away. “The only reason we’re not homeless is because Kurt has been putting us up in a motel. I only have clothes because he gives me his. I’m only passing school because he tutors me.”

Marlena gave him a hard stare before turning around and running to Kurt’s bed, where she dislodged Quinn and grabbed Kurt in a hug.

“You wonderful, wonderful boy,” she whispered. “Thank you. Thank you so much for what you’ve done for my family, for my cousin and my son. Thank you.”

Kurt awkwardly patted her back and insisted he had done nothing at all, looking up at his father who was so moved, he couldn’t speak.

“What a load of shit,” said a shaky Eric. “It’s everything. What you did is *everything*. I hope you never stop surprising me with your kindness.”

He shook his head and extricated himself from Marlena’s embrace. “I only did what I hope any decent person would do. I have more money than I could ever spend. What better use is there for it than to help my family and friends?

“And Sam is my best friend.” He smiled. “Well, they all are. Speaking of, I should probably make introductions: this is Quinn, my sister.”

Marlena smiled and shook the girl’s hand. She was stunningly beautiful, reminding her very strongly of someone she knew but couldn’t place.

“I married Quinn’s mother Judy last year,” Burt said, “and then adopted Quinn. She and Kurt are so close in age, they regard each other as twins.”

Kurt nodded. “And this is Santana Lopez and Brittany Pierce. Brittany’s been my best friend since we were children. We were in ballet together. Santana and I became friends last year. I finally wore her down with the awesomeness that is me.”

Santana rolled her eyes. “You’re only awesome because you’re pretty with a big dick.”

Everyone turned and gaped at her. She raised an eyebrow in challenge.

“Not bigger than yours,” Kurt cooed, fluttering his eyelashes.

She snorted before crossing her arms and cocking a hip. “No one’s is.”

“I like that girl,” Burt said, not for the first time.

Quinn poked Kurt in his side. He quietly began explaining everything he had been told prior to her arrival. She merely frowned, but Santana was quickly becoming apoplectic and it was all Brittany could do to restrain her from throwing punches. Sam was just incredulous.

“This is the most preposterous thing I’ve ever heard,” said a blithe Quinn. “That didn’t come out of Rachel’s mouth,” she quickly amended. “Obviously the test is wrong, no one questions that, so I don’t understand why it’s still a discussion topic.”

Eric, Burt, and Marlena all nodded their agreement.
“But you said there was more, Dr. Carver,” Kurt said.

Lexie gave a hesitant nod. “According to the analysis, Marlena is not only your mother, but your biological father is a man named Joshua Fallon.”

Marlena threw up her hands. “All right, that’s it! For the last time, I never had another pregnancy or child after Belle. There is no lost time for which to account around the time of Kurt’s conception and birth. As lovely as he is, he is not my son.” She smirked. “Not until he marries Eric.”

Her smirk grew as Kurt and Eric blushed, but as Brittany and Quinn and Santana cheered, Marlena noticed the look of devastation on Sam’s face. He quickly tried to hide it, but she wasn’t fooled.

She repressed a sigh. Oh, dear. She already considered Sam part of her family and she certainly wanted his happiness, but not the expense of her son. She would pull Sam away later and discuss this with him.

Eric gave her a skeptical look. “You’re taking this awfully well, Mom.”

Marlena merely shrugged. “What would you have me do, Eric? You know your own mind far better than I ever have or will, and if what you want is to marry Kurt, who am I to object? You’re an adult. Kurt will be of age in a matter of weeks. It’s obvious to me just how much you love each other. As Burt said, whenever you find happiness, grab it and don’t let go.”

She nodded to herself. “As for that damnable test and what it suggests, Joshua Fallon was my best friend for a number of years. I loved him dearly and always will, but we were never intimate. He left Salem over twenty years ago and has been happily married that entire time. I won’t even entertain how ludicrous this has all become.”

She turned. “Lexie, I know exactly what a kind and competent physician you are and I’m sure you’re only doing your job, but even you have to realize what a farce this is. Either the test was contaminated or compromised. Personally, I don’t believe Stefano would do this. He has nothing to gain and, given Kurt’s relatives, everything to lose.”

Lexie offered a hesitant nod. She sighed. “I apologize to all of you. It’s just … this is unfathomable to me. Why would someone do this? What’s the advantage? It’s apparent few if any knew Kurt and Eric were even together, so why try to drive them apart? What does it accomplish?”

“That’s the big question,” John agreed.

“Further, who did it?” Kayla wondered. “Access to the lab is tightly controlled and there are stringent security measures in place. Either someone managed to override the protocols or a member of our personnel has a depraved sense of humor.”

“May I see the results?” asked a frowning Eric, holding out his hand.

Lexie nodded and handed them over.

Eric studied them for a moment, his frown deepening.

“What is it, son?” asked a worried Burt.

“This is wrong,” Eric said.
“I thought that was established,” said a snide Santana.

He shook his head. “No, I mean all of this wrong, not just the family relationship analysis.”

“What do you mean?” Kayla asked.

“How do you know?” asked an astonished Lexie.

“I’ve run a DNA analysis on Kurt before and it showed unequivocally that he is the biological child of Burt and Suzanne Hummel. Leaving that aside, these sequences aren’t his; they don’t match the previous results by any stretch of the imagination. Not to mention that Kurt’s blood type is A+, while this says he’s B-.”

“You’re sure?” Marlena pressed.

“I know my own blood type,” Kurt said, “and given that I’ve had a blood transfusion and am still alive, I have to believe I was typed correctly the first time.”

“I was the donor,” Burt said. “Suzanne was also A+.”

“Then there’s no way Kurt could be B-,” Kayla said.

Kurt gave Eric a hard stare. “What are you thinking?”

“That these results are too specific. If someone was responsible for this, they had to know we would run the test again, especially given that I’m well aware of your genetic profile. What’s the point of this?”

Kurt swallowed. “Do you … you think it might be accurate after all? But that’s impossible!”

Eric chewed on his lip. “Not if what I’m thinking is correct.”

“Which is what?” Burt demanded.

Eric looked at Lexie, and then at Kayla and his mother. “Kurt’s a chimera.”

Their eyes widened.

Kayla began slowly nodding. “That would be the only way any of this could make sense.”

“Why wasn’t it detected sooner?” Lexie wondered.

“Who would know to look for it?” Marlena said, sighing.

“What the hell is a chimera?” Burt growled.

Eric took a breath. “A chimera is essentially a single organism that's made up of cells from two or more individuals—that is, it contains two sets of DNA, with the code to make two separate organisms.”

Kurt furrowed his brow. “Wait,” he said, holding up a hand. “If this is true, wouldn’t that mean that I had a twin?”

Eric nodded. “One way that chimeras can happen naturally in humans is that a fetus can, well, absorb its twin. This can occur with fraternal twins, if one embryo dies very early in pregnancy, and some of its cells are absorbed by the other twin. The remaining fetus will have two sets of cells, its own original set, plus the one from its twin.”
“I had a twin?” Kurt softly murmured, eyes filling. He quickly wiped them away and forced a laugh. “I don’t even know why I’m upset.”

“I do,” Eric and Marlena said quietly.

Burt and Anna exchanged an anxious glance.

John cleared his throat. “Look, this is all pretty much beyond me, but Lexie’s right. Why wasn’t it detected sooner, especially since Eric ran the same test previously?”

Eric shook his head. “Because it wasn’t the same test. Lexie has a test run against Kurt’s red blood cells. The ones I ran were derived from pancreatic cells.”

“Pancreas?” John whispered, turning to Kurt. “You had pancreatic cancer?”

A confused Kurt nodded as Marlena took John’s hand.

Eric gave John a forlorn look. “Yes, but not the same as what Isabella had. Kurt has a neuroendocrine tumor. His mother, however, had adenocarcinoma. She lost her battle, just as Isabella did.”

“Who’s Isabella?” Quinn asked. She had always loved that name and had considered giving it to Beth, but she decided on the latter to placate Puck.

“She was my wife,” John said roughly, “and the mother of my son, Brady.”

“Isabella was a wonderful woman,” said a quiet Marlena. “Everyone loved her.”

“Victor Kiriakis’ daughter,” Kurt whispered.

“You know of her?” asked a surprised John.

“Only by name. Uncle Victor called Grandmère after Isabella passed.”

John gave an absent nod, but Eric and Quinn could tell from Kurt’s tone that he was hiding something. Burt apparently knew what it was, but wasn’t talking.

“This chimera thing,” Burt interrupted, “is it dangerous? Is it going to hurt my son?”

“It shouldn’t,” Kayla said. “Most people don’t even know they are chimeras because they never have a DNA analysis performed. Basically it just means Kurt has an extra set of DNA. It shouldn’t pose any problems, but it also needs to be noted in his file in case he ever again requires a transfusion.”

Burt blew out a breath he didn’t even realize he was holding.

Kurt looked down at his sheets. “Poor Mom. She probably didn’t even know she had lost a baby.”

Anna swallowed heavily and turned away.

Marlena frowned in concern. “Anna, what is it? Are you all right?”

She turned back around and pasted a smile on her face. “Oh, just ignore me. I’m overly emotional, I guess.”

“Anna,” Burt began.
“Don’t,” she whispered. “It won’t change anything.”

He sighed.

Kurt looked at them in turn through narrowed eyes. “What’s going on here?”

Burt carefully sat down in the chair beside Kurt’s bed, grabbing Anna’s hand in the process. “Son, what I’m about to tell you is something I probably should have a long time ago. Your mother and I had planned to discuss it with you, but after she died … well, so many things just fell away.”

Kurt gave a hesitant nod.

“Let’s clear the room,” Marlena suggested.

“No, you can stay,” Burt said. “This is nothing I’m ashamed of and you all are, in one way or another, going to be Kurt’s family. Dr. Carver is his physician of record right now and neither I nor Kurt will be waiving privilege.”

Lexie nodded. “Understood.”

“Kurt, your mother and I … we had a lot of problems trying to get pregnant. We never knew exactly what caused it.”

Kurt had become very nervous and thus slipped into Hermione Granger Mode, in which he would spout facts like platitudes to calm his nerves. “It is estimated that ten percent of the population who is infertile is such for no apparent medical reason. Reproductive endocrinologists have tried and failed for decades to discover this ambiguous and unknown etiology.”

Marlena, Lexie, and Kayla stared.

Burt nodded. “Your mom … everything worked right, but for some reason, her uterus couldn’t attach an egg for very long.” He grabbed his son’s hand and looked down. “It was … it was very hard,” he said, voice cracking, “on both of us. We tried artificial insemination and then IVF, but they just didn’t work. Your mom suffered six miscarriages.”

Kurt’s eyes filled and tears began dripping down his cheeks. Quinn was no better; she was trying to stifle her sobs by burrowing against her brother.

“After the last one,” Burt whispered, “she hemorrhaged so badly, they had to perform a partial hysterectomy. They almost weren’t able to bring her out of the anesthesia. I knew then it was over, and that was fine. I wanted children, of course, but I also wanted your mother with me, safe and healthy. We had discussed adoption and both agreed that we would look into it further after we had tried everything else.”

“Am I adopted?” asked a breathless Kurt.

Burt smiled and shook his head. “No, baby. You know you’re the spitting image of your mom.” He patted his son’s hand. “We were considering adoption, but there was one more avenue your mom wanted to try. I agreed, and that’s where Anna comes in.”

Anna wiped her tears and smiled at Kurt. “Oh, honey, I loved your mom so much. She’s the only reason I didn’t flunk out of that obnoxious Swiss boarding school. Hell, she’s probably the only reason I’m still alive, as ridiculous as my behavior was back then.”

She swallowed heavily. “Your mother was one of the most important people in my life. I never had, nor will I ever have, a friend like that again. It wasn’t that we were like sisters, but that we
were sisters. We had chosen that for ourselves. After the last procedure, Burt called me because we weren’t sure … we didn’t know …”

She shook her head. “At any rate, I flew out immediately. Thankfully, Suzanne survived, but she was so devastated at losing another child, your father and I thought she might never get over it. She blamed herself, which was so much nonsense. She did nothing wrong. She followed every doctor’s order, took her medications, followed the prescribed diet. It just … it just didn’t work for her.

“And as I sat there at her bedside holding her hand, willing her to wake up, I thought about everything she had been to me, everything she had done for me, and what I could do for her.”

His eyes widened with realization.

She smiled. “I never thought I would have another child after Carrie.” She hung her head. “I wasn’t a good mother and I thank god every day for Marlena Evans and John Black. After I checked out and Roman was taken, they’re the ones who raised Carrie, and they did a phenomenal job.”

Marlena had her hand over her mouth as John stared at Anna in fascination. Never would either one have believed Anna could be so selfless, but she was so earnest in her confession, they knew every word was true.

“And I looked at my dear, sweet friend, who wanted nothing more than the chance to be the mother I knew she could and would be, and the decision was so clear and so very easy. I offered to be their surrogate.”

Burt patted her hand. “It went well, surpassing everyone’s expectations. The doctors extracted some of your mom’s eggs and I, uh, did my part, and then four embryos were created. The doctors implanted all of them. Anna was aware of the possibility of a multiple pregnancy, but she wasn’t fazed.”

“I really wasn’t.” Anna agreed. “Multiples were a possibility, but it was much more likely only one embryo would attach.”

“Regardless, Suzanne decided this was a one-time deal. She wasn’t going to put her best friend through everything she herself had experienced. She was so grateful to Anna, she wanted to streamline the process and make it as easy for her as possible.”

Anna smiled. “And it worked.” She stroked Kurt’s face. “Six weeks later, we found out I was pregnant with you.” She laughed. “Oh, Suzanne was so nervous, but so excited.”

“The first sonogram was when Anna was three months along,” Burt continued, “and it showed only one embryo had attached.” He shrugged awkwardly. “I guess two of the others just didn’t take and, by then, this chimera thing happened with the third.”

Kurt stared hard at his father and then at his … what was he supposed to call her now?

“You think Dr. Carver might have been right after all,” he surmised. “That the other embryo I … absorbed, my lost twin whose DNA I carry, was created from Dr. Evans and this Joshua Fallon. That’s why I have two blood types.” He paused. “You think Eric really might be my brother?”

Marlena gasped as Lexie bit her lip, silently cursing the hell out of her damnable father.

Eric was done. He was not about to lose the love of his life because of a one-in-a-million biochemical accident. “Kurt, even if it’s true, you and I would share no more than two to five
percent of DNA. Statistically speaking, it’s just as likely you would share that percentage with Santana or John or Lexie.”

Kurt looked over at a very relieved Lexie, who smiled and nodded. “Eric’s right, honey. Almost everyone shares some DNA. At the most, you and Eric might be considered extremely distant cousins, probably by a degree of ten or higher.”

Kurt exhaled and closed his eyes. “Oh, thank god.”

“So Stefano might have actually done this … this obscenity,” John growled. "He stole Doc’s eggs and created an embryo which he then implanted in Anna.”

“Sick bastard.” Anna savagely mumbled. How she loathed that man and despised he was her father-in-law, even if Tony was only adopted.

Marlena shook her head. “But it’s not like Stefano to sit on it for so long. As I said, he would have told me if only to torment me.”

“Which means he’s probably accessed Kurt’s medical records,” Kayla said, “and saw the results of Eric’s test. He would presume his noxious experiment had failed.”

A flurry of emotions presented on Kurt’s face before his eyes at last found Eric. “I need to know for sure. I understand what you’re saying and I think you’re right. Frankly, and this may suggest something deeply disturbing about me, I would have married you regardless. There’s nothing on this earth that could ever take me from you.”

Eric’s jaw worked furiously as he struggled not to cry.

“But I need to know,” he continued. “I want to know. I want to know if my best friend is also my cousin,” he said, looking at Sam, “because then he won’t feel such stupid, worthless guilt for accepting help from family.”

Sam blinked and gave Kurt a shy smile. It hurt, it hurt a lot, but just this past hour all but screamed how much Kurt loved Eric. He wasn’t about to get in the way of that, his feelings aside. They would pass eventually, and if he couldn’t have Kurt as a lover, having him as part of his family was the next best thing.

Kurt pried himself loose of Quinn’s arms and stood, swaying slightly after lying down for so long. The first thing he did was embrace Anna, whispering into her ear how grateful he was to her.

“You don’t owe me anything, sweetheart,” she insisted.

“I owe you my life,” Kurt insisted. “It’s because of you that I’m here at all. Thank you so much for that. Thank you for loving my parents enough to give them a child.”

Her eyes spilled over as she held him for the first time since he had been born.

“It’s an incredible gift, Anna,” Marlena said quietly. She thought she knew Anna almost better than anybody and was only now realizing she didn’t know the woman at all.

Kurt pulled back and wiped his eyes, smiling. “I’d really like to meet Carrie, if you think she might like to meet me.”

Anna took his face in her hands. “Oh, sweetheart, she’ll love you.”

“She really will,” Eric said.
Kurt nodded to himself. That was for later. He also wanted face-time with Sami to put her on notice. He’d be taking Quinn and Santana along for that meeting. After all, it would be necessary to set the right ... tone.

“You’re plotting something,” Burt observed.

Kurt scoffed. “How dare you cast aspersions upon my sterling character? I am shocked and offended.”

“Definitely plotting,” Eric said.

“I’m in,” Quinn, Santana, Brittany, and Sam all said simultaneously.

“Okay,” Eric sighed, “we’ll rerun the test.”

Lexie nodded.

“Including whatever occurred to you when you were introducing Sam and Dr. Evans?” Kurt asked with a raised brow. “You didn’t think I missed that, did you?”

Eric pursed his lips.

“Kurt, call me Marlena,” she admonished before looking at her son. “What is it, honey?”

“I don’t want to be right about this, Mom, but if Stefano really is involved, we can’t rule out anything. Especially if the initial analysis is correct and Joshua was the father of Kurt’s twin.”

Her eyes narrowed. “What are you thinking?”

He gave her a sorrowful look. “Lexie, I want you to run the test again, using the DNA you have on file for Mom and Josh. Also use Anna as an exemplar. It’s possible she also carries cells from the twins.”

Anna blinked in surprise.

“And?” Kurt demanded.

Eric closed his eyes and sighed. “I also need you to do a mitochondrial analysis.” He licked his lips. “Run it against Mom and … and the histological samples that should be on file from Aunt Sam’s autopsy.”

Lexie stopped nodding and taking notes to look at him before quickly blanching.

Marlena stumbled and almost fainted. John was quick to catch her.

“I’m going to be sick,” Anna said before clamping a hand over her mouth and running for the bathroom.

“I can’t believe even Stefano would do something so monstrous,” whispered a stricken Kayla.

“Aunt Kayla,” Eric began, “whatever this vendetta is between the Bradys and the DiMeras, we know Stefano has been watching us at least since you, Dad, Aunt Kim, and Uncle Bo were born. He’s been obsessed with Mom since she first moved to Salem.” He raised a brow. “Do you really think this is that far out of the realm of possibility?”
She choked on bile and turned away.

"And it makes sense," he continued. "He must have done the ... extractions ... years ago. Joshua Fallon hasn't been in Salem for more than twenty years and Mom's been out of the coma for at least that long. So if this was done, say thirty years ago, Samantha is a definite possibility."

"Why would he do that?" Marlena whispered through her fingers. "Why would he do something so evil?"

"To hurt you," Eric gently suggested. "To drive a wedge between you and John. To make you mourn for Aunt Sam all over again. To hurt Anna for being with Tony. The list is endless."

Lexie could stand no more and quickly excused herself. "I'll start right away."

"Wait," Quinn called out. "I think this needs to be done right. By all means, run the tests, but I think we should collect our own samples later and send them out to different labs. We can't be sure this Stefano person doesn't have an inside man here."

John’s eyes gleamed with approval.

Lexie nodded and all but ran from the room.

“I don’t know why,” Santana said, “but this all feels very anticlimactic.”

They stared at her, but she only shrugged.

“What do you want to do now?” Eric asked Kurt.

“Am I done here?”

He nodded. “Your tests all came back clear, but I still want to keep an eye on you.”

Quinn snorted. “I just bet you do.”

Kurt slapped her hand. “Be nice to my fiancé.”

Her eyes bugged. “Wow. You really are engaged.”

He gave her a bright smile and nodded.

Her grin was feral. “I get to tell Rachel!”

They split up into smaller groups though it wasn’t tacitly discussed.

Burt and Anna decided to have lunch at Tuscany, where her husband Tony would meet them. He knew about the surrogacy and had always wondered about the child. Anna knew he would be furious to learn of Stefano’s involvement and she wanted to tell him someplace public so that he wouldn’t go off and murder his father. She had no interest in conjugal visits, thank you.

Quinn, Santana, and Brittany decided to make a detour to Salem University, where all of them had already applied and received early acceptance. Kurt felt guilty about that, believing they had done so out of concern for him in case the cancer had returned. Brittany was quick to disabuse him of that notion.
“Oh, that’s just a big load, Kurty,” she said. “Sure, maybe that was the initial reason for applying - and if it was, so what? - but don’t forget SU pursued each of us pretty hard. They know they’re lucky to have us and our out-of-state tuition dollars. They’re also one of the premier research institutions in the Midwest and offer a lot more opportunities than some of the other places we applied.”

“They’ll let us tailor our own majors,” Santana cut in. “That’s not really something we’re going to get at an Ivy League. So stop being such a martyr. It will ruin your skin.”

She cackled as his hands quickly felt the planes of his face in search of the slightest trace of a wrinkle.

“Well,” Marlena began, “John and I were going to take a weekend away, but I’d like to postpone that in favor of getting to know my new cousin.”

Sam blushed. “You don’t have to do that.”

“We want to do that,” John insisted. “Outside of the kids, Doc doesn’t have much family, and with her parents getting on …”

Marlena nodded, trying to keep the despair from her face. Her parents were now elderly and she knew it was only a matter of time before she had to put them into care. As it was, she had a visiting nurse staying with them eighteen hours a day, but it was quickly becoming more than one could handle.

“Is there anything in particular you’d like to do?” she asked Sam. “Any part of Salem you want to see?”

He bit his lip but said nothing.

“It’s all right, Sam,” she said gently. “You can tell me.”

“Well,” he slowly began, “I know that Samantha and Aunt Trista are buried in Colorado, but …”

“There are memorials,” Marlena murmured, “for victims of the Salem Strangler and the Salem Slasher. Would you like to visit them?”

He nodded. “I think my dad would appreciate it. Do you … do you think we could stop for flowers, or is that dumb?”

“Nothing dumb about it, kiddo,” John assured him, “and there’s no reason to be embarrassed. They were your family, too. You’re entitled to mourn them.”

“It’s just that I know you both lost someone recently …”

“Alice Horton was a huge presence in both our lives,” Marlena agreed, “and it’s a loss we will always feel, but if anyone understood the importance of family, it was her.”

Sam gave her a grateful smile.

“And what about you, gorgeous?” Eric asked Kurt. “What would you like to do?”

Kurt appeared at a loss. “I don’t know,” he said honestly. “I was trying to be strong for Dad, but I think I was expecting bad news,” he whispered. “I didn’t plan for anything else.”

“How about meeting some of your new family?” asked a smiling Kayla. “There’s going to be a
reception for Alice at the pub after the private one at the Horton house. I think everyone could use some good news for a change.”

Kurt looked unsure and turned to Eric. “Is now really the best time? You haven’t come out to anyone but Marlena, John, and Aunt Kayla. That’s a lot of people to tell all at once.”

“I think it would be a good thing,” Eric said. “Just get it out of the way. If anyone has a problem with it …”

“I’ll deal with it,” interrupted a stern Kayla. She held up a hand to silence her nephew. “No, Eric. You will let me handle it. You’re going to have more support than you realize, and if anyone says something they might later regret, I will do something I won’t regret.”

Eric blushed.

“What if Sami’s there?” Kurt asked, almost hoping for a confrontation. “Now is neither the time nor place for her nonsense.”

“She said she was going home to be with her husband and children. I think she’s avoiding Carrie.”

His eyes brightened. “Carrie will be there?” He looked at Eric. “Would it really be okay? Are you sure?”

“I’m sure of you. I’m proud of you and want everyone to know it.”

“Okay,” Kurt said shyly, though he was obviously pleased. “Just let me change.”

“You heard him,” Eric said to the others. “Clear out.”

“That includes you,” Kurt told him.

“We’re engaged!”

Kurt sniffed. “You haven’t put a ring on it yet. You’re not sampling the goods until you do.”

Eric gave him a crooked smile as Burt decided this was getting a little too close for comfort. He grabbed Anna’s hand and quickly left, promising to call his son later. Marlena looked over her shoulder at Kurt and Eric, smirking. John quickly joined her before they led Sam from the room.

Quinn, Santana, and Brittany all demanded hugs and kisses from Kurt, and then Eric, before they would leave. A flustered Eric wasn’t sure what was happening.

“Kurt’s our best friend,” Santana said.

“He’s like my brother,” Brittany added.

“He is my brother,” Quinn said, “and therefore, so are you.”

Santana’s eyes darkened. “And if your other sister has a problem with any of this, she’ll be taking it up with us.”

For a moment, Eric felt a sliver of pity for Sami. Then it passed.
“Wow,” Kurt whispered, looking at the storefront, “an authentic Irish pub. That is so cool.”

Eric grinned.

“Are you sure it’s okay for me to be in there? I am still a minor.”

“Sure. It’s a full-service restaurant. You just can’t drink.”


Eric frowned and wrapped his arms around him. “There’s no reason to be scared, baby. They’re my family. They’ll love you just as much as I do.” He bent down and nipped Kurt’s neck before laving the skin gently with his tongue. “Well, maybe not quite as much.”

“Thank goodness for that,” Kurt gasped, closing his eyes and resting his head on Eric’s shoulder. “I don’t think I could possibly handle such attention from anyone other than you.”

“Good,” Eric purred. “Because after I put a ring on it, you’re all mine.”

Kurt shivered with pleasure at the possessive tone. “Does it bother you I want to wait until after the wedding?”

“Oh, honey, of course not,” Eric insisted. “I want you to be comfortable. I don’t mind waiting. I’ve waited for you my entire life.”

Kurt giggled. “That was pretty good, Dr. Brady. I like a man who not only understands the value of compliments, but knows to keep them coming.” He stared deeply into Eric’s eyes. “After the wedding, I’m going to devour you.”

Eric’s breath hitched as his pupils dilated. “W-What are you going to d-do me?” he breathed.

“Obscene things,” Kurt promised. “I’m going to do obscene things to you and you’ll love every second of it.”

“Eric?”

He blinked slowly and turned in annoyance toward the source of the unwelcome interruption. “Hello, Nicole,” he said crossly.

“I didn’t know you were in town,” she said hesitantly, looking back and forth between Eric and a much younger boy, wondering why their arms were entwined about each other.

“There’s no reason you should know,” he said shortly, “but if it will make you go away more quickly, I moved back to Salem a few days ago.”

“You’re still angry with me.”

“You mean for dumping me and marrying my nephew’s father for money? Why would you think that?”

“Eric, it was ten years ago. I’m not proud of it and I’m not the same person I was then.”

He looked at her for a long moment and at last nodded. “No, I don’t think you are. Good.”

She offered a tentative smile. “I’ll just go. I’m sorry to have bothered you.”

Eric rolled his eyes when he felt Kurt tugging on his sleeve. “Nicole, wait. Please. I’m sorry, I
shouldn’t have snapped at you.”

“That’s all right,” she said quietly. “I deserve it.”

He blew out a breath. “No, you don’t. Like you said, that was a long time ago. We’ve both changed since then.”

Her smile grew slightly. “It really is good to see you, Eric. I hope you’re happy?”

He beamed. “I am. I really am, and it’s all thanks to this guy right here.”

Her eyes widened and darted toward the younger man, who was blushing shyly. What a gorgeous kid, she thought.

He nodded. “It’s okay, Nicole. You can ask.”

“I don’t think I need to,” she said. Her smile was now at full bloom. “Eric, after everything I did to you, after everything I put you through, I just want you to be happy. You say you are, so …” she shrugged, “… that’s all I need to know.”

His shock quickly gave away to sincere gratitude. “Thanks, Nicole. That means a lot.” He looked over his shoulder and sighed. “This is Kurt Hummel, my fiancé.” He ignored her utter shock. “We’re about to tell the family.”

She became anxious. “Is Sami in there?”

Eric quirked a brow. “No. I take you two still don’t get along?”

She snorted and rolled her eyes.

“Yeah, I’d guess not, after what she did to your brother. How is Brandon?”

“He’s fine. We don’t see each other often and, when we do, I have to go to him. He refuses to return to Salem.”

Eric scowled. “I can’t say as I blame him.”

“I haven’t been an angel as far as Sami is concerned, Eric. She has just as much right to dislike me.”

He shrugged an unsure shoulder. “If you say so. I don’t really know what’s happened in Salem since I left. Mom is pretty circumspect in her updates.”

“Does Marlena know? About you two, I mean.”

Eric grinned. “She does and she approves. So does John.”

“And so do I,” Kayla chimed in, turning the corner after parking the car. She nodded. “Nicole.”

“Hi, Kayla,” she said awkwardly.

Kayla looked at her and then at the boys. “Everything okay?”

“We’re good,” Eric said, nodding. “Listen, Nicole, we should get inside, but … I’m glad we crossed paths. I hope you’re happy, too. You deserve it.”

She chuckled darkly. “Oh, Eric, believe me, I’ve gotten what I deserved.”
“Everyone deserves happiness,” Kurt said quietly. “You just have to believe that and it will find you.”

Nicole studied him for a moment before smiling once more. “You did good, Eric. Hold on to him and don’t let him go, no matter what anyone says.” Her eyes darkened. “And if Sami kicks up a fuss, well, for whatever it’s worth, you have one more person on your side.”

“It’s worth a lot,” Eric said. “You take care, Nicole, and expect an invitation to the wedding.”

She blushed and ducked her head before murmuring her best wishes.

“Are you sure that was a good idea?” Kayla asked in measured voice, staring at Nicole as the woman made her way toward her car.

“I don’t know,” Eric said, “but the past is in the past. I’m looking at my future now.” He kissed Kurt’s cheek. “And it’s brighter than ever.”

Kayla smiled and led them inside.

Marlena and John sat at one of the benches in the cemetery watching Sam. He first went to the memorial stone for the Strangler victims and laid a white rose at its foot for Samantha, telling her that he was sorry he had never known her but that he hoped she’d found the peace for which she had always been searching.

He then wandered over toward the marker for the Slasher victims, laid down a bouquet of forget-me-nots, and then proceeded to sit Indian style at the border and talk to Trista.

Marlena had tears in her eyes as she listened to Sam speak to the aunt he had never known, telling her all about his parents and siblings, his troubles in school, the friendships he held so very close to his heart, and how much his father missed her.

She was astonished by such gentle kindness.

“He’s a good boy,” John murmured.

She nodded.

He hesitated a moment. “You know he’s love with Kurt.”

She nodded again. “I think that will resolve itself quickly. It’s obvious he adores Kurt and wants him to be happy, and he knows that Eric makes Kurt happy.”

“You’re not worried?”

“What, that he’ll act out like Sami? No. Like you said, he’s a good boy. He’s had a difficult life but he’s not resentful or angry. Just sad, I think. Perhaps part of his love for Kurt is confused by the gratitude he feels toward him. I don’t think he’s as much in love with Kurt as he is in love with the idea of him.”

John nodded. “Makes sense.”

“Mom? John?”

Marlena suppressed the wince and stood to greet her daughter and grandson. “Hello, Sami, Will. What are you two doing here?”
Sami looked at the boy by the marker and frowned before turning back to her mother. “Will wanted to leave some flowers at Grandpa Shawn’s grave.” She again looked at the boy. “Are we interrupting something?”

Marlena smiled. “No, not at all. In fact, there’s someone I’d very much like you to meet.” She turned. “Honey?”

Sam startled and paused in his monologue, jumping to his feet and rushing over. “Yes?”

She smiled and took his hand before looking back to the other. “Sami, Will, this is your cousin Sam Evans.”

Sami did a double take at the name, her mouth falling open. “What?”

Will and Sam shook hands awkwardly and the others stopped and stared at their uncanny resemblance. They were the same height and about the same weight, as well as the same age. Each had large, stunning blue eyes and very fair complexions. Both were blond, though Sam’s hair was enhanced and therefore lighter, and of similar builds. They even had identical haircuts.

“Wow,” they both said, then grinned.

“Mom,” Sami said quietly, “how is this possible?”

Marlena quickly explained Sam’s backstory. Sami’s eyes shined with tears, sad that Sam had been named after relatives he would never meet because they had been taken by violence.

“It’s so nice to meet you, Sam,” she said sincerely, shaking his hand, “and welcome to Salem. Are you staying long?”

“No really,” Sam said. “I’m just here to visit a friend. Actually, he’s one of your brother’s patients. Eric was taking care of Kurt back in Ohio, before he left for Doctors Without Borders and then transferred here. After Eric came back to the States, Kurt wanted to do his follow-up care with him.”

Sami frowned in confusion.

Will gave Sam a sad look. “Uncle Eric is an oncologist, Mom.”

Sami gasped. “Is your friend – Kurt, right? – is he okay?”

Sam beamed and nodded. “He is! He went into remission last year and today’s his anniversary. The tests are in and the remission is holding. Your brother saved the life of my best friend.”

“I’m so glad,” Sami said sincerely, holding Sam’s arms in his hands. “I hope I get to meet him before he leaves.”

Sam glanced at Marlena, who sighed.

“Sami, you should sit down.”

Sami closed her eyes and groaned. “Oh, no. What’s going on, Mom?” she asked as she took a seat.

“Honey, what I’m about to tell you is something you might not want to hear, or are not ready to hear, but I’m going to tell you because Eric is rather, well, afraid to tell you himself.”
Sami clutched her chest. “He’s not sick, is he?”

“No, no, no.” Marlena rushed to say, sitting down next to her daughter. She took Sami’s hand. “Eric is gay.”

She noticed Will startle at the news. So did John, as a missing piece of the puzzle fell into place.

Sami offered an exaggerated blink in reply. “Huh?”

“I’m sure you’re surprised. I know I was.”

“You didn’t know?” Sami asked through narrowed eyes.

“I didn’t.” Marlena said honestly. “You know your brother has always been a very private person, but I also believe he was scared to tell us.”

Tears appeared in Sami’s eyes. “Why?” she beseeched. “He’s my brother, my twin. I don’t care if he’s gay, I just want him to be happy!” The tears began to fall. “He … he was afraid … of me?”

John put his hand on her shoulder. “Peanut, I don’t think Eric was afraid of you, but perhaps of your reaction and of rejection in general. You have to know how some gay people are treated by their families.”

She gave a defeated sigh. “And he thought we would do that?” She laughed. It was brittle and bitter. “I guess I can’t blame him, given everything I did to him.”

“I think Eric just needed time to himself to come to terms with everything,” John said, “and it’s good he took that time. He’s not embarrassed or ashamed of being gay, honey. In fact, he’s very proud, but I think he needed to get away from Salem to find himself. Does that make sense?”

She nodded and reached up to grab his hand. She then startled. “Wait, does he have a boyfriend?” she asked with obscene cheer. “I’m going to find my brother a man!”

Will was horrified. “Mom, are you okay? How much did you have to drink back at the mansion?”

She waved him away. “Let’s see, who do I know that’s gay? There has to be someone.”

“Sami,” Marlena interrupted, “your brother doesn’t need any help in the romance department.”

Sami clapped her hands in delight. “Then he does have a boyfriend! What do you know about him? Is he cute? Is he nice? Will he treat Eric the way my brother deserves? Because if he doesn’t …”

“You don’t have to worry about that,” Sam interrupted. “Eric is the lucky one.”

Sami frowned. “So you know him?”

“It’s my best friend, Kurt, the one I told you about. Eric proposed to him today in the hospital room.”

“Whoa,” Will whispered.


“He’ll be eighteen in three weeks,” Sam said defensively.

“That’s ridiculous!” Sami exclaimed. “What the hell is wrong with Eric that he’s robbing the
“Enough, Sami,” Marlena said sharply. “You don’t know Kurt or the situation, and if you want to have any kind of relationship with your brother, you’d better think twice before opening your mouth.”

“Mom, you can’t be serious! You can’t possibly approve of this!”

“My approval is neither needed nor required. What I know is that Kurt is a wonderful boy …”

“Key word: boy,” Sami interrupted. “As in a minor.”

“… who loves Eric very much and makes him deliriously happy,” Marlena finished, gaze hardening. “What I know is that my son hasn’t returned to Salem in over ten years, but now he’s back and is a doctor and has found the love of his life. What I know is that I will not see my son run out of town again because he feels unwelcome here.”

Sami gaped like a fish.

“So you need to think long and hard about this, Sami, and decide if being self-righteous is worth more than knowing your brother. Eric now has a profession that can take him anywhere in the world, and from what I’ve seen, Kurt would happily follow.”
The Brady Bunch

The Brady clan had all gathered at the Pub after the funeral to mourn Alice Horton but, as was wont with their family, it had instead turned into a wake, a celebration of life. It was also a chance for those who hadn’t seen each for years to catch up.

The eldest, Roman Brady, was behind the bar attempting to fill his daughter Carrie’s drink order. He was fairly certain his fumbling was due to his incredulity that his child was old enough to drink. Hell, all of them were. When did he get so old? The police department was pushing him to retire soon and he was giving it serious thought. He could’ve stayed on, but it most likely would only be in an administrative capacity; he was never much one for paperwork.

It was really was a young man’s game, he thought ruefully. His glory days of catching murderers and rapists and serial killers were long past and, honestly, he was mostly relieved. He had grown weary of being exposed every day to the violence people willfully committed against each other.

Carrie was now a successful corporate lawyer based out of Zurich. Her professional success was enormous, but he felt sad she and Austin had been unable to make their marriage last. They had tried, he knew, but it just hadn’t worked. He did notice that Carrie was looking around every few moments in search of someone. He suspected Mike Horton and was fine with it. Mike was a great guy who had made Carrie very happy once upon a time. He was always surprised they hadn’t married, but Carrie had felt compelled to try and make things work with Austin.

He didn’t know where Sami was, but presumed she was at the DiMera mansion with her children and alleged husband. EJ DiMera was every bit the crook, liar, and murderer his father was, but despite the horrific things he had done to the Brady family and particularly to Sami, she loved him. Roman had learned a long time ago to stay out of her love life. She would do what she was going to do and no one could talk her out of it. He was grateful that EJ at least loved their children and was a good father. He even loved Will and Allie, though their father was Lucas Horton.

Roman snorted and shook his head. How the hell did he have four grandchildren?

He supposed he had always felt his life hadn’t truly begun until he had met and fallen in love with Marlena, but by then they were both in their mid-thirties. Now they had grandchildren.

“Where does the time go?” he wondered aloud.

Carrie grinned. “Having a senior moment, Dad?”

He scowled. “Just for that, you can fix your own drink.”

She shrugged and skipped behind the bar to do just that. “You okay?” she asked with genuine concern.

“I don’t know, pumpkin. It seems like yesterday Mrs. H was breaking me out of jail. Today we put her in the ground and Bo and I are suddenly grandparents.” He smirked. “Speaking of, when are you going to make me a grandfather?”

She rolled her eyes and sipped her Jack and Coke. “Next life.”

He turned and looked at her. “You serious, little girl? Don’t you want children?”

She took another sip and shrugged. “I don’t know, Dad. Austin and I talked about it, but I never really had the desire. I think he knew that and it helped us on the road to divorce. Besides, next
year I’ll be thirty-five. They consider that advanced maternal age.”

He chewed on his tongue for a moment. “Is this because of Sami?”

She snorted. “Believe it or not, Dad, not everything in my life is about my sister. We love each other, but we’re never going to get along; too much has happened. I wish her nothing but the best, but I doubt she’s going to find it with EJ.”

Roman grimaced.

“Have you heard from Cassie and Rex?”

“Cassie checks in with me every so often, as Rex does with Kate,” he said, “and I think that’s the most I can expect.”

“It’s not your fault you didn’t get to raise them,” she said quietly.

“Like I didn’t get to raise you? Or Sami and Eric?”

“That wasn’t your fault.”

He sighed. “I know, but it still kills me. Doc, too.”

“Have you and Mom talked since she’s been back in town?”

He raised a brow. “Do you mean Marlena or Anna?”

She shrugged. “They’re both my mothers, so I guess either one.”

He laughed. “Yes to Marlena, no to Anna.”

She shook her head. “Sometimes it’s hard to believe you and Mom were ever married.” She paused. “I’m talking about Anna, by the way.”

His eyes crinkled in amusement. “You should see it from my side.” He sighed. “She’s happily married to Tony. Doc is happily married to John. And here I am.”

“You need to get back out there, Dad,” she said. “Just because it didn’t work out with Kate doesn’t mean there’s not another woman looking for a big, strong, handsome police commander.”

He laughed and dropped a kiss on the top of my head. “You were always my favorite.”

“Oh, that was never in doubt,” she said blithely before turning stoic.

“It’s not your fault,” Roman insisted. “Sami’s problems are her own and have nothing to do with you. Just because she made you her scapegoat doesn’t mean you have to take up the mantle.”

She sighed. “At least Eric’s happy.”

“Now where the hell is your brother?” he wondered. “I haven’t seen him for almost ten years, he finally moves back to Salem, and I still don’t get to see him.”

“Dad, you know he had to meet a patient at the hospital.”

He puffed out his chest with pride. “My son, the doctor.”

Carrie rolled her eyes.
He smiled and wrapped an arm around her shoulders, drawing her flush against him. “And my beautiful daughter, the lawyer. I couldn’t be more proud.”

She gave him a wry grin. “I’m just happy Eric has finally found his path. It took him a while, but I knew he’d get there.”

He nodded. “Have you seen your Grandma?” he asked, scanning the room for his mother Caroline.

“Mrs. Horton’s death hit her hard,” Carrie said quietly. “They knew each other for fifty years and were best friends for forty. In a way, it’s kind of like losing Grandpa again.”

He nodded. It was still difficult to accept Pop had been gone these past years.

“Bo and Hope look happy,” she said, nodding in their direction. “Well, as happy as they can be given the circumstances.”

“I think they finally are,” Roman agreed. “After all that mess with Carly and Vivian, they’re getting back to normal. Ciara’s been a huge help with that.”

Carrie nodded. “I was worried. I thought she might have been a Band-Aid baby after they lost Zack, but it looks like they’ve refocused and recommitted themselves to each other. I’m glad.”

Roman clucked his tongue. “I can’t believe Andrew is in college and Jeannie’s about to start.”

She looked closely at her cousins, the children of her Aunt Kimberly and husband, Shane Donovan. “Any idea why Jeannie wants us to call her Theresa now?”

“Not a clue. I guess some adolescent identity crisis.” He shook his head. “Thank god you didn’t have that.”

She chuckled darkly. “Oh, I did. Thankfully, you weren’t here to see it.”

He cocked his head.

She colored. “Sorry. I know you don’t like talking about when John was …”

“No, no,” he said quickly, holding up a hand, “that’s okay, pumpkin. Believe me, I know how lucky we all were that John stepped in, regardless of circumstances. That’s all water under the bridge now. So what was your crisis?”

She threw back the glass and drained it. “Lawrence Alamain. I had a thing for Lawrence Alamain.”

He curled a lip.

“I know. Believe me, I know. Even after I knew he raped Jennifer, I still wanted him. Even though I knew he was using me to bolster his reputation, I didn’t care.” She shuddered. “All I can say is that I was eighteen and incredibly stupid, but lucky enough to have John chasing after me and shaking sense into me.”

“Well, thank heaven for that.”

“I think I see Aunt Kayla and Eric outside.” She frowned. “I don’t recognize who’s with them, though.”
Roman tilted his head and peered out the window. “Cute kid. Think he’s Eric’s patient?”

She winced. “God, I hope not. Dad, don’t forget Eric’s an oncologist.”

He cringed. “Why did he choose so morbid a field?”

“Because he wants to help people. It’s very noble.”

“But hard, pumpkin, so very hard.”

She sighed her agreement. When the door opened and the trio walked inside, she immediately spied the joined hands and put two and two together. Well, this was going to kill Sami, she thought.

“Dad,” she hissed, “you need to prepare yourself now.”

Roman was flummoxed. “For what?”

“I think that’s Eric’s boyfriend.”

His eyes bugged. “His what?” he spluttered.

She bit her lip.

“Did you know?” he demanded.

“Honestly? No clue.”

“Is … is that why he stayed away so long?” he asked quietly, the devastation in his tone obvious.

“Your guess is as good as mine. He didn’t stay in any better contact with me than he did the rest of you.”

“How do you …”


Roman slowly shook his head.

“Now look at what, or rather who, is the object of his attention. I mean, it’s pretty obvious, isn’t it?”

“But that boy is just a kid! Way too young for Eric.”

“We don’t know that,” she insisted, “and if he is young, so what? Eric’s not the kind of guy to go trolling for little boys, Dad. Have some faith in him.”

“I do!”

“Then listen to him when he tells us, okay? Really listen to what he says, because whatever you say will help determine whether or not Eric sticks around this time.”

“Shit,” he muttered. “You’ll help me, right?”

“Sure,” she tinkled. “I’ll stomp on your foot to keep you from jamming it in your mouth.”

“That’s why you’re my favorite.”
Kayla was doing her best to fend off her well-meaning family from smothering Eric, but they ignored her. Kurt simply stood off to the side, smiling at the sight. She had been worried he would be overwhelmed by the sheer number of Bradys, especially given that it was just Kurt and his father for so long, but apparently that fear was groundless. He was happy to see Eric was so loved.

“Well, look what the cat threw up,” Bo drawled, pushing his way to the front of the line. “It’s about time you dragged your ass back here, little man.” He put his hands on Eric’s shoulders. “All grown up, aren’t you? And a doctor to boot.”

Eric blushed. “It’s good to see you, Uncle Bo.” He held out a hand, but Bo was having none of it and Eric soon found himself enveloped in a fierce hug.

“We really missed you, kid,” Bo murmured into his ear.

“I missed all of you, too.”

“My turn!” Kimberly shrieked, shoving Bo aside and throwing herself at her nephew.

Eric laughed. “You’re as gorgeous as ever, Aunt Kim.” He then wheezed. “Still strong, too.”

“Oh, Kimberly, for goodness sake!” her mother scolded. “Let the boy breathe!” Caroline gently pushed her daughter away and took a good luck at her eldest grandson, the first in, well, far longer than she could remember. “You look good, sweetheart. Happy.”

“I am happy, Grandma,” he said, beaming. “I really missed you.” He gave her a warm hug, distressed by how frail she had become since the last time he had seen her.

“I always knew you were destined for great things,” she said. “I’m so happy it finally caught up to you.”

He kissed her cheek and looked over her shoulder. “Hey, Dad.”

“Son,” he said, nodding and smiling. “You look good.”

“He really does,” Bo said. “Thank god he takes after Marlena.”

Kim and Kayla snickered.

“Thank god Shawn-Douglas takes after Hope,” Roman shot back.

Bo grinned. “No argument here.”

Hope laughed.

Shawn rolled his eyes and exchanged handshakes with Eric. He had been ten the last time he’d seen his cousin. Now he was married with a child and Eric was a doctor.

“Hey, sis,” Eric smiled, winking at Belle.

She screeched and bounced into his arms. “Oh, my god, Eric! How are you? What’s going on? Why did you decide to move back to Salem? Where’s Mom and Dad? Why didn’t you invite us to your graduation? Why were you doing volunteer work in the Congo? You could have been killed! Are you seeing anyone? Have you gotten a place yet? Have you …”
“Have you breathed?” he interrupted.

She flushed. “Breathing is overrated.”

“Apparently.”

She punched his shoulder. “Jerk.”

“Brat.”

She beamed at him. “I’ve missed you, big brother.”

“I’ve missed you too, Kitten.”

She groaned. “You can’t call me that anymore.”

“Try and stop me. When you were a baby, Mom would wake me up by putting you on my chest. You’d claw your way around before circling and finally settling down and falling asleep. Then I had to get you up so I could get dressed and you carried on for an hour. I think that was Mom’s ultimate revenge for having twins.”

She rolled her eyes.

“Is that my niece?”

“That’s Claire!” Belle giggled. “She’s going to be three soon.”

“Wow,” he whispered, shaking his head, “you and Sami sure didn’t waste any time.”

She shrugged. “That’s because when you and Carrie finally get around to having kids of your own, we’ll all be in diapers.”

“Watch it, Junior Miss,” Carrie griped.

Belle stuck out her tongue.

Eric chuckled. “Anyway, I’m glad you’re all here. There’s someone special I’d like you to meet.” He grabbed Kurt’s hand and pulled him over, wrapping his arm around his waist. “This is Kurt Hummel, my fiancé.”

Shocked into silence, they did nothing but stare.

“What?”

Eric and Kurt turned around and saw the Horton contingent on the threshold. Just behind them were John, Marlena, Sam, Sami, and Will.

“Well, the gang’s all here.”

John and Marlena pushed past the Hortons and entered the Pub proper, thus also pushing back the Bradys to stand next to Kurt and Eric. Roman, sensing a line had just been drawn, immediately crossed to them. He would not allow his son to feel unsupported. Yes, he was surprised, but he was more hurt than anything. He was hurt that Eric had kept this a secret, that he felt he had needed to do so.

Melissa, Jennifer, and Lucas moved to stand with Hope, who was staring at her husband and
hoping Bo wasn’t about to make an ass of himself. Melissa’s son Nathan, who had no stake in this, took shelter at the kids’ table, deciding to keep an eye on them.

Sami was staring daggers into the back of her brother’s head as Carrie subtly shifted her stance in case she needed to punch her sister twice in the same day. Will edged over, wanting to get a look at Kurt, and dragged Sam with him.

“Wow,” he whispered, “he’s beautiful.”

Sam turned and looked at him. “You too?”

Will’s eyes widened to the size of moons.

“I won’t tell anyone,” Sam promised, “not until you’re ready, but you can always talk to me. We may have only just found out that we’re cousins, but we’re still family.”

Will blinked rapidly, a blush spreading across his cheeks. “Thanks,” he murmured.

Sam smiled and offered a kind nod in reply.

Unknown to them, Lucas had overheard the entire conversation. Saddened his son didn’t yet feel safe enough to confide in him, he was grateful Will had another person in his corner. He was very confused, however, about how they were cousins.

Kayla decided to take the bull by the horns. “I sincerely hope that I can depend on my family to at least be as gracious as Nicole Walker just was about this announcement.”

All of them were well aware of the disastrous relationship Eric and Nicole had while teenagers.

“Did that cow make you gay?” Belle demanded of her brother.

“Isabella Black!” Marlena shouted.

Belle cringed and then blushed, hiding behind her husband, who looked disappointed by his wife’s reaction.

Eric stared at her in horror.

“What the hell!” Sami roared, pushing her way to the front and standing before Eric to shield him. “Nothing or no one makes someone gay. You’d think the daughter of a doctor would know better.”

Belle flushed with shame and tried to disappear.

“Uh, thanks, Sami?” said a dazed Eric.

“Not so fast,” she snapped. “Why didn’t you tell me sooner?”

“Really?” he asked, voice absolutely dripping with sarcasm.

She ducked her head. “I guess I deserve that.”

Kurt had to fight to hold his tongue. There was a lot he wanted to say to this woman, but this was not the time. He couldn’t wait until it was.

“Yeah, you do,” Eric agreed. “Look, Sami, it wasn’t just you that I didn’t tell. I didn’t tell anyone. Why did I stay silent? Because it wasn’t anyone’s business until I decided to make it their
business. This is my life and I don’t owe anyone anything.”

“Well said,” said an approving Bo, with nods from his siblings and their spouses.

“I just hate to think of you keeping this to yourself,” Caroline sniffled. “Was it because you were afraid of how we would react?”

Eric cocked his head in thought. “A little, perhaps, but not much, nor was I ever ashamed or embarrassed. I always knew Mom and Dads would be supportive.”

John and Roman started and looked warily at each other, before the former offered a hesitant smile which the latter returned.

Eric sighed and tightened his hold on Kurt, who gently coaxed him with a tender touch.

They stood and watched as Eric calmed from this simple action.

“You all know what it was like when Sami, Carrie, and I were kids,” he said softly. “It was very … difficult,” he continued, voice cracking. “Dad was taken when Sami and I were still babies. We grew up knowing how badly Carrie grieved him. Then Mom was taken and we were lucky enough to have John. It wasn’t that we just believed he was our father; he was our father.”

Tears fell from Carrie’s eyes as Sami wrung her hands.

“Then Mom came back, but Isabella died,” he whispered. “Then Dad came back and everything just went crazy. Everyone knew our story and had no compunction about coming up to us and saying what they thought of it.” He hung his head. “Especially at school. Kids can be … very cruel.”

Marlena, John, and Roman were devastated. They’d had no idea about any of this.

“It felt like there was always some spotlight shining on us,” Eric said. “Come see the kids who lose parents the way others lose socks!”

Carrie snickered.

“It’s not funny, honey,” Caroline scolded her.

“Oh, Grandma,” Carrie laughed, wiping her eyes, “it wasn’t then, but it is now.”

“And it just got worse as time went on,” Eric said. “Everywhere I went, I was someone’s son or so-and-so’s brother. I was never just Eric. Until I left Salem, I didn’t understand that even I didn’t know who the hell Eric Brady was.

“I tried to make it work with Nicole, but she was more interested in money than in me. I loved Greta, I truly did, but there was just too much standing in the way.”

Hope looked down. She missed Greta and always wondered what had happened to her. She tried to track her down numerous times, but Greta had disappeared into Europe never to be heard from again.

“It wasn’t that I didn’t love them,” Eric continued. “I did love them, but not the way they deserved, nor did they love me as I deserved. I was tired of settling for less, not understanding why I ever thought I should. Once I left, I thought long and hard about what I wanted and who I wanted to be.
“I had always wanted to be a doctor, but I had a lot of insecurities about my intelligence and ability which I’ve since resolved.” He shrugged a shoulder. “And I had some hang-ups. It’s one thing for a little boy to want to be a doctor.

“It’s altogether different for that boy to grow up amongst some of the best doctors in the country,” he said, waving an arm toward the Horton family, “and one of the world’s most renowned psychiatrists.” He gave his mother a sardonic smile.

“Oh, sweetie,” Marlena said, sighing, “if I’d had any idea …”

“I know, Mom,” he interrupted, “and I appreciate it, but I had to do it for myself. I needed to know that I could.”

She nodded.

“What finally convinced you?” Carrie asked.

Eric smiled. “I was in Los Angeles, still trying to be a photographer. I was on a shoot one day in Santa Barbara for a local television studio when the station manager collapsed.”

Several gasps erupted.

“Mom had made sure we learned CPR and that we kept our certifications current, so I delivered CPR until the ambulance arrived. It turned out she’d had a mild heart attack and, well, I kind of saved her life,” he finished, absently scratching the back of his neck.

“She recovered fully and quickly decided she owed me something, which she didn’t.” He laughed. “But you don’t say no to Eden Capwell.”

“You know Eden Capwell?” asked a shocked Sami.

He blushed in embarrassment. “I’m her youngest daughter’s godfather, actually.”

She stared.

He cleared his throat. “Anyway, Eden pretty much insisted on becoming my fairy godmother. After visiting her in the hospital, she and her husband Cruz coaxed me into a long conversation.” He shrugged. “I told her everything and she decided that I was too smart to be doing something other than my passion.

“I lived with her and Cruz while I attended UCSB. They gave me room and board in exchange for part-time childcare and I took out loans for tuition. The university had an accelerated program that combined a bachelor’s degree with an MD. I graduated in six years and after I was handed my diploma, Eden handed me a piece of paper.”

He flushed. “She had paid off all my loans,” he whispered, still beyond moved she had done that for him. “She said I had a brilliant career in front of me and she wasn’t about to have it hampered by something she could so easily remedy.”

“She sounds like a remarkable woman,” Marlena said quietly. “I’d very much like to meet her one day.”

Eric grinned. “You will. She knew I wanted to propose to Kurt but was scared he might turn me down. She told me, um, to tinkle or get off the pot, except with more colorful language. She and Cruz will be at the wedding.”
“I still can’t believe you’re godfather to Eden Capwell’s daughter!” Jennifer said. She knew Eden tangentially as they were both former reporters.

Kayla snorted. “If you think that’s neat, just ask Kurt who his godmother is.”

They all turned toward him and he rolled his eyes. “Olivia Pope.”

As the others stared in stupefaction and tried to assimilate all of this data, Carrie decided to take control of the conversation. Someone had to and it might as well be her. She looked at Kurt and smiled.

“How did you and my brother meet?”

“One day I was lying on a bed in a hospital in Ohio, terrified I was going to die and leave my father, sister, and stepmother. Everyone was trying so hard to be strong for me, but that only made me determined to be even stronger for them.”

His lips quirked up. “Then the most gorgeous creature on whom I’ve ever laid eyes breezed into my room and told me he wasn’t about to let my cancer kill me. He was going to save me, so I needed to suck it up and do the steps necessary to make that happen.”

Tears appeared in his eyes. “And he did. He saved my life.”

“That is so romantic!” Belle bleated.

But Kurt wasn’t finished. He had waited a long time to say these words and he wanted to say them here, now, in front of these people, so that they might better understand just what Eric meant to him.

“When I say Eric saved my life, I don’t mean just my body.”

In a succinct monologue utterly devoid of emotion, he detailed his life growing up in Lima, of the schoolyard taunts and slurs to the detailed and prolonged campaigns of verbal and physical harassment they became.

Will didn’t even know he was crying until he felt Sam surreptitiously press a napkin into his hand. Lucas was completely devastated, wondering if his son would have fared any better in Salem had he come out, and terrified he might be targeted after he did. He was both annoyed and relieved Sami wasn’t paying attention to their son.

Finally, and with obvious great discomfort, Kurt told them about the day after he found out he had cancer, of how he had gone to school in a bid for some measure of normality, only to find himself in a confrontation with his greatest tormenter … who then tried to rape him in the locker room.

Sami burst into tears, realizing she had been Kurt’s age then when she was raped. Jennifer, Kayla, and Marlena, all of whom had been raped, were also crying, as were Carrie, Melissa, and Hope, who had each been attacked when they were younger.

Roman and John were furious on his behalf. Far too many women in their shared life, women they loved and adored, had been victims of sexual assault. Eric wrapped his arms tightly around Kurt and rocked them gently.

Kurt startled when he felt a hand fall on his shoulder. He turned around to find a sobbing Victor Kiriakis.

“Oh, my boy,” he cried. “Oh, my dear, sweet boy.”
Kurt smiled and reached up to touch the man’s cheek. “I’m okay now, Uncle Victor, and a large part of that is because of Eric.”

“Uh, Uncle Victor?” said a shocked Bo. “How is that possible?”

Kurt wiped his tears and cleared his throat. “We’re not biologically related, Bo,” he said, knowing that Bo Brady was in fact the son of Victor Kiriakis. “Uncle Victor is close friends with my grandmother and aunt. He was also my mother’s godfather.”

“And does your grandmother or aunt know about this … this obscenity?” Victor demanded of him, moving past sadness straight to anger.

“No, and you mustn’t tell them,” Kurt said sternly. “I have no idea what they would do and, frankly, it’s none of their business.”

Victor growled. “Someone tried to rape you, Kurt. They should be punished.”

“He killed himself last year, Uncle Victor. He punished himself. I just want - no, I need - it to be over.”

Victor grimaced but at last nodded before pulling the boy into a hug. “And what is this about you getting married? You’re far too young.”

“And you have no say in the matter,” Kurt said cheerfully, “so shut up and stop being such a grumpy old man.”

Caroline and Bo gaped as everyone’s eyes all but fell out their heads.

Victor surprised everyone by bursting into laughter. “Just like your mother,” he chuckled before looking around the room. “And where is Burt? I presume he’s here and knows about this?”

Kurt rolled his eyes. “Of course he does, Uncle Victor, and he approves. He loves Eric. Dad’s having lunch with Anna and Tony DiMera.”

Carrie frowned and was about to ask for clarification, when Kurt clucked his tongue.

“Don’t think I don’t see you, Dimples! Get over here and give me a hug.”

A grinning Justin Kiriakis emerged from behind his uncle and took Kurt into his arms.

“Well,” Justin purred, “look who’s all grown up and absolutely delicious.”

Kurt swatted his shoulder and pulled back. “Watch it, sugar daddy. Three of your children are older than I am.”

“Right,” Justin said, glaring at Eric, “apparently only he can rob your cradle.”

Marlena, John, and Roman bristled as Sami prepared to kick some Greek-American ass.

Kurt tilted his head and slowly pushed Justin away. “You’re a lawyer, Justin, allegedly a good one, so I would advise you to refrain from making speculative statements. No one here is interested in your testimony.

“Further, freedom of speech does not mean freedom from consequences, so if I ever hear you make another derogatory statement about my fiancé, you will find yourself very glad you and Adrienne weren’t planning on more children, because I’ll cut your balls off with a rusty knife and
feed them to the first herd of pigs I pass.”

John and Roman were grinning like fools as Carrie and Marlena smirked as though they had invented the art.

Sami reared back. “Okay, that was awesome.”

The fire in Justin’s eyes died and was replaced with concern. “Kurt, you’re only seventeen …”

“Soon to be eighteen,” Kurt interrupted, “and spare me the useless platitudes; they bore me. You know me, Justin, and you know I don’t rush into things. I certainly don’t take action until I’ve carefully considered the consequences. I love Eric and want to marry him; that’s the end of it. Whatever you think – frankly, what anyone thinks – is not our problem. If you don’t like it, don’t come to the ceremony.”

He arched a brow. “And don’t be such a hypocrite. Adrienne was eighteen when you fell in love with her. You didn’t let anything stand in your path; do you really think I would?”

Justin’s lips quirked into a smile. “That’s all I needed to know.”

Kurt pursed his lips and offered a prissy nod.

“Are you sure you’re not interested in becoming a lawyer?” Justin asked rather pathetically. “I know a firm that could really use someone who knows how to make closing arguments.”

Kurt smirked. “It’s medical school for me.”

Justin heaved a tremendous sigh and nodded.

“How are Adrienne and the kids?”

“They’re well. They’re actually flying in tonight from Greece, so you’ll probably see them tomorrow.”

Kurt nodded. “Good. It’s been too long since I’ve seen Alex, Sonny, and the twins.” He blinked and turned to Carrie. “I’m sorry, did you want to ask me something?”

She nodded. “You said your father is with Tony and my mother. Do you know my mother?”

“We were introduced only today, but it turns out Anna and my mother, Suzanne, were best friends at boarding school.”

Eric stepped forward and cleared his throat. “I’m glad you’re all here for this, because I only want to have to say it once. There are things you need to know about what’s been done to Kurt.” He gnashed his teeth. “By Stefano.”

“That miserable son of a bitch!” Bo seethed.

“I wish I could say this was unbelievable,” Kimberly murmured, head in her hands. She raised her gaze to her husband, Shane, knowing he was silently contemplating what, if any, crimes with which Stefano could be charged. She was sure she already knew the answer.


He watched as his parents and aunts and uncles winced, wondering just how right he might be.
Were their children in danger?

“I should have killed him years ago,” said a tired Victor. “After what he did to John, I should have put an end to him then.”

John snorted. “I appreciate the thought, Vic, but we both know nothing kills him. He’s like a goddamn cockroach.”

“This ridiculous vendetta,” Caroline hissed. “I just wish I knew what the hell that man wants from my family!”

Marlena sighed. “Unfortunately, Caroline, we don’t know, and it’s no longer limited to the Bradys, if that’s really even the cause.”

“What do you mean, Doc?” Roman asked.

“Stefano’s always been rather selective in his targets, hasn’t he?” she asked. “He’s never had much to do with Kim or Kayla directly, hurting them by hurting you, me, and John. He’s caused great pain to Bo by keeping Hope from him all those years but, again, he’s done little to Bo himself. It seems he has very specific plans for certain people.”

“Now he’s got his hooks into Sami,” Eric growled, “because of her marriage to EJ. The fact that Sami is the mother of two of his grandchildren means little to a man like Stefano. I’m sure he’s already plotting to get rid of her and raise Johnny and Sydney as his heirs. Will and Allie would just be collateral damage.”

Sami swallowed heavily.

“I’m not sure that’s true,” said a reluctant Will, flinching when they all turned toward him.

“What do you mean, honey?” Marlena asked her grandson.

“Well,” Will continued, “for whatever weird reason … Stefano likes me.”

“That’s true,” said an uneasy Sami. “He’s very fond of Will.”

Will cleared his throat. “He, uh, he actually cried about Great Gran. He doesn’t know I saw him, but her death has affected him.”

“That’s just frightening,” said an affronted Melissa.

Hope tilted her head. “I don’t know, Melissa. Stefano and Gran had a few encounters and there was never a clear winner. I believe that, for whatever reason, Stefano respected her.” She paused. “I also think Marlena is right. Keeping me prisoner at Maison Blanche had everything to do with hurting Bo and nothing with me being a Horton.”

“So he has something against Brady men,” Kurt said quietly, looking at Eric with great concern.

“Hey,” Eric whispered, “you don’t have to worry. Stefano’s never expressed any real interest in me before and there’s no reason to assume he’ll do so now.”

“You were gone from Salem for years, Eric.”

“And he has the money and resources to have me followed and observed. If he had wanted to do something, he could have done it then.”

“But it wouldn’t have the effect he desires. He’d want you to be here, in Salem, so that whatever
he did would have maximum impact: on you, on Carrie and Sami, your parents, and the rest of the Bradys.”

“That makes sense,” said Carrie, exchanging a glance with an anxious Sami.

Kurt blew out a breath. “As it stands, I think you’re right, honey. I don’t believe Stefano will come for you because he doesn’t want to deal with me, but that doesn’t mean he won’t target others.”

“And what’s so special about you?” Sami demanded.

“Aside from everything?” a smirking Kurt asked. “Attacking me directly or indirectly would ensure my grandmother and aunt would become involved, as well as Victor. As my mother’s godfather, he is honor-bound to protect her only child.”

Victor nodded.

“Then why did Stefano target Anna?” Eric asked.

“Wait, what!” Carrie exclaimed. “What did he do to my mother?”

Kurt turned to her. “When I told you that today I learned our mothers were friends, there was a lot more I didn’t say. My parents had been struggling with infertility for years, something which I never knew. They suffered many miscarriages and, during the last IVF procedure, my mother almost died.”

He exhaled. “When her best friend came to visit her and saw everything my mother had endured, she offered to carry my parents’ child.” He gave a watery smile. “And she did.”

“Anna did that?” whispered a stunned Roman.

“I never knew she could be so … selfless,” Caroline murmured.

Carrie stared at Kurt. “You’re the baby.”

He blinked. “You knew.”

“Pumpkin?” asked a surprised John.

Carrie shook her head. “After I graduated high school and went to live with Mom in Europe, I found some old letters in a shoebox. There were ones from Dad and Tony, and ones from a woman I didn’t know. Her name was Suzanne.”

Kurt nodded.

“At first I thought they must have belonged to someone else. I couldn’t imagine my mother carrying a child for another, but she did, and those letters were filled with such love and gratitude on both sides. I never … I never knew my mother could love someone like that other than me.”

She locked eyes with Kurt. “My mother loved your mother so much, she loved you so much, but what I remember most about those letters was that my mother never regretted her decision. Not once. I … I don’t know if I could do that, carry a child and then give it up, but she wrote that you were never hers. Oh, she loved you, I’m sure she still does, but she was never confused about whose child you were and where you belonged.”

“No, I wasn’t.”
They turned and saw Anna standing with Burt and a furious Tony.

“My father should be killed,” Tony spat.

“Someone who sees sense,” Victor muttered.

“I agree with Tony,” Carrie said.

“Carrie!” protested a shocked Marlena.

“You do?” asked an incredulous Sami.

Carrie nodded. “Sami, stop and really think about this. You know what he’s already done to our parents – all of them – but separate that from this for just a moment.”

Her confused sister nodded.

“We already know Stefano is far too invested in reproductive endocrinology. He stole Dad’s semen, probably while holding him captive, and somehow got his hands on Kate’s eggs. He then engineered embryos and implanted them in Marlena while keeping her in a coma.”

Sami shuddered as John and Roman grumbled.

“The question is why,” she continued. “Why go to such lengths? Why did he create Cassie and Rex? We still don’t know. We do know he took care of them, at least obliquely, while they were growing up, but for what purpose?”

“You think he wants Bradys he can control,” Kurt surmised, “sleeper agents.”

She nodded. “It didn’t work out with the twins, for whatever reason. They wanted nothing to do with him, but who’s to say he stopped there? The fact of the matter is that there could be other embryos out there we don’t know about. They could belong to Dad and Kate, or well, just about any of us.”

“What do you mean?” asked a horrified Hope.

Carrie released a patient sigh. “Aunt Hope, Stefano had you for years. Do you remember everything about that time?”

Hope shook her head.

“He could have taken eggs from you. How many times has he held John captive? He could’ve taken specimens from him. Stefano kidnapped me when I was a child. I don’t remember everything about it. We don’t know the technology to which he has access, but females are born with eggs. He could have stolen mine and I simply wouldn’t know. He also kidnapped Sami and Eric when they were infants.”

“Dear god,” Justin murmured, closing his eyes.

“How much of our family has he held captive over the years? What has he done to us when we’ve been drugged or unconscious? We don’t know. We probably never will.”

She shook her head. “Whatever this vendetta is about, and I certainly think it’s more than Stefano’s father having an affair with Grandpa’s sister, we have no idea what his endgame is. Why us? Why the Bradys? Why a working-class immigrant family from Ireland? Who are we to an obscenely rich Italian mafia don?”
Chatter broke out amongst the others while Eric and Sami stared at Carrie and Kurt, who were staring at each other.

“You see it, don’t you?” she asked.

He nodded.

“See what?” Eric asked.

Kurt placed his hand over Eric’s own. “Sweetheart, whether or not the egg he implanted in Anna was from Marlena or Samantha isn’t the issue, not really. Neither is why he selected this Joshua Fallon person as the father. That he knew the procedure was happening at all tells us he had been watching Anna for years, even after she and Count DiMera divorced.”

“Call me Tony, please,” the man interjected, “and that is a most interesting observation. Why indeed would he use Anna for his schemes? Stefano never had any love or use for Anna. He only ever bothered with her to torment me.”

Kurt nodded. “And I believe that Anna herself was incidental in this instance. You have to remember that Stefano planned on that embryo attaching itself and being born. He wanted it to be born. That it died and was absorbed by me couldn’t have been foreseen.”

He turned to Burt. “Stefano wasn’t targeting Anna, Dad. He was after Mom.”

Burt paled and began breathing heavily.

“Easy, Burt,” Anna cautioned. “You have to calm down.”

“Please, Dad,” Kurt begged. “I can’t go through that again.”

Burt closed his eyes and steadied his breathing.

“Burt had a heart attack last year,” Anna said quietly. “He was in a coma.”

Eric pulled Kurt flush against him.

For the first time, Sami saw it. How much they truly loved one another, how right they looked together. Kurt was young, but he wasn’t a typical teenager. He knew who he was and what he wanted. He wanted Eric and her brother’s desire was returned. She knew if she tried to interfere in that, she would lose Eric for good. She didn’t like it, but she would try to accept it.

“What would Stefano want with your mother?” Jennifer asked.

“My mother was born Suzanne Delacroix, the only begotten child of Katrine Valois. My grandmother is to France what Stefano DiMera is to Italy and Uncle Victor is to Greece.”

He let that settle a bit before continuing. It wasn’t every day you announced your grandmother as a mafia queen.

“My grandmother is a proud, fearsome woman and, while her true business interests are understood by the entirety of France, it is not discussed. There is even tacit approval. Her activities are extremely narrow in scope. She doesn’t deal in weapons, drugs, or human trafficking. As to her other interests, I don’t know and do not wish to know.

“She is, to me, simply my grandmother. She has only ever been kind and loyal to me and my father. She has raised hundreds of millions of dollars across Europe for a variety of charities which
she administers through the Valois trust. That trust has been audited by more forensic and law enforcement agencies than you can name. It is legitimate.”

Burt sighed and sat down. “I don’t know any more than Kurt about what Katrine gets up to. I’ve always suspected it was mostly labor, shipping routes, and border crossings. I don’t think about it because I don’t want to know. That woman has been like a second mother to me. That’s all I need to know. Suzanne was never involved in any of it.”

Kurt offered a grim smile. “My grandmother has a half-sister whose name I’m sure most of you have heard before: Helena Cassadine.”

Justin gasped.

“Holy shit,” said both Bo and Hope.

“You’re kidding,” Roman said.

As police officers, all three were acutely aware of the woman and her reputation.

“I’m not here to defend her,” Kurt said. “The things she’s done are indefensible but, at the end of the day, whether I like it or not, she is my family. Granted, she has been crueler to members of our family than perhaps anyone else, but she loves me for whatever reason. She would never hurt me.”

“The woman’s a gargoyle,” Burt spat, “but she does love my kid.”

“I’ve known Helena since we were children,” Victor said. “Our families pressed us to marry, but she instead chose Mikkos Cassadine. Surprisingly, it was a love match. When he died, her viciousness reached new heights. I do believe at this point she is clinically insane.”

Kurt winced but didn’t disagree.

“Mikkos and I maintained an alliance for many years. He, like Katrine, was smart enough to divide his interests. His legitimate business was overseen by Cassadine Industries, which is now helmed by his grandson and heir, Prince Nikolas, who is based out of Port Charles, New York.”

“Nikolas Cassadine is your cousin?” Will asked Kurt, who nodded.

“Helena assumed control of the illegal aspects after becoming a widow,” Victor continued. “She is far more successful than her husband ever was. My alliance with Mikkos holds with Helena, though I try not to deal with her more than necessary. I do not consider her a friend, but I do count her as an ally. Stefano tried to make a run at her enterprise after Mikkos died. Helena did not react well.”

John raised an eyebrow. “So Stefano is evil, but Helena Cassadine is evil and insane.”

“Precisely. She will always ally herself with any who stand against him. When she learns of this debacle with Anna and the in vitro, she will be furious.”

“What will she do?” Sami whispered.

Kurt shrugged an unsure shoulder. “I would hope she would first contact me to see how I would wish to proceed, but I can’t count on that. Eventually she will come for Stefano, but I doubt she would hurt those who also bear the DiMera name.”

“He’s also tried more than once to gain control of my grandmother’s holdings, underestimating her
ability because she’s a woman. Frankly, given everything I’ve heard of Stefano, this surprises me. I didn’t peg him a misogynist. So it makes me question if there’s not something else behind it.

“As to the rest, I think Stefano targeted my mother to get to Katrine. As Dad said, Mom was never part of Katrine’s illicit enterprises, which she inherited from my late grandfather Gérard Delacroix. As their only child, Mom would have inherited the Valois title and foundation, which dates back centuries to Charlemagne through Eleanor of Aquitaine and now falls to me on my twenty-first birthday.

“I believe Stefano wanted Mom to have a child, particularly an heir, she would eventually be forced to surrender. I think, had that child been born, in a few years Stefano would have approached Marlena and told her what he had done. Of course she would want her child. Who wouldn’t?

“And while Marlena and my parents were dealing with that, that’s when Stefano would move on Katrine. Given the time frame and what I know Helena was doing then, she wouldn’t have been much use. That Stefano would have destroyed my parents and Marlena, and our families, in the process meant little to him. Uncle Victor, as Mom’s godfather, also would have been dragged into it. Stefano used babies as chess pieces.”

“Sick,” Sam whispered. “That’s just sick.”

Will looked green but rushed when Marlena stumbled, grabbing her before either John or Roman could, and guided her to a seat.

“But that’s not what’s worrying you, is it?” Carrie asked.

He shook his head. “I couldn’t care less what happens to Stefano DiMera. What concerns me is that Mom and Dad had four fertilized embryos. The doctor told Anna all four were implanted, but he was obviously working for Stefano. So the questions are these: were all the embryos implanted, in addition to the one Stefano engineered from Marlena or Samantha; if not, where are they?

“Oh, my god,” Burt warbled. “You mean …”

“I mean I might have brothers and sisters, Dad,” Kurt whispered. “You might have daughters or other sons. And they were kept from us.” He shook his head. “Even if that’s not the case, what the hell did that monster do with those embryos?!

“And that ties into Carrie’s earlier point. Regardless if he stole the egg from Marlena or Samantha, I doubt he took just one. Where are they now? More frighteningly, who are they now? We don’t know. We might never know. He could have engineered more embryos with those eggs and god only knows whose sperm. Roman? John? Joshua Fallon? Tony?”

“Dear lord, Marlena,” Tony whispered, tears streaking down his face, “I am so sorry.”

“It’s not your fault, Tony. You and I have been friends for years and you know I have never blamed you for your father's actions. I know Stefano resented that, and I also know you are nothing like him.” She sighed. “Please forgive me for saying this, but thank god Renée never lived to see this.”

He hung his head. “I agree. I don’t think she could have borne it.”

“And it just spirals out from there,” Carrie said. “He could have taken eggs from Mom during the procedure. Stefano has consistently proven that security at University Hospital is a joke. He could have stolen eggs and sperm from any of us whenever we’ve been admitted.”
“What are we going to do?” Sami whispered.

“I think you need to get the hell out of that mansion,” Eric said. “You’re in constant danger just living there. If you want to stay married to EJ, fine, but he has money. There’s no reason you have to live with Stefano.”

She bit her lip.

“I’ll alert your grandmother and aunt,” Victor said to Kurt. “They will make discreet inquiries.” He arched a brow. “Well, as discreet as Helena is capable of being.”

Kurt nodded.

“You do know she will probably make her way to you,” Victor continued, “even if only to prove to herself that you are in remission.” He paused. “Are you ready for that?”

“I can deal with Helena,” Kurt said, “but I would prefer Eric not have to, though I know she won’t hurt him.”

Victor nodded and turned his thoughts over and over. “Are you going back to Ohio?”

Kurt exchanged a long look with his father.

“No,” he finally said, “I’m going to stay in Salem.”

“Me too,” Sam said.

“You don’t have to do that.”

“Kurt, we’re family now, but even if we weren’t, you’re my best friend. I will always choose you.”

Kurt smiled. Eric didn’t.

“And I’m sure Quinn will make the same decision.”

Burt exhaled. “Wouldn’t be able to keep your sister from you if you tried, son. Better accept that now.” He tilted his head. “Brittany and Santana, too.”

Kurt blinked. “I need to find a house. Maybe more than one.”

“Definitely more than one,” Eric said. “Once we’re married, I get you all to myself.”

Kurt smirked. “Acceptable, but when are we getting married?”

“Would immediately be too soon?”

“Yes!” everyone shouted.

“Not for me,” Kurt said. “I can’t wait to marry you. Vegas?”

“We need to plan!” Carrie insisted. “Venue! Guest lists! Floral arrangements!”

“Male bridal showers!” Sami added, not about to let Carrie take the lead on this. “Whatever the hell they’re called. Groomsmen or groomswomen or best man or whatever! Daytime or nighttime wedding? Do you even have rings yet?”
Neither Eric nor Kurt answered, far more concerned with staring into each other’s eyes.

“They really are sweet together,” Hope said.

“They look good,” Bo agreed. “Lots of hotness going on there.”

“Something you want to tell me, Brady?” she teased.

“Only that you’re lucky you snagged me when you did. Who knows? I could have been married to your cousin Mike all this time. He’s blond and a doctor, just like Eric. I can see the attraction.”

Shawn-Douglas was unusually mortified by his parents. Belle thought the entire thing was hysterical and little Claire mimicked her mother’s giggles.

Jennifer snickered. “Sorry, Bo, but Mike prefers blonds.”

An eavesdropping Carrie blushed, which is exactly what Jennifer had intended.

Burt rolled his eyes. All he could do was wonder what Judy would have to say about this.
Chapter Summary

In which Kurt and Eric talk sexy to each other, and Judy’s secret is exposed.

Longtime fans will see I'm digging deep into Days history for this story, trying to reconcile current storylines, and the ones I'm writing, with past ones. Frankly, I don’t know why the show's writers never did that.

To those who aren't familiar with Days, I understand this story can be difficult to follow, given the number of characters and their rich histories. I so appreciate you trying to muddle thorough and won't take offense if you decide to move on. Again, thank you, all of you, for reading. Your time and comments mean the world to me!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Eric crept into the kitchen of his mother’s townhouse only to come to a halt when he saw her sitting at the table. She calmly poured them both a cup of tea and pushed his toward him.

“How did you know I’d be up?”

“Because I’m your mother.”

His lips quirked up and he sat down. “John asleep?”

She nodded. “For now. He’s already woken up twice because of nightmares.”

“Stefano?”

Another nod.

He sighed. “I’m sorry, Mom. Maybe we shouldn’t have brought all that up at the Pub.”

“Eric, John lives with those memories every day. I can’t even remember the last time he slept through the night.”

“Do you sleep?”

She gave him a sardonic grin. “On occasion.” She placed her hand on his. “What’s really going on with you, baby?”

He was silent a long moment. “You’ll think it’s ridiculous.”

“You miss Kurt.”

He blushed. “I don’t understand why. I dropped him off at the hotel only hours ago. I’ll be seeing him tomorrow. I was in the Congo for months and it didn’t ache like this.”

“You weren’t engaged then, and that changes things. After your father proposed, I didn’t want to
spend another night without him by my side.”

Eric’s blush deepened and he ducked his head. “Mom, you know Kurt and I have never …”

“That has nothing to do with it,” she said. “Intimacy isn’t just sexual, Eric. You two truly know each other – at least the thing that really matter; the minutiae you can learn together later – and it’s only natural you want to be with him. If I hadn’t seen it for myself, I probably would’ve fought this engagement, but I don’t think anyone who has seen the way you look at each other could dismiss those feelings in good conscience.”

“He wants to wait,” he blurted out. “To have sex, I mean. He wants to wait until after we’re married.”

She made a humming noise. “And how do you feel about that?”

“Good. Impatient, but hopeful. A little relieved.”

Her brow furrowed. “Relieved?”

“I’ve never been with a man, Mom. I was waiting for Kurt. I feel like I’ve been waiting for him my entire life.”

She smiled softly. “That’s good.”

“You don’t think it’s corny?”

“I think it’s sweet. I think it’s commendable you both waited for that special person and found them in each other. But that’s not what’s troubling you, is it? What’s behind the relief?”

“I think … I think Kurt has different expectations for me than I do for him.” He paused. “There’s a large part of him that appreciates that I’m older, that I have more experience than he does, but I don’t think that’s necessarily true. I’ve lived longer, sure, but that doesn’t mean I’ve lived more.”

Her smile was soft. “There’s more wisdom in that statement than what comes out of the mouths of people twice your age.”

“I don’t know about that,” he demurred. “I don’t think I’m wise, but perhaps more cognizant of what I want from life. Kurt … has had a very hard life.”

Her eyes darkened. “The things he said today in the Pub, what has been done to him …”

Eric nodded sadly.

“Burt doesn’t know about the attempted rape, does he?”

His eyes widened. “No, and you can’t tell him!”

“I would never do that, Eric. I respect and appreciate Kurt’s candor and bravery. I would never betray it, nor do I believe the others would, but how has it affected him, really?”

“I think Kurt understands better than most how important psychological and emotional health is. After he was diagnosed, he entered therapy and stayed with it for the year of his treatment and then the following year. I know he plans to stick with it.”

“That’s wonderful, but doesn’t answer my question.”

“He talked about what David did to him, about how his peers treated him, but he confronted so
much more than that. He told his therapist everything; about his mother’s death, Burt’s heart attack, Lima, his relationships with Finn and Sam. He really did the work and understands he has more to do.”

“It sounds like you’ve been helping him with that.”

“When I can, but he’s also careful not to make me some kind of messiah. He knows I’m not the answer to his problems, that he needs to find that within himself. He’s so much stronger than I am.”

“I think you both are strong in different ways and better together than apart.”

“I didn’t think Kurt would be so open,” he admitted, “and I think some of it was contrived. I don’t know what it makes me that I don’t care.”

“Contrived how?”

“Kurt knew Alan attacked Carrie and later raped Sami. I think he told them about what David did to him for the express purpose of changing how they viewed him.”

“That’s not necessarily contrivance, Eric,” she said. “Slightly manipulative perhaps, but not contrived. If that’s what he did, it’s understandable and most likely worked. Kurt wanted your sisters to see him as an actual person and not just his age. He’s young, but he’s lived a long and difficult life. Making others aware of that isn’t a bad thing.”

She quirked her lips. “It certainly helped to change my thinking.”

“Mom?” Insight crashed into him. “Oh, Mom,” he whispered, “I’m so sorry. I never knew.”

“Very few people do, honey,” she said, patting his hand, “and that’s how I wanted it. People react to rape in different ways. Carrie became withdrawn and more serious. Sami acted out. I ignored it completely which, as a psychiatrist, I can tell you was the worst thing to do, but it was how I needed to cope at the time.”

There were so many questions he wanted to ask, his worldview having just fundamentally shifted. “Did you ever tell anyone?” he asked.

She blew out a breath. “Joshua Fallon.”

His brow furrowed. “The father of the embryo Stefano created.”

She nodded and sipped her tea. “Joshua was my best friend for many years. He’d had a hard life and became hard himself, but he was never anything but kind and gentle with me.”

“I’m glad you had him.”

She smiled. “Me too. I called Josh after it happened. He rushed over to my apartment and …”

“It happened where you lived?” he whispered, wincing.

She said nothing for a long moment but eventually nodded. “Josh came to me and then called Neil Curtis to examine me. I made them both promise never to tell and they never did, though Joshua in particular was very angry about that.”

“Why?”

“Because it was his stepfather who raped me.”
His eyes filled. “Oh, god.”

“Kellam Chandler was very mentally disturbed and had become fixated on me because I bear a resemblance to his dead wife. He had actually murdered her in a fit of jealousy, but we didn’t know that at the time.”

She paused. “Obsession and stalking weren’t understood then as they are now, so I excused his unwanted attention, thinking it was nothing more than grief.” Her eyes turned distant. “And then it became something else.”

“What happened to him?”

“He tried to kill Joshua. He was about to shoot him when Josh’s half-brother Tod came into the room. Kellam and Tod struggled for the gun and it went off. Tod accidentally killed his father.”

“Jesus,” whispered a shaky Eric. “Do … do the girls know?”

She shook her head. “Looking back, I wonder if I should have told them that I knew what they were going through, but I’m not sure it would have helped. Carrie was assaulted but not raped. You know how she is. I feared if I told her of my rape, she would feel guilty that she hadn’t suffered what I had and that her experience caused her to remember my own. She would have tried to comfort me rather than taking comfort from me.”

Eric pulled a face and nodded. That’s exactly what Carrie would have done.

Marlena took another sip of tea. “As for Sami, given her feelings toward me at the time, most likely she would have construed my disclosure as trying to lessen her own experience rather than seeing that she would survive as I had.”

“What about Dad and John?”

She nodded. “They know, but I’ve never discussed it in detail with either of them. That was my choice and they’ve always respected it. It happened before I knew them.”

She watched him carefully for several moments as he wrestled with this information. She took another sip.

“You can ask me questions, honey.”

He shook his head. “I don’t want you to feel pressured.”

“I don’t. I raised the subject. It would be hypocritical of me to close off avenues of discussion now.”

“I just … I’m not judging you, okay, it’s just I can’t believe you of all people didn’t have counseling.”

She nodded. “It’s a more than reasonable point, but you have to remember that rape was viewed very differently then. It was considered a sex crime, not a violent crime. I never felt any shame, which I know isn’t everyone’s experience. I never felt as though I was responsible or had led him on. He broke into my apartment. I tried to make him leave, but couldn’t. I fought him, but he was stronger. Everything that night was out of my control.

“I kept it to myself and no one knew other than Joshua and Neil. I managed to function, though not particularly well. I took a sabbatical from the hospital because I knew I had no business seeing
patients.” She paused. “And then Kellam was killed and I had to testify at Tod’s trial. It all came out then.”

Eric blanched.

“I hated that,” she said softly, “but I couldn’t lie and I wanted to help Tod.” She gave a wry smile. “It didn’t help matters that I was on the stand being questioned by my ex-husband.”

He blinked. “Don? Don Craig?”

She nodded. “He was so furious, it was probably a good thing Kellam was dead, for Don certainly would have killed him.” She sighed. “Even though it was a closed court, it got out, but I was incredibly fortunate to have received unconditional support, particularly from Tom and Alice, Mickey and Maggie, and Doug and Julie. My colleagues knew, but they were respectful and didn’t pry.”

“Did … did you ever tell Grandma and Grandpa?”

“No,” she whispered. “They had already been put through so much, Eric, and they were still mourning DJ.”

He didn’t know why his eyes filled with tears. “I wish he had lived. I wished I had the chance to know my brother.”

She blinked rapidly, trying to push it away, though it had never worked. She missed her firstborn every single day. It was a grief she suspected would never heal. If DJ hadn’t died, she would probably still be married to Don and have a very different life. Not necessarily better; just different.

“I know, honey,” she said. She drew in a breath. “After DJ died, Don and I fostered a little boy named Johnny. I resisted at first, I was terrified to have another child anywhere near me, convinced something would happen that would be my fault.”

“Mom,” Eric said gently, “DJ died of SIDS. It wasn’t your fault.”

“Intellectually I knew that, but emotionally …” She wrung her hands. “It was hard, Eric. I blamed myself. Don blamed me initially, so desperate to have a focus for his grief and anger. Every single minute of every single day I obsessed about it. SIDS was not well understood then. Hell, it’s not now. I wondered if I had fed him the wrong food or if I had put him down in the wrong position. It just … it’s really something you never get over.”

She cleared her throat. “Anyway, back to Johnny. I had decided one weekend to take him to Colorado to visit my parents so they could get to know him. Sam had business in Salem so I sent her my apartment key.”

Her eyes darkened. “And then Jake Kositchek happened. He broke into my apartment and strangled Sam. When they found her, the police identified her as me. Why wouldn’t they? She was in my apartment and in my robe. Roman and Don were destroyed; they thought I had returned early.”

He stared at her in horror.

“They didn’t tell my parents straightaway. They wanted to find Jake first so that he couldn’t hurt anyone else. So there I was in Colorado with Johnny and my parents, having no idea that my twin sister had been murdered in my home by one of my patients.”
“Johnny fell in love with Mom and Dad, so I decided to leave him with them and take a small vacation to myself. I went up to the cabin Don and I had when we were married. It stayed in both our names and we each used it when we wanted.”

She blew out a breath. “In the meantime, your father finally called Grandma and Grandpa and told them I had been killed. They tried to get hold of Sam, but she was also on vacation from a movie she was shooting and was expected to be back in Los Angeles within a few days.”

She swallowed. “Then Don showed up at the cabin. When he saw me …” She shook her head. “He told me I was supposed to be dead. My apartment. My robe. I knew it was Sam.”

She closed her eyes but the tears streaked down her face. “I had to identify her body. Then I had to call my parents and tell them the daughter they thought was dead was actually alive, but their other daughter had been killed.”

Eric’s huge eyes were filled with tears as he stared at her, his hands wrapped over his mouth.

She straightened her shoulders. “The next year, Kellam attacked me. I couldn’t tell them that. Johnny had by then been returned to his biological mother. My parents were mourning DJ and Sam, and missing Johnny. I just couldn’t put them through any more. Then, the next year, Trista was murdered.”

“How have you survived?” he breathed. “After all of that, and then what Stefano did …”

“Because I realized a very long time ago that no one gets through life unscathed, Eric. I’ve been a psychiatrist for more than half my life, and I have patients who have endured much more than I have. Bad things happen to good people every single day. Sometimes, those people have bad things happen continually. But you get through it. You go on. At the end of the day, what else can you do?”

She smiled. “Yes, a lot of bad things have happened to me, but I don’t believe it’s outweighed by the good. I lost DJ and that was horrible, but then Carrie came into my life. Then I had you and Sami, and then Belle. Because of Isabella, I was able to be a mother to Brady. I thought I would be married to Don forever, but things happened and we divorced. I found your father and then John. Would I change that? No, I don’t think so.

“You can’t always control events, but you can control how you can respond to them. It’s not easy, it’s incredibly hard, but it’s worth it. After everything that’s happened, I don’t think anyone would blame me if I had curled up into a ball and spent the rest of my life eating my hair, but I chose not to do that. I showed up. That’s all you can really do in this life, Eric: show up for it.”

“You’re the strongest, bravest person I know,” he whispered roughly.

She shook her head and smiled. “I’m strong because I’ve had to be. That’s what real strength is; it’s not born, it’s made.” She paused. “Sweetie, there’s nothing I can tell you about my experience with Kellam that will help you with Kurt. As you’ve said, he’s done the work, which puts him lightyears ahead of many survivors who can’t even admit it to themselves, let alone someone else. Carrie dealt with it on her own. Sami … well, that situation is very different.”

He sighed. “I know. I really do understand that, but … I’m still angry with her, Mom. What I told you today in the hospital was true. Sami did say she wished it happened to Carrie and not her. I think part of the reason I’m angry, both with her and myself, is because I understand that. I just don’t want to.”

“Tell me what you mean,” Marlena coaxed.
“The truth is that Alan was obsessed with Carrie. He attacked her and she fought him off, so he targeted Sami. She was younger, more vulnerable, and believed herself to be more sophisticated than she was. Alan preyed on her and I despise him for that. But for Sami to blame Carrie more than she did Alan? I’m sorry, but that’s just nuts. None of it was Carrie’s fault.”

“No, it wasn’t.” Marlena said, sighing. “It wasn’t any more her fault than Stefano taking me and your father, though Sami blamed Carrie for that too, as well as John. Carrie has always been a convenient target for your sister. Yes, it’s horrible and it’s wrong, and Roman, John, and I are all partially responsible for not nipping that nonsense in the bud. But Carrie is also somewhat to blame.”

“How can you say that?” he demanded.

“Carrie is not a weak person by any stretch of the imagination, Eric,” Marlena said sharply, “but she has always allowed Sami to run roughshod over her. I don’t know why. Maybe because Carrie is the eldest, she believes she has some responsibility for Sami and her problems. Perhaps losing her parents so many times made Carrie insecure about losing the rest of her family, and that in turn drove her to be far more accepting than she should be.”

She shook her head. “Don’t misunderstand me. In no way do I blame Carrie for Sami’s problems and certainly not for the choices Sami makes, but Carrie is responsible for how she deals with your sister. That scene at the funeral today is a perfect example. Yes, Sami goaded her, but Carrie knew exactly what your sister was doing and let it go on for far too long. When she could take no more, her temper exploded. She allowed that to happen and then physically attacked Sami.

“I’m not saying Sami didn’t deserve it. What I am saying is that the guilt Carrie felt for it after? That’s on her. She could have ignored Sami; she didn’t. She could have walked away; she didn’t. She could have sought help from someone else; she didn’t. Carrie knows that Sami brings out the worst in her, but rises to the bait every single time.”

“That’s true,” Eric said quietly.

“Like I said before, whether or not it’s true, Carrie believes Sami has suffered more than the rest of you and therefore makes allowances for Sami that she wouldn’t for anyone else. Carrie has always been a very honest and direct person who lives in her truth. She hates that Sami lies and schemes, but she excuses it because of everything Sami has endured.

“She shouldn’t do that. Yes, terrible things have happened to her, but terrible things have happened to all of us, Eric. Sami doesn’t deserve special dispensation because she’s suffered. But Carrie has given her that. So have Roman and John. So have you and so have I. Because of that, Sami feels entitled to act first and ignore the consequences later because she knows we’ll forgive her.”

“Because we feel sorry for her,” he finished.

“Exactly. She counts on that. She preys on that and always has. She’d rather blame her sister for her rape than the real perpetrator, just as she blamed both Carrie and me for her bulimia. Because we never struggled with our weight and Sami did, she felt we were somehow responsible for both her weight and her condition. We never commented on her weight, nor did we ridicule her for it. We didn’t criticize her when she gained, nor did we overly praise her when she lost.”

She heaved an enormous sigh. “I can’t tell you how many years on therapists’ couches it took for me to let go of my guilt where Sami is concerned. No, I wasn’t there for her like I should have been, but that wasn’t my fault, and Sami received no less attention than you or Carrie. The majority of my guilt stemmed from my not holding her accountable for her actions when I should
have. That’s a failing I share with Carrie.”

Marlena closed her eyes, lips trembling with anger. “When I think of everything that girl has done: to your father, to John, to Austin and Lucas, to you and your sisters …”

“What about what she’s done to you?” Eric quietly asked. “You’re doing it again, excusing her behavior toward you in relation to how she treats others.”

She smirked. “I bet you aced your psych rotation.”

He snickered.

“Oh, honey, she’s my daughter. At the end of the day, no matter what she does, she’s my daughter. I should have done things very differently; I handled her all wrong by not trying to handle her at all.” She paused. “Perhaps the only good thing to come out of it is that, now that Sami has her own children, she also has a better understanding of the things she’s done and the hurt she’s caused.”

“She does seem different,” he acknowledged.

“Change is hard, Eric. It’s even harder to change your own behavior, but I really do believe she has changed. Sami is not the person she was and is trying every day to be better.”

He looked down. “I feel guilty sometimes that I was always closer to Carrie. When I said that I love Sami, I meant it, but I also meant that I don’t like her. Carrie is my friend as well as my sister. Belle is my sister and I love her, but I don’t know her very well.”

“Honey, no one understands better than me just how complex the relationship can be between twins. I’m not telling you that you must forgive or even try to understand the things Sami has done, but I do think you should try to get to know the person she is now. You might be surprised.”

He rubbed his eyes. “I don’t even know how we got on this topic.”

“Because you want to avoid whatever’s bothering you about Kurt,” she immediately replied.

He gave her the stink-eye.

She grinned. “Come on, tell your old mom all about it.”

He rolled his eyes but didn’t answer for several long minutes. “The money. Kurt has a lot of money, Mom. A lot.”

“Do you feel emasculated by that?”

“No! Of course n … yes.” He sighed. “After we left the Pub, we walked into the first real estate agency Kurt saw. He plopped down and talked to the agent and they went over various properties for two hours. When the woman asked about a mortgage, Kurt told her it would be a cash transaction. They weren’t talking garden apartments, Mom.”

“You need to decide how important you’re going to allow this to be.”

“I know it shouldn’t matter,” he said softly, “but it does. Even though I’m a doctor and will make a good salary at University, it’s nowhere near the amount of money Kurt has in just his Christmas Club account. The only reason I’m not in debt up to my eyeballs is because of Eden. I know she paid off my loans as a gift, and I’m incredibly grateful for that, but I can’t help but feel beholden to
She hummed in thought. “Have you ever been to Kurt’s house in Ohio?”

He nodded. “A few times. There were some appointments where he was just too ill to travel to Dayton, so I went to him.”

“And what was the house like?”

Eric looked at her blankly. “Like a house. It was pretty modest, on par with our old one on Sycamore.”

She nodded. “His car?”

“A Navigator that Burt bought him, on the condition Kurt paid for insurance and gas, and did the maintenance work.”

“Maintenance?”

“Kurt’s a mechanic.”

She raised a brow. “So what you’re telling me is that a young man who has more money than he can count was raised in a single family home in Ohio and drives a nice car he services himself. He also has a job.”

“Well, sure. Kurt’s been working in the shop since he was …” he trailed off, realization dawning in his eyes.

She smiled. “Honey, to me it sounds like, while Kurt is wealthy, he doesn’t live as though he is. He doesn’t flaunt it. He’s also extremely intelligent, so I imagine he did well in school.”

Eric nodded absently. “He’s in the top five of his class, plus he was the cheerleading captain for a while and even on the football team.”

“Did he earn any scholarships to SU?”

“Full ride.”

“Merit based?”

He nodded.

“Don’t get hung up on his money,” she advised. “From what little I know, Kurt is more apt to spend it on his friends and family.” She tilted her head. “Sam being a case in point.”

“You’re right,” he said, sighing. “I just … I’m worried Kurt feels as though he has to support us. I’m also not just comfortable with him buying our first home.”

“Then talk to him about it, but I will say this: the two of you would be better off financially by buying a home outright. Have it put into both your names and then dedicate a percentage of your salary and put it toward what you’d be paying for a mortgage. Why pay unnecessary interest when you could put the money safely in a bank and let it earn interest for you?”

He sighed again. “I know you’re right. I don’t why I’m acting like this.”

“Honey, it’s not wrong to want to feel you’re an equal partner in your marriage, but you also need to step back and consider how you’re approaching this.”
He smirked. “You mean as though I’m the breadwinner and Kurt is a desperate housewife?”

“Exactly. This is the twenty-first century, Eric, and archaic gender roles no longer apply. They certainly don’t to you and Kurt. I always made more money than your father. In the beginning, he resented it, especially considering he was raised blue collar, but I made it clear I wasn’t going to tolerate it. He worked very hard and was underpaid for most of his career. That I made more money was simply a byproduct of my field and level of education. It took him a while, and it wasn’t always easy, but he came around. Other things were more important.”

She took his hands in hers. “At the end of the day, you and Kurt love each other. That you managed to find each other at all, let alone so early in your lives, is a blessing. Money is always nice and will be a great help to you, and it’s always better to have a surplus than a lack, but you’re not marrying Kurt for his money and he knows that.

“If he wants to share it with you, if he wants to use it to help you start your life together, you need to let him. You might think his money emasculates you, but you also need to recognize that Kurt himself most likely feels emasculated himself. You’re older than him. You have more experience in almost everything. You have more education.

“Kurt probably feels that his money is one of the few things he’s bringing to the table. Don’t rob him of that because you feel insecure.”

“I … I never thought of it like that,” he admitted.

“I bet Kurt has.”

Before he could stop himself or think twice, Eric burst into tears. Marlena was immediately up and out of her chair, wrapping him in her arms.

“I’ve missed you so much, Mommy,” he sobbed. “I can’t … I can’t even imagine who or what I’d be if I had lost you like Kurt did his mom.”

She ignored her own tears and rocked them gently. “I’m right here, baby. I’m right here for you and always will be. Don’t be afraid to love him, Eric. Never be afraid of love. Love hard, without restraint and without regret. Money, possessions, jobs … they come and go, but the love always stays if you fight for it. So fight for it.”

Burt kept an eye on his son as Kurt slept, slowly nursing a whiskey neat and making a mental note to wash the glass himself. He didn’t need another lecture about drinking from his far-too-intelligent and perpetually worried son. He rarely indulged anymore, but if anything called for a drink, it was this day.

He owed his wife a phone call. He had dodged Judy the entire afternoon after sending off a quick text that Kurt was still in remission. She was likely furious with him, but he honestly had no idea how to tell her everything he had learned this day.

This bullshit was Stefano DiMera was beyond belief and Burt could think of no logical or reasonable way to frame it so that Judy could understand. How could anyone understand? If he had relayed the story to his buddies back home, they would have chased him out of the shop with butterfly nets.

It wasn’t that he was unfamiliar with rich, powerful people and their schemes. His marriage to Suzanne had cured him of that. Sure, he knew Katrine was shady as fuck, but she’d never been anything but decent to him. The woman hadn’t batted an eye that her daughter had fallen in love
with and married a man of a lower class with nothing in his bank account. She had only ever wanted Suzanne to be happy. When she had insisted she was, Katrine accepted it without issue. She was even supportive of his remarriage to Judy. She wanted Burt to be happy and for Kurt to have a maternal figure. Katrine was also fond of Quinn; though they had only ever spoken on the phone, she found Quinn to be highly intelligent and cunning, and appreciated the girl’s devotion to Kurt.

Helena had been a much harder sell in the beginning. The fact of the matter was that bitch scared Burt out of his fucking mind. He knew she was a murderous harpy but was loyal to Katrine, who, for whatever reason, managed to exert some control over her sister. Then Kurt was born, beautiful and brilliant, and Helena was satisfied. Hell, she treated Kurt better than she did her own sons and grandson. He knew Helena would never hurt Kurt and would hunt to the ends of the earth those who would hurt him.

Nevertheless, he was glad Victor Kiriakis had taken the reins and offered to contact them on Kurt’s behalf. Those were phone calls Burt did not want to make, primarily because he had no idea how to verbalize something he couldn’t understand himself.

The one thing he knew for certain was that he couldn’t go back to Lima. After learning everything he had, he would not be separated from his son. Too much could happen and too much was at stake. He also had no intention of denying Kurt his matriculation at SU, nor his impending marriage. Eric made Kurt happy. Burt wanted his son to be happy. That was the end of it.

Besides, he knew if he tried to place restrictions on Kurt, the moment the boy turned eighteen he would be out of the house and back in Eric’s arms.

But none of that helped him with Judy. Unlike Russell Fabray, Burt truly knew his wife and understood why she would never want to return to Salem.

That meant difficult choices were ahead for them.

He loved her. Jesus, he loved her. He never thought he’d be able to love someone so much again. Not that he loved Judy more than he had Suzanne, just in a different way. Still, at the end of the day, Kurt was his priority. He would never divorce Judy and certainly had no wish to live apart from her, but he needed to be where Kurt was. Otherwise he’d spend every minute of every day worrying.

He sighed and stood, cracking his back, before creeping over toward the sliding door. Opening it cautiously, he stepped out onto the balcony and called his wife.

“What the hell is going on, Burt Hummel?!”

He told her, holding nothing back. To say she was stunned – that she was horrified and appalled – would be an understatement, but her decision was immediate and unequivocal.

“I’ll be there tomorrow afternoon.”

Burt met the boys and girls in the Penthouse Grille on the top floor of the Salem Inn the next morning.

“How’s everybody doing?” he grunted as he took his seat and poured a cup of decaf.

Quinn and Brittany chattered excitedly about Salem University and all of its amenities, ready to move into the dorms at a moment’s notice. Santana was more laconic, which was surprising and
somewhat worrying, but she also appeared pleased.

“What about you, kiddo?” he asked Sam after nodding at the girls.

“Pretty good,” the boy said shyly. “Marlena is just … she’s kind of amazing. Eric has been awesome and even Sami was nice.” He paused. “I always knew they were my family, but I didn’t expect such an immediate connection. But it’s there and I’m grateful. Marlena and John are picking me up later to take me around the city.”

“I’m real happy for you, son,” Burt said, grinning.

Kurt smiled and patted Sam’s hand. “What about your parents?”

Sam finished chewing and then swallowed, nodding. “They’re driving out now. They should be here in time for lunch.”

“Should I make reservations for them here?”

Sam blushed. “Thank you, but it’s okay. Marlena has a penthouse at Salem Towers that she’s letting us use while we’re in town.”

Kurt studied him for a moment. “Are you okay with that?” he asked gently.

Sam exhaled and nodded. “Yeah. If there’s one thing I’ve learned recently, it’s that my pride is pretty useless. There’s nothing wrong with accepting help.”

Kurt smiled. “I’m glad you feel that way.”

“I’m still going to pay you back, though.”

“No, you’re not, and that’s the end of it.”

“Kurt …”

“I said no, Sam. I won’t hear any more of it.” He sipped his orange juice. “What’s Will like? I didn’t really get a chance to meet him yesterday.”

Sam bit his lip, his anxious eyes circling the table.

“I thought it might be that,” Kurt said quietly. “We won’t say anything, nor will we discuss it with him.”

Sam closed his eyes and murmured his thanks.

“Gay, huh?” Santana asked while chewing a croissant. She shrugged. “I can understand why he wants to keep it under wraps, considering his mom. I didn’t meet her, but she sounds like a bitch, and not in the awesome way Tink and I are.”

Kurt rolled his eyes.

“Have you talked to Mom?” Quinn asked Burt, who nodded.

“She should be here in a few hours.”

She nodded, a small, pleased smile on her face.

“What are everyone’s plans for today?” Burt asked.
“We’re going back to the campus,” said an excited Brittany. “I’m thinking about taking one or two summer classes and Santana wants to check out the squad to see if they’re worthy of us.”

Santana grunted and began shoveling eggs in her mouth.

“I’m going to the Salem Place and work on my laptop until Mom gets here,” Quinn said.

“What about you, Dad?” Kurt asked.

“Same as your sister, son. We might have lunch with Anna and Tony.”

Kurt smiled. “You like her, huh?”

“Sure. Anna’s a beautiful and glamorous woman, but you know a lot of people don’t look beneath the surface. She’s a good person. Your mom had told me all about her before I even met her, so that’s what I think of when I look at her; your mom’s best friend who gave us the most incredible gift in the world.”

He cleared his throat. “It’s been me and you for so long, Kurt. Your mom and I were both only children and never had a lot of family. Sometimes I forget your mom had friends outside of Lima, good ones, and it’s nice to talk about her with them.”

He sipped his coffee. “Speaking of, have you talked to Olivia?”

Kurt grimaced. “This morning, briefly. She … is not happy. I only barely managed to keep her from demanding President Fitzgerald declare war on Stefano DiMera.”

Burt raised a brow. “Always liked that woman.”

Kurt and Eric agreed to meet at the Pub, which was equidistant between the Salem Inn and Marlena’s townhouse. Kurt was patiently sitting on an outside bench and ignoring his screaming phone. He knew Quinn had called Rachel last night with the news that his remission was holding, and the calls and texts hadn’t stopped coming in since. He reached down and shut it off.

He loved his friends, he did, but he was also thankful for this time away from them. Rachel and Mercedes in particular could be very demanding, and Finn was a whole other host of problems. He was seriously considering letting Quinn make his engagement announcement for him, just so he wouldn’t have to deal with the incessant questions and well-meaning derogatory statements.

He blinked and looked up when a shadow suddenly blocked his sun. He didn’t like it when something interfered with his lighting.

“Hi Uncle Bo, Aunt Hope.”

Bo and Hope were momentarily surprised, but just as quickly smiled, pleased Kurt was beginning to regard them as family. They already considered him as such.

“Hey, little dude,” Bo grinned. “Where’s your worse half?”

Kurt snickered. “He’s still at the townhouse with Marlena. There’s some paperwork he needs to finish and email to the hospital administration before he begins seeing patients properly.”

Hope plopped down next to him. “How are you coping with all the Bradys thrown at you yesterday?”
“Watch it, lady,” Bo joked. “It’s not like your family is all that small.”

Kurt beamed. “I think it’s wonderful. Growing up, it was just Dad and me. Dad is an only child and his parents died before I was born. I have some cousins through Mom’s side, but we’ve never been close. I’m so happy Eric has such a terrific family. I know he’s missed you very much.”

He blushed and looked down. “Thank you, all of you, for being as accepting as you’ve been. Eric and I are both very lucky.”

Bo mussed Kurt’s hair, laughing when he squawked in indignation. “We’re the lucky ones, kid. Don’t think we missed that Eric’s only here because of you. He chose to come back to Salem to be close to you and, if you hadn’t agreed to marry him, he probably would have pulled up stakes and gone back to Los Angeles.”

Hope nodded. “I don’t think we really understood until yesterday just how much we’ve missed him. I don’t mean as a son or brother or nephew, but how much we missed his physical presence. We’re thrilled he’s back, but we’re even more thrilled he returned to us happy. That’s something we haven’t seen in him for a very long time.”

Kurt bit his lip. “It really doesn’t bother you?”

Bo shook his head. “Boy, that town really did a number on you, huh? I’d like to go there, wave my gun around, and arrest some of those idiots for being too stupid to live.”

Hope glowered. “Amen.” She shook her head to clear it and smiled. “Any idea when the wedding will be?”

“Well, Eric and I agree we’d prefer it to be sooner rather than later,” Kurt said. “Ideally, I’d like to do it before the semester begins.” He sighed. “I know so many people are going to say it’s too fast and I’m too young and …”

“Aw, let them talk,” Bo said. “Their words don’t matter. All that matters is you and Eric love each other, which is clearly obvious to anyone who looks at you.”

“Bo is older than me,” Hope said, “but I counted down the days until I was eighteen so I could marry him. I couldn’t wait and I never regretted it. I’ve loved him my entire life.”

Bo gave her a soft smile.

“I still can’t believe you’re grandparents,” Kurt said. “You’re both far too young and gorgeous.”

Bo and Hope looked at each other before looking back at him.

“If Eric somehow screws this up,” Hope said.

“We’ll marry you,” Bo finished.

“Good morning, sweetheart!”

Victor looked up from his newspaper and gave his wife a soft smile. He still had no idea how he had ever convinced this beautiful, vivacious woman to take a chance on him, but each day he thanked every god he could think of for her presence in his life.

“Good morning, my darling,” he said, standing and leaning over to kiss her cheek. He smiled segued into concern. “How are you doing?”
Maggie blew out a breath. “It’s not easy, but all I can do is keep reminding myself that Alice lived a long and full life, and she died with all of her many loved ones surrounding her.” She gave him a small smile. “That helps.”

He nodded and poured her a cup of coffee.

She took it with gratitude and arched a brow. “And how are you doing after yesterday?”

He blew out a breath and retook his seat. “I honestly don’t know. As far as the marriage, I know it’s none of my business, but I love that boy and he is just a boy. Still, I know Suzanne would have supported Kurt unconditionally and she’d have adored Eric.”

His eyes narrowed as his face was overtaken by a glower. “As for Stefano …”

Maggie curled a lip and nodded. She hated that man. He had tortured her best friend for years. Maggie still didn’t understand how Marlena was even sane, let alone functional.

“Did you reach the Cassadine woman?”

“Yes,” Victor groaned, “and she was predictably outraged and furious. I think the only reason she’s not here committing mass slaughter is because I told her Kurt had accepted Eric’s proposal. Apparently Kurt being able to find happiness in all of this insanity has given Helena pause, but I have no idea how long it will last. Katrine has not yet returned my call.”

Maggie nodded and began scrolling through her phone.

“How is your day shaping up?” Victor asked.

“I’ll be at Chez Rouge today,” she said. “I’m needed at Tuscany, but I don’t think I’ll manage to get over there before tomorrow.”

“You still haven’t found a manager?”

She shook her head. “You know how difficult it can be to find someone to represent your company. Tuscany was my first restaurant, my first stab at independence after Mickey died, and it holds a special place in my heart. I want it run the right way.”

He nodded. “Totally understandable. Any leads?”

She sighed. “Not yet, but I continue to hold out hope.”

He patted her hand. “Please let me know if there’s anything I can do.”

She gave him a coy look. “Another kiss wouldn’t be remiss.”

He smirked and leaned over, pressing his lips to hers.

“Gross!”

Victor slowly pulled away and growled, ignoring Maggie’s giggle.

“Justin,” he snarled, “you are far too old to be making such inane statements at expressions of love. Honestly, I don’t know how or why Adrienne has continued to put up with you.”

“The money’s a perk,” Adrienne cheerfully said as she sailed into the room. She smiled at a cackling Victor before turning to Maggie, winking, and holding her index fingers eight inches apart.
Maggie blushed though her eyes sparkled. Apparently the men in the family were just blessed.

Adrienne stood behind Victor’s chair and wrapped her arms around him. “How are you, Victor? It feels as though we haven’t seen you in forever.”

He patted her hand. It had taken him a while to pull the blinders from his eyes to see who this woman truly was, that she was remarkable and his nephew was incredibly lucky to have her. “I’m well, dear girl. Upset about Alice, but she had a remarkable life.”

Adrienne blinked rapidly and nodded before leaning over to kiss his cheek.

“Where are the boys?” Maggie asked.

“Being teenagers and sleeping in,” Adrienne dryly replied, rolling her eyes.

“How long will you be staying?” Victor asked as he cut his grapefruit.

Adrienne and Justin exchanged a quick glance.

“Well,” he began, “that’s something we’d like to discuss with you.”

Victor quirked a brow. “Oh?”

“We’d like to return to Salem,” Adrienne said. “We love Texas, but all of our friends and family are here. The older the kids get, the older we get, the more we want our family around us.”

“Would you mind if we stayed with you for a while?” Justin asked. “Just until we find a house, of course.”

Maggie, who loved nothing more than being surrounded by family, began bouncing in her seat. “Of course you can! We’d be delighted to have you.”

“The lady has spoken,” Victor said, eyes sparkling.

“We don’t want to impose,” Adrienne said.

“Young lady,” he said sternly, “you are my family. I’d love nothing more than have you here and I insist you stay as long as you want.”

She gave him a warm smile.

“Have you given any thought as to what you’d like to do?” Maggie asked them.

Justin sipped his coffee and nodded. “Actually, yes. I spoke with Carrie last night and we’re considering starting a firm together. I’d handle the criminal cases, while she’d take the corporate side.”

Victor blinked and shook his head. “I still remember when Carrie was selling Girl Scout Cookies. I keep forgetting she’s an accomplished attorney.” He nodded. “Sounds like a smart move. I take it Carrie is also interested in returning to Salem?”

Justin nodded. “She’s bored with her current position and there’s no room for her to advance. I also think she wants to leave Europe to help put Austin behind her. Besides, with Roman, Marlena, and John here, and Eric and Anna having returned, Carrie wants to be with her family.”

“So what’s the next step?”
“We draw up papers detailing the partnership and then look for office space.”

“What about you, honey?” Maggie asked Adrienne, who sighed.

“I’m not sure. The past several years, I’ve been working part-time managing a chain of boutiques in Dallas, but it’s no longer satisfying. The kids are almost grown and I want to do more with my life than sell overpriced lingerie to bored socialites with bad plastic surgery. Ideally, I’d prefer something that allows me to interact and build relationships with customers, but also allows me to utilize my business skills.”

Maggie smirked. “Ever thought about managing a restaurant?”

John and Sam were discussing football as Marlena paced the floor of the penthouse, anxious to meet Sam’s family. She didn’t know why she was so nervous, but she was, and she was determined to get it out of her system before Scott and his family arrived so as not to put them ill at ease.

She knew her husband was aware of her nerves, but was kind enough to let her resolve it on her own.

She drew in a breath. She had spent most of her life in Salem and, while she had made her home and family there, there was a part of her that longed for more blood connections, separate from her parents and children, especially after Samantha and Trista had been taken from her. She was so excited to meet Scott, but also afraid that she would overwhelm him.

There was a knock on the door and Sam jumped to his feet and hurried over. Marlena smiled, thinking it sweet how close he was with his parents and siblings. He threw open the door and then threw himself into his mother’s arms.

Savannah laughed and kissed his cheek. “I missed you too, sweetheart.”

Sam smiled and kissed Stacy’s cheek before picking up Stevie, tossing him in the air, and then settling the boy on his shoulders.

“Sammy!” Stevie cheerfully screeched. “I missed you!”

“I missed you, monkey.”

Stevie pouted. “Not a monkey. I’m a gorilla!” He thumped his little fists on his chest.

“You must be Marlena,” Savannah said, smiling. “I’m so happy to finally meet you.”

“The pleasure is all mine,” Marlena said as she crossed to the other woman.

They looked at each other a moment before hugging.

“Scott will be up in just a moment,” Savannah said. “He’s struggling with the bags, but I also think he needed a minute.”

Marlena was relieved Scott was just as nervous as she.

“Stevie, Stacy,” Sam began, “this our cousin, Dr. Marlena Evans.”

“Hi,” Stacy said shyly. “You’re pretty.”
Marlena crouched and tapped the girl on her nose. “Thank you, honey. You’re just beautiful.”

Stacy blushed and ducked her head.

Stevie looked at Marlena with suspicion. “Doctor? You’re not going to give me a shot, are you?”

Marlena stood and looked at him, cocking her head. “Well, I don’t know, young man. Do you need one?”

Stevie shook his head vigorously.

“Then how about we just shake hands?” Marlena suggested. “How do you do?”

Stevie shook her hand with a solid shake. “Very well, thank you, and you?”

Marlena laughed. “You have excellent manners.”

Stevie gave a serious nod. “Kurt says first impressions are very important. Also, every moment is an opportunity for fashion.”

“Kurt is a very smart young man.”

Stevie nodded again. “When I grow up, I’m going to marry him.”

Sam froze.

“No, you’re not!” Stacy hissed. “I am.”

Stevie growled.

Sam rolled his eyes.

“Kurt has been a godsend,” Savannah murmured. “I honestly have no idea what we would have done without him.”

“He’s a wonderful boy,” Marlena agreed. “I couldn’t ask for a better son-in-law.”

Savannah stared. “I’m sorry, what did you say?”

Marlena blinked and turned to Sam, who flushed.

Savannah then too looked at her son, first in concern and then annoyance. “Is there something you forgot to tell us, Samuel?”

Scott then stumbled in, tripping over the weight of the bags and panting. “I’m here! What did I miss?”

Marlena turned and gasped. Dear Lord, he looked so much like Trista. It was almost impossible to believe Scott was adopted, even from within the family, the resemblance was so strong.

He looked at her and they were suddenly in each other’s arms.

“I feel like I’ve been waiting for this moment forever,” he murmured.

“Why didn’t you contact me before?” she whispered.

“Oh, you know how it is,” he demurred. “There was always something going on.”
She pulled back and frowned.

“You had your own life, your own family,” he continued. “I didn’t want to get in the way of that.”

“You are my family.”

He blushed. “It just never seemed as though there was a good time. Mom and Dad, well, they were always a little afraid of us meeting. They felt very guilty for leaving Trista with your parents. I think they thought I would judge them for it.”

“Do … do they blame me for what happened?”

His face softened. “Oh, Marlena, of course not. None of us did. Trista was murdered by a serial killer because she was in the wrong place at the wrong time and saw something she wasn’t meant to see. None of us were ever confused about that, and we certainly didn’t blame you. We know you’ve have had a difficult life through no fault of your own. I think Mom and Dad just didn’t want to add to your burden.”

“My family could never be a burden,” she said, embracing him once more. “I’m so glad that you’re here.”

He held her tightly for a moment before releasing her. He looked around and whistled. “This is some place! Are … are you sure you don’t mind us staying here?”

“Of course not. It’s been sitting empty for years. The only reason I haven’t sold it is because of sentimental value. I was subletting it for a while, but the last tenants moved out about six months ago. They relocated to New York. I’m happy to put it to good use.”

“I’m not sure …”

“You’re not paying me anything,” Marlena insisted. “You’re family.”

“You know about our, uh, situation, don’t you?”

She gave him a brisk nod and a chiding look. “Sam informed us. You should have called or written. Carrier pigeon. Smoke signals.”

“I wasn’t about to introduce myself to a cousin I’ve never met and ask for money,” he said heatedly. “That’s not how I operate.”

“Who said anything about money? What about resources? I have an empty apartment that’s just gathering dust.”

He ducked his head. “Thank you,” he whispered.

She took his hands in hers, smiled, and nodded. Words weren’t necessary.

“I’ll give you a tour later, but the master suite is upstairs, as are two other bedrooms which I thought you could use for Stevie and Stacy. There’s a guest suite downstairs by the kitchen, which would be perfect for Sam. From what I remember, it’s best to keep a teenage boy near a food source at all times.”

Scott laughed before looking over at his wife, who was whispering furiously at his eldest son. “Any idea what that’s about?”

She opened her mouth but was cut off when John cleared his throat.
“Oh, my goodness!” Marlena exclaimed. “Please forgive me. This is my husband, John Black.”

After handshakes and appropriate greetings, Savannah turned on Sam.

“Is there any reason you didn’t tell us Kurt is getting married?”

“What!” Scott yelped. “He’s far too young! He’s sick! He’s …”

“Kurt is remission,” Sam said. “The tests yesterday confirmed it.” He winced. "Sorry. I guess I buried the lead."

Savannah closed her eyes. “Oh, thank god. Burt must be so relieved.”

“Getting married?” Scott helplessly repeated.

“Actually,” Marlena said, “Kurt is engaged to my son, Eric. He proposed yesterday and Kurt accepted.”

Savannah opened her mouth, but Sam placed a restraining hand on her arm.

“Mom, don’t.”

She looked at him with sadness. “Honey …”

“It was always one-sided,” he said quietly. “Kurt loves me, but not like that, and it’s okay. It really is. I think … I think I got very confused for a while and conflated a great friendship with a great love. Don’t get me wrong, I do love Kurt, and, yeah, this will probably hurt for a while, but I’m realizing now I was never in love with him. He and Eric are so right together. Once you see them, you’ll understand.”

Her eyes searched his for several long moments before she at last nodded.

She looked at Marlena. “I’m sorry.”

“For what? Wanting to protect your child? Being concerned for his feelings?” She waved a hand. “Don’t be absurd.”

John wrapped his arms around his wife’s shoulders. “Why don’t you take a little time to settle in while Doc and I go grab a coffee? We promised Sam a tour of the city since he’ll be starting SU in the fall. It would great if you could join us.”

Stacy and Stevie cheered as Scott and Savannah nodded.

“Then we’ll meet Kurt and Eric for lunch,” Marlena said.

Stevie whooped with joy. “Yay! Kurty time!”

Lunchtime approached more quickly than Kurt had realized, but he had been having so much fun with Eric he hadn’t been paying attention to the clock. Even though they were engaged and planned on spending the rest of their lives together, even though they knew the most important things and people and events with regard to one another, they were still missing a lot of details.

They had spent the morning filling in a few, over many cups of coffee.

Kurt was cognizant they were the recipients of many curious looks, but he made no mention of them. Finally, Eric commented on it.
“Mostly people I went to high school with,” he said. “I’m not sure if they just can’t place me or are running off to post on Facebook that Eric Brady is gay.”

“Does that bother you?” Kurt asked gently.

“Nope,” Eric smiled, “I am gay. I’ve also got a really hot boyfriend, so I can understand their desire to stare.”

Kurt just smirked and shook his head.

Eric grinned and placed his hand on Kurt’s own. “What are you thinking about?”

“Honestly?”

Eric frowned in concern. “Of course. You can tell me anything.”

“Well,” Kurt began slowly, raising his gaze to stare into Eric’s eyes, “I was thinking about how desperately I want to blow you.”

Eric paled as his heart rate increased exponentially. “What?” he croaked.

Kurt bit his lip, now unsure. “I … is it okay to talk about this?”


“I still want to wait,” Kurt said, “but I was hoping we could make this a little more PG-13 until the wedding. Maybe some R-rated stuff.”

“Blowjobs aren’t R-rated,” Eric whined.

“Unfortunately,” Kurt groused, “and while kisses on the cheek and handholding is absolutely lovely, I’d like to at least get to second base by tonight.”

“That can be arranged,” Eric purred. He knew it got Kurt hot when he used that voice.

Indeed, he found himself the recipient of a hard side-eye.

“Unfair play.”

“Fiancé, please,” Eric drawled. “You can’t talk about blowing me and then get annoyed when I use the Sex God Voice.”

Kurt raised a brow. “I’m sorry, the what? Someone has a vastly overrated opinion of himself.”

“I’m sexy and you know it!”

Kurt burst out laughing.

“Where do you want to go on our honeymoon?”

Kurt hummed. “I’m thinking tropical island, private beach, and clothing optional.”

Eric gave him a filthy smirk. “There’s nothing optional about it. Once I get a ring on that finger and we take the vows, I’m getting you naked as soon as possible.”

“Is that so?”
“It is. I’m thinking private plane, so you’ll be naked that much sooner and I can bury my face in that succulent ass of yours.”

Kurt flushed as his pupils dilated. “We, uh, haven’t really talked about the particulars concerning … that.”

“You mean sex? We’re engaged, Kurt. You can say it. As for the particulars, I’d prefer if we don’t lock ourselves into any … positions … as of yet.”

Kurt began panting. “What are you saying?”

Eric frowned. “Kurt, I’m not Finn. I remember what you told me, that when you were dating him, he only wanted to have sex if you bottomed.” He shook his head. “I’m just glad you said no.”

“Me too,” Kurt muttered.

“I can’t wait for you to give it to me.”

Kurt gripped the table so hard, his knuckles turned white. He glared at his smirking boyfriend. “Oh, I’ll give it to you. Hard.”

Eric leaned in. “I’m so hard right now, I could pound nails.”

Kurt swallowed heavily. “What about handies?” he groaned. “Are they second base?”

Eric grinned. “Nope.”

“You’re trying to kill me.”

“But what a way to go.”

Kurt continued to give him a smoldering stare as he reached down to retrieve his chirping cell phone. “We’re late. We’re supposed to meet Dad and Anna and Tony at Chez Rouge.”

Eric sighed. “We’ll continue this later.”

Kurt nodded and they stood. “Would now be a good time to tell you I want us to sixty-nine in a hammock?”

“I hate you.”

Somehow their luncheon party had swelled to a number which required almost the entire restaurant, much to Maggie’s delight. Thursdays were typically slow, so she was glad for the revenue. Plus it allowed her to delay that bothersome paperwork demanding her attention.

She had taken Adrienne to Tuscany that morning for a tour, pleased the woman wasn’t a hard sell. She had always known Adrienne to be an extremely dedicated and hard-worker and so felt no qualms about turning the reins over to her. Adrienne would officially assume command of the restaurant within two weeks, after shadowing Maggie for a while.

After welcoming so many of her friends and family, Maggie decided she wanted to join in the festivities as well and closed the restaurant to further guests. There were no reservations on the books and she could do the paperwork later, so she hung a sign on the door announcing a private party before going to the kitchen to ensure they could accommodate everyone.

Burt wasn’t sure how it happened, but suddenly he was surrounded by Bradys and Hortons, all of
whom greeted him as though he were one of them. He’d been having a great lunch with Tony and Anna, waiting for Kurt and Eric to join them. Carrie was also expected to show up, which was good because he liked that girl. She was as nice as could be, but she was also a spitfire who took crap from no one.

Tony liked Burt a great deal. He appreciated a man who spoke his mind, whose actions mirrored his words. It was very refreshing. It was also enjoyable to hear about Anna’s shenanigans when she was a young girl. Burt had apparently memorized all the stories his late wife had imparted and relished teasing Anna with them. Tony was also pleased to be spending more time with Carrie, whom he very much regarded as his own daughter.

He also wanted to get to know Kurt better. Even though Anna didn’t consider him her proper son, she had still birthed him and that mattered to Tony. He’d always regretted he and Anna hadn’t had children when they were younger before Stefano separated them. He still mourned the child Anna miscarried thanks to Renée.

“Tony!”

He beamed and stood, sweeping Carrie into a hug. “Hello, Princess,” he said, kissing her cheek. “I’m sorry we didn’t get to spend more time together yesterday.”

“There were important things to discuss,” she acknowledged. Her face marred with concern. “How are you coping?”

He scoffed. “You mean after discovering my father is even more evil than I thought? I don’t know if I’m necessarily coping, but I’m certainly not surprised.”

She gave a sad nod before turning to greet her mother, and then Burt, with hugs. Burt was surprised, but pleased.

Carrie shrugged. “Regardless of how it came about, Mom gave birth to Kurt and me. We might not be related by blood, but we’re still connected. Besides, once he and Eric marry, he really will be my brother.”

“I’m glad you feel that way,” Burt said. “Kurt was very excited to meet you and hoped you’d want a relationship with him.”

She waved a hand. “I’d want one regardless. He’s a great guy who’s made my brother very happy.”

“I saw you speaking with Justin last night,” Anna said.

Carrie nodded. “He and I are going to open a law firm together.”

Anna’s breath hitched. “Does this mean you’re moving back to Salem?”

She smiled and nodded. “And I expect to spend lots of quality time with you and Tony.” She paused. “But I won’t go to that house. I can’t believe Sami willingly lives there.”

Anna grimaced. “Believe me, it’s not my first choice.”

Tony smirked. “Well, then, it’s a good thing the penthouse opposite Marlena’s went up for sale and I bought it this morning.”

Anna gasped. “You did?”
“Darling, nothing matters more to me than your happiness. My father … is my father, but after yesterday, I can’t be anywhere near him. I certainly don’t want him around you. I’m already having our belongings moved out of the mansion.”

She grabbed his face and pulled him into a passionate kiss.

Carrie smiled and leaned toward Burt. “It’s taken her a long time to be this happy. I could kill Stefano for having separated them.”

“He should be killed for many reasons,” Burt grunted.

She lifted her water glass and clinked it against his. “From your mouth.” She turned and stared. “What on earth is all that noise?”

Burt peered around her. “Incoming. Bradys and Hortons approaching at the speed of light.”

Carrie took a breath and held it a moment, girding her loins for yet another possible confrontation with Sami. Things between them had been well recently, but her sister had a hair-trigger and could turn on her at the drop of a dime.

She stood and greeted her aunts Kim and Kayla, and their husbands Shane and Steve, asking after their children. Andrew and Theresa were exploring the city, while Stephanie was at home babysitting Joey. She told them about her plans with Justin and smiled at their bubbling excitement that she was returning to Salem.

Bo and Hope then wandered in, having dropped Ciara off at the Horton house where Laura was looking after Jennifer’s children.

“Hey, Burt,” Bo said, sitting down in the empty chair next to the man and shaking his hand. “Ran into your son a little while ago. He’s pretty great. Hope and I told him that if Eric fucks up, we’ll marry him.”

Burt raised a brow. “My teenage son is about to marry a doctor. I don’t need to think of him in a threesome.”

Bo smirked, but winced when Hope slugged his shoulder.

"Behave, Brady."

He pouted. “That’s no fun.”

Jennifer and Jack were the next to arrive, and while Jack was his usual effusive self, he shied away from Steve and Kayla. Some wounds would never truly heal. Melissa came next, Maggie accompanying her daughter to the table and then sitting down herself.

“How did this even happen?” Anna quietly wondered to Burt. “I thought it was just going to be you, me, Tony, Carrie, Kurt and Eric, and your wife.”

Burt shrugged. “Don’t ask me. I don’t know from big families, but … it’s nice, isn’t it?”

She nodded. “It is. Speaking of, where is Judy? I’m looking forward to meeting her.”

Burt looked away. “She should be here soon.”

Anna frowned. “Burt, what’s wrong?”

He said nothing and she realized he didn’t feel comfortable speaking in front of the others. That
was fine, she wouldn’t press, but would support him if needed.

“I cannot believe she brought him,” Carrie hissed. “What the hell?"

As one, the table looked up and stared as they were approached by a nervous Sami, a resigned Will, and a smug EJ DiMera.

An irate Tony stood and stalked toward them. “You have no business here, brother.”

“It’s a free country, Tony, and we are in public.”

Maggie stood, scowling. “This is my restaurant, EJ, and it is closed for a private party.”

EJ glared at her before forcing a smile. “As you wish, Mrs. Horton.”

“Mrs. Kiriakis,” she corrected.

That gave EJ pause. It wouldn’t do to antagonize the wife of one his father’s enemies.

“Why don’t you run along, Elvis,” John said from behind him. “We’ll make sure Sami gets back okay.”

Sami repressed a sigh of relief. She hadn’t wanted EJ to come, but he insisted and she couldn’t talk him out of it. She didn’t want to argue with him before meeting Eric and especially Carrie. She knew she had a tendency to take her bad moods out on them. She was so grateful to John, who was one of the few unafraid to tangle with the DiMeras.

“There’s no need to be rude, John. After all, you are practically my father-in-law.”

John grinned and leaned in toward him. “I’ve put up with you because, for whatever reason, Sami loves you. That, and because of your mother. I feel sorry for Susan. She deserves better.”

EJ flinched and straightened his shoulders. “Don’t you speak her name.”

“I’m not the one who hurt her. That was your father.” John nodded toward the door. “Get out.”

EJ glowered before making a great show of kissing Sami’s cheek and ruffling Will’s hair.

Marlena frowned when she noticed Will trying to shy away from his stepfather.

“I’ll see you at home Samantha, William.” He turned and noticed the others with them before leering at Sam. “Well, this must be the new branch of the Evans family. Welcome to Salem.”

Scott looked him up and down and sneered. “Who the hell are you?”

EJ bowed. “EJ DiMera. It’s a pleasure.”

“I wish I could say the same, but I can’t, considering your brother murdered my sister. Hey, he also murdered your sister, isn’t that right?”

EJ stalked from the restaurant.

“Well done,” Marlena said.

Scott nodded and turned toward Sam. “I don’t like the way he looked at you. Stay away from him, son. If you even see him coming toward you, run.”
“I’m not a kid, Dad.”

“Your age has nothing to do with it. His father has been obsessed with this family for years and has no qualms about hurting us to hurt Marlena. Stay away from him.”

“Your father’s right, Sam,” Marlena said. “Don’t draw their attention if you can avoid it.”

Sam gave a shaky nod and gathered Stevie and Stacy to him.

Carrie got up and walked to them, introducing herself to the kids after giving Sam a quick hug. She then set about introducing them to the others.

“Wow,” Stevie whispered. “You’re all my family?”

“We sure are, cutie,” Bo said, grabbing the little boy up and placing him on his knee. “Marlena is like a sister to me, and if you’re her cousin, that means you’re my cousin.”

Stevie frowned. “You’re too old to be my cousin. I don’t have any uncles, though. Can you be my uncle instead?”

Bo laughed. “Sounds good to me. This is my wife, your Aunt Hope. We have a little girl about your age. Her name’s Ciara. You can meet her later, if you want.”

“Girls are gross.”

“You’re just like your Uncle Bo was at your age,” Hope laughed.

“You mean awesome?”

She laughed harder, Bo joining in.

Stevie gasped and sat up straight. “Kurt’s here!”

Sam blinked. “I swear, he’s got a sixth sense where Kurt is concerned.”

Stevie launched himself off of Bo and ran toward the door, which just as soon opened as Kurt and Eric walked inside.

“Kurty! Kurty!”

Kurt beamed and swooped down to scoop Stevie up in a hug.

Stevie wrapped his little arms around Kurt and squeezed. “Bon après-midi, Kurt! Comment allez-vous aujourd'hui?”

Scott stared. “Uh, since when does my son speak French?”

“Since Kurt taught him,” Sam replied. “He’s teaching Stacy Spanish.”

Scott blinked and looked down at his daughter, who was smirking at him. “¿Estás bien, papá? Te ves pálido.”

“Damn,” Bo whispered. “How many languages does Kurt speak?”

“Six.”

Hope stared.
“Je suis bien, mon chéri,” Kurt said, cuddling Stevie close, “et comment allez-vous?”

“D’accord!”

Kurt kissed Stevie’s cheek and placed him down on the floor. Stevie looked up and glared at Eric.

“Kurt should be marrying me, not you. He’s Prince Charming!”

Kurt turned the color of a boiled lobster.

Eric raised a brow and crouched down. “Well, I certainly agree that Kurt is Prince Charming, and while I’m certain you’re one of the only few who deserves him, I can’t say I’m sorry that he accepted my proposal.”

Stevie narrowed his eyes and thought about the words. “Do you love him? Like, really love him?”

“I really, really do,” Eric said with great sincerity.

Stevie’s mouth pressed into a moue of concentration. “I guess you can marry Kurt, but if you ever hurt him, me and my brother and sister will have to kill you.”

“Stevie!” Sam shouted, as his father continued to stare and his mother had her head cradled in her hands.

Eric grinned. “I appreciate your honesty, Stevie. I’ll do everything I can to make Kurt happy.”

Stevie grunted and looked back at Kurt, putting his arms in the air. “Up, please.”

Kurt shook his head and rolled his eyes, but did as commanded. Stevie laid his head on Kurt’s shoulder and blinked innocently at everyone. Kurt began whispering in his ear and soon had Stevie giggling. After that, he walked over and shook Scott’s hand, kissed Savannah’s cheek, did the same with Stacy, and then hugged Sam.

“Everything okay?”

Sam nodded. “A little overwhelmed, but dealing.”

Kurt smiled. “I know exactly what you mean.”

“Are the girls coming?”

“They should be here soon. They caught a cab from campus.”

Kurt nodded and deposited a protesting Stevie back on the floor. Sami thought the entire situation was beyond adorable and was pleased Kurt liked and appeared good with children. Carrie had hearts in her eyes.

The Evans family, as well as John and Marlena, took seats at the other end of the table, while Kurt and Eric sat in the chairs Burt had reserved for them. Carrie quickly introduced Kurt to the few he hadn’t met the night prior.

To the surprise of everyone, Kurt and Steve Johnson got on like a house afire and were soon relentlessly flirting as Kayla laughed her ass off.

“Eric,” Kurt purred, “you never told me you had such sexy uncles.” He leered at Steve and then winked at Bo.
Eric stared at him in horror. “You can’t be serious!”

Maggie and Marlena were snickering at the end of the table.

Kurt pouted. “Uncle Bo told me if you weren’t nice to me, he and Aunt Hope would marry me.”

“What!”

“Yeah,” Bo said, “so there.”

“What is happening?” Eric demanded.

“You brought home Choice Cuts, nephew,” Steve said. “Can’t blame us for wanting a taste.”

“While I appreciate the Macho Men showing their acceptance, no matter how obscene,” Burt drawled, “I would like it if men my own age refrained from making salacious comments about my son.”

Steve smirked. “He was pretty salacious himself.”

Burt sighed and rolled his eyes. “Santana’s influence.”

Kurt’s eyes sparkled. “Speaking of, I hear her dulcet tones.”

Burt groaned. “Lord, save us.”

Santana stormed into the restaurant and made a beeline for Kurt, dragging Brittany with her.

“Some prick in a cheap convertible just tried to proposition Brittany!” she bellowed. “When I spit on his car and ridiculed his obviously small penis, he asked how much for the both of us!”

“And what did you do?” Kurt calmly asked.

“What do you mean what did I do?” she exploded. “I ripped off his rear bumper and threw it down an alley!”

Complete silence descended.

“I like that girl,” said Burt, Bo, Steve, John, Scott, and Sami.

Stacy, who had long ago accepted Santana Lopez as her Lord and Personal Savior, stared at her in awe.

Stevie tugged on Brittany’s arm. “Boys have penises and girls have vaginas.”

“You’re so smart!” she praised. “Maybe one day you’ll have a large penis like Sam and Kurt.”

Sam slammed his head down on the table and mumbled nonsensical inanities.

Eric slowly turned toward his fiancé.

“Brittany,” Kurt sighed as he looked up at the ceiling, “how many times have I told you to stay out of the locker room?”

“Bunches! But you know I get lost in the hallways, Kurty, that’s why I go to the locker room to find you. You’re my Seeing-Eye Dolphin!”
Stevie nodded sagely. “Dolphins are just gay sharks.”

Brittany beamed. "My legacy continues!"

Carrie was howling and holding on to Burt’s arm to keep herself upright. Tony observed the spectacle with utter fascination. Jack was fairly certain he was hallucinating all of this and only dimly registered Jennifer lapsing into hysterics. Marlena and Maggie continued their snickering as Scott and Savannah just shook their heads at their children’s antics. Anna just wanted more champagne.

“We could have sold tickets to this lunch,” Hope said to Melissa, who nodded. Kim and Kayla laughed.

“Nathan will regret missing this.”

“I think most of the town will regret missing this.”

Kurt felt a pair of arms wrap around him. He sighed and sank into the back of his chair.

“Hey,” Quinn murmured, kissing his cheek. “How’s everything going?”

“A little too well,” Kurt said. “I have a feeling the other shoe is about to drop.”

And it did.

The door to the restaurant opened and Burt was suddenly on his feet, rushing to the entrance. The others continued to talk amongst themselves, knowing he was expecting his wife.

What they didn’t expect was to know her. Chatter slowly died.

Quinn frowned and narrowed her eyes, wondering what the problem was.

Burt escorted Judy to the table, her tight grip on his arm almost cutting off his circulation. She looked lovely, dressed in an ice blue skirt suit and matching heels. Her only adornments were gold studs in her ears and her diamond wedding set. Large dark sunglasses covered half her face, her long blond hair falling in waves halfway down her back.

Kurt beamed, stood up and, with Quinn in hand, raced forward to greet her. She embraced her children, though neither understood the despair that underscored it.

“Oh, my god,” Jennifer whispered.

Jack gaped.

“Is this happening?” Melissa demanded of no one in particular.

A shocked Shane Donovan rose on shaky legs, his wife Kimberly Brady clutching his arm. He left the table and walked forward, finally coming to stand before Kurt’s stepmother.

“Mom, what's going on?” asked a very confused Quinn.

Shane turned wide eyes on her before looking back to the newest arrival.

“Eve?” he whispered.

Judy swallowed heavily and pushed her sunglasses up to the top of her head.
“Hi, Daddy.”

Chapter End Notes

This story began germinating in my mind during Season One of *Glee*, when I saw Charlotte Ross as Judy Fabray. I was a big fan of her work as Eve on *Days* (she was screwed out of two Emmys) and I thought to myself: what if Judy is really Eve? And then the rest fell into place.

Some casting notices:

Eric Brady is played by Jensen Ackles
Roman Brady is played by Wayne Northrup
Shawn-Douglas Brady is played by Jason Cook
Belle Black-Brady is played by Kirsten Storms
Will Horton is played by Chandler Massey

As for Sam's parents, my fantasy casting would be Timothy Adams (ex-Casey, *Sunset Beach*) as Scott Evans and Schae Harrison (ex-Darla, *The Bold and the Beautiful*) as Savannah.
Judy stood at the foot of the table, keeping her eyes on her father and ignoring the hushed whispers buzzing about her like mosquitoes.

The majority of those present were nothing to her, merely people she had known once upon a time. Those who hated her, perhaps legitimately, knew only the angry, volatile teenager she had been, but she left that girl behind when she left Salem. Their opinions were irrelevant.

That just left her family, if they would even still acknowledge her as such.

Shane was stuck in a stupor, unable even to contemplate anything beyond the fact his daughter was standing before him.

Kimberly stepped in front of him and looked into her eyes. Judy almost winced at the maelstrom of emotions swirling across her stepmother’s face, but Kimberly remained silent. Judy wished the woman would just start berating her and get it over with. She knew she had this coming. After twenty years, she was strong enough to accept Kimberly’s righteous anger.

That’s why she was so stunned when Kim simply grabbed her and pulled her into her arms.

Judy frowned in confusion. What was happening here?

But for Kimberly, her relationship with Eve had never been clearer than in this moment. This woman was her husband’s daughter, kept from him by a vindictive woman who cared more for a lover than she did her child. She had then abandoned that child to fend for herself, leaving her to an existence no one should ever be made to endure.

That was a lifetime ago. Now Eve was a woman, a mother in her own right, and all of the horrible things that had happened were no longer so important. Kimberly knew how terribly Shane missed his little girl, how long and hard he had searched for her, how often he feared she was dead and buried in some nameless potter’s field.

Eve was alive. She was here with children of her own. Nothing else really mattered.

“Welcome back,” Kimberly whispered.

Judy’s breath caught in her throat. She appreciated the words, but more important the meaning behind them. Kimberly hadn’t said welcome home, for she knew Salem had never been a home to Eve Donovan. No, welcome back had an entirely different connotation.

Welcome back to your family. We’ve been waiting for you.

Suddenly a horrible sound was torn from Judy’s throat. A low, raw keening accompanied by tears she hadn’t allowed herself to shed publicly in years.

“Oh, Eve,” Shane murmured, grabbing both of them and resting his chin atop his daughter’s head. “Where have you been? Why didn’t you call me? Years! I’ve spent years searching for you!”

“What the hell is going on?” Jennifer barked, jumping to her feet.

Burt turned and glared. “Simmer down, Salem Barbie!” he snapped. “My wife’s been waiting a lot of years for this and I won’t have you spoiling it.”
Shane snapped his head toward him. Never would he have pictured his daughter with this man, but it was obvious from their soft looks and tender touches just how much they loved each other. He didn’t know what Eve had been through, most likely terrible things, but she had found the love for which she had once been so desperately seeking.

Jennifer gave an owlish blink and said nothing as Jack pulled her back down into her seat.

Shane breathed harshly. “Your wife,” he repeated.

Burt gave a gruff nod.

“Did you know you were married to my daughter?”

“I knew your name.”

Shane’s complexion turned florid. “So you knew yesterday in the Pub who I was, yet you couldn’t be bothered to pull me aside and say, Hey! Your daughter sends her regards!”

Burt just grunted. “Not my call.”

Shane narrowed his eyes, suspecting there was a lot more going on here than he realized, but he had to respect the man for respecting her daughter.

“Mom?” whispered a frightened Quinn, a terrible confusion in her eyes. “Mom, what’s happening?”

Judy sighed and pulled away from her parents before withdrawing a handkerchief and dabbing her eyes. “Oh, baby,” she warbled, “I’m so sorry I’ve had to hide so much from you. Please know I never wanted to keep secrets. I only wanted to keep you safe.”


Judy gave him a sad smile and patted his cheek. “Oh, honey. You’re always trying to protect your girls, aren’t you?”

“You’re my family,” Kurt said quietly. “You’re my mom.”

Judy’s breath hitched as her tears spilled over.

Burt had to look away. His sweet, remarkable boy. Christ, what the hell had he ever done to deserve such a son?

Quinn turned toward her brother, eyes huge. Kurt had never called her mother that before and no one believed he ever would. His mourning for his own mother was still a raw thing. Yet she believed him. Kurt Hummel never said anything he didn’t mean. And this? This meant the world.

Shane stared at them. “My grandchildren. I have grandchildren.”

Judy smiled through her tears and nodded. “You do. I have another daughter, Emily. She’s Quinn’s elder sister and is studying at Berkeley.”

Shane was gob-smacked. Three grandchildren. He had three grandchildren, two of whom were roughly the same age as his children with Kimberly.

An anxious Kimberly cleared her throat. “Eve …”

“Judy,” she said abruptly. “My name is Judy Hummel. I haven’t been Eve Donovan in over
twenty years, Kim, and have no plans to resurrect her now.”

“Thank god for small favors,” Jennifer muttered.

Judy rolled her eyes. “Good grief, Jennifer, let it go! Yes, I was horrible to you and, for that, I am truly sorry. I have no excuses to offer other than that I was young and stupid with no self-control. If I could go back in time and change my behavior, I would, but I’m not Doctor Who. All I can do is apologize. I don’t expect nor will I ask for your forgiveness.”

“Good!”

Eric dropped his napkin on his plate and stood. “Allow me to walk you to your car, Jen,” he said smoothly.

She stared at him in disbelief. “You’re throwing me out?”

“I’ve known you my entire life, Jennifer, but you’re not my family.” He pointed at Judy. “She is. She’s going to be my mother-in-law, so it’s not even a choice. Family always comes first.”

Marlena gave her son a nod of approval. She loved Jennifer dearly, but her tiffs with Eve all those years ago were nothing to what she had endured before and since. Why was she behaving like such a child?

Shane realized that this man, his nephew, was also going to be his … grandson-in-law? All of a sudden he became much more aware of the age difference between Kurt and Eric. It didn’t sit well.

“Stow it, Gramps,” Quinn hissed. “Interfere with my brother’s happiness and I’ll come for you. I promise you won’t see it coming.”

He startled and regarded her with a cool look. He had spent almost forty years in law enforcement and this little girl, granddaughter or not, would not unseat him.

Still … the look in her eyes suggested she was far more dangerous than Eve had ever been.

“Eric,” Judy said softly, “you don’t have to do this. Not for me.”

“Family,” he repeated, “and it wouldn’t be just for you, but for Kurt, Quinn, and Burt.”

Burt looked at him with respect.

“Eric’s right,” Hope said flatly. “If you can’t get yourself under control, Jennifer, then it’s best you just leave.”

“You’re supposed to be my cousin, Hope!”

Hope raised a brow. “And Eric is my nephew. Soon Kurt will be as well. They’re family, too.”

“What did we say back at Grandma’s house, Jen?” Melissa quietly interrupted. “We do for family.”

Jennifer gaped.

“Don’t forget I have my own history with, er, Judy,” Melissa continued, “but that was literally a lifetime ago. She’s obviously grown up and I know I certainly have. Leave it in the past where it belongs.”
Jennifer curled her lip.

Jack stood and placed his napkin on the table. “I think Hope and Melissa are right, Jennifer. It’s best we leave before things are said that can’t be taken back.”

She was outraged. “Are you serious? That’s Eve Donovan! You know what she did, Jack!” She turned. “What? Because you’re a wife and mother now, you’re suddenly a different person? Do they even have any idea of what you did?” Her lips turned up into a vicious smirk. “Do they know …”

“Jennifer!” Jack bellowed, kicking his chair out from behind him and sending it crashing into the wall. “If you complete that sentence, I will have Carrie filing divorce papers before the courts close!”

“I won’t even bill you for it,” Carrie murmured.

“Are you insane?” Jennifer screeched at her husband. “What the hell is wrong with you, Jack?!”

“Pull yourself together!” he snapped. “Look at where you are! Remember why we’re here!”

Jennifer blinked. She then became aware of the frigid looks Eric and Kimberly were giving her. Kurt was glaring at her with utter contempt as he held his sobbing sister in his arms.

She deflated.

These were children. These were Eve’s children and all they knew was someone was attacking their mother.

Humiliated, Jennifer grabbed her purse and ran out of the restaurant. Jack followed, stopping briefly to apologize.

“It’s unnecessary, Jack,” Judy whispered. “I had that coming.”

He shook his head. “It was more than twenty years ago. We’re not the same people we were then.” He gave Kayla a pained look, shame causing his face to flush. “Thank god.”

He quickly left.

Kimberly put her hand on Judy’s arm. “Honey, where have you been? Why did you stay away?”

“I thought you were dead,” Shane said dully. “I had given up hope.”

Burt nudged his wife’s shoulder. “Tell them. They deserve an explanation.”

“Perhaps we should all go,” Marlena said, standing up.

“You don’t have to do that, Dr. Evans,” Judy said, “though I appreciate it. It’s going to come out sooner or later, and I’d rather people hear the story from me.”

Marlena gave her a kind nod and retook her seat.

“Judy,” Savannah said, “we’re here for you, sweetie, no matter what it is.”

Scott nodded.

Judy gave her best friend a grateful smile before turning toward her daughter. “Baby, I’m going to tell you everything, all right? But I need you to prepare yourself, because it won’t be pretty.
You’re going to hear things you’ll wish you never heard and I am so, so sorry for that.”

She bit her lip. “And you’re going to know things about me no daughter should know about her mother.” She sighed. “But that can’t be helped. All I ask is that you listen to what I have to say. Then … well, we’ll take the rest as it comes.”

“Who are you?” Quinn whispered.

“She’s our mother,” Kurt said firmly, “and that’s all that matters.”

Quinn looked at him and searched his eyes for what felt like minutes. “You’re right.”

“Boy’s got a good head on his shoulders,” Steve murmured to Kayla, who nodded.

Scott stood and shepherded Stacy and Stevie to him. “I think we could use some ice cream, kids. What do you say?”

They stared blankly at him.

Savannah made to stand, but Scott pushed her shoulder and shook his head. “Stay with Judy. I don’t know what’s happening, but she needs her best friend.”

Savannah nodded and kissed her younger children before Scott took them outside.

Burt escorted Judy to the nearest chair and deposited her into it, standing at her side like a guard.

“Mom,” Kurt said, “whatever it is, you can tell us. It’s going to be okay.”

Judy released a shaky laugh. “Oh, sweetie, I don’t know about that.”

“I do,” Quinn said firmly. “I don’t know Eve Donovan, but I know my mother. And I love her.”

Judy sighed. “Eve … Eve was not a good person, honey. She did horrible things to a great many people, particularly her father and stepmother.”

“You said it yourself. You’re not Eve.” Quinn smirked. “And don’t forget to whom you’re speaking. Remember my sophomore year?”

Judy gave her a pained smile and swallowed heavily. “I’ve tried very hard these past years not to be her. I’ve never forgotten the things she did, but I have tried to make up for them.”

“Sweetheart,” Shane said, “all that matters is that you’re home.”

“Salem is not my home, Daddy, and it never was. The best thing I ever did for myself, for you and Kim, was to leave and not look back. The only reason I’m here now is because of what Burt told me last night.” She turned to Kurt. “Are you okay?”

“I will be,” he said.

She nodded, though it was obvious she didn’t totally believe him. She then looked to Sam. “And you, baby?”

Sam gave her a weak smile. “I’m dealing, Aunt Judy.”

She nodded and closed her eyes. When she opened them, she looked at her father. “There were people after me, Daddy. Horrible, dangerous people who wanted me dead.”
“Who?” he barked. “Honey, why didn’t you come to me? I could have protected you. For god’s sake I’m an ISA agent! I could have …”

“They threatened Andrew and Jeannie.”

Shane abruptly shut up as Kimberly blanched.

Judy looked at her, tears rolling down her cheeks. “I took one baby from you, Kim.” She shook her head. “Never again. I refused to let you lose another child because of me.”

Kimberly crouched down and took Judy’s hands in hers. “That was not your fault,” she insisted. “I never blamed you.”

“You should have,” Judy spat. “If I hadn’t called you that night …”

“Then you would be dead,” Kim interrupted. “You would be dead and wouldn’t have this wonderful man and these beautiful children.” She shook her head and quickly wiped her tears. “Who are these people, the ones you mentioned? Why are they after you?”

“Nick,” Judy whispered after a long silence.

“Corelli,” Shane hissed. “That man has been dead for over twenty years and he is still interfering in my family.”

“It wasn’t Nick. It’s what he knew.”

“Who’s Nick Corelli?” Quinn asked.

Judy closed her eyes again and slowly exhaled. “Nick was my … he was my … pimp.”

Quinn was stunned to silence, so pale that Marlena was immediately at her side, pouring her a glass of water and insisting she drink it. Quinn took it with a shaky hand and promptly dropped it.

“Oh, Mom,” Kurt whispered, tears streaking down his face, “I’m so sorry.”

Judy stared at him.

“How dare you?” Quinn seethed.

“Shut up and think!” Kurt barked. “Stop reacting and use the brain I know you have! Do the
math! Mom would have been younger than we are now when this all happened. She was younger than you when you were pregnant with Beth! Tell me, Quinn, has there ever been a moment in your life where you woke up and thought, *Hey, I think I’ll become a teenage prostitute today! It must be such a glamorous and rewarding life!*

Santana couldn't help but snort. Kurt's quip was not only clever but correct. Obviously Mrs. H hadn't wanted to hook. What girl in her right mind did? It must have been horrible. All that mattered was she had gotten out and pulled herself up.

Quinn opened her mouth in fury, but thankfully his words connected before she could argue them. She slowly turned to her mother, eyes filled with tears.

“You were younger than me,” she whispered.

A tearful Judy nodded.

Tears slipped down Quinn’s cheeks. “It wasn’t your choice, was it?”

Despite already knowing the answer, she began sobbing when her mother quietly confirmed it.

Sam was out of his chair and next to Judy in a moment.

“I’m so sorry that happened to you, Aunt Judy,” he murmured, squeezing her shoulder. “It wasn’t your fault.”

“It wasn’t,” an angry Savannah insisted, eyes all but shooting sparks. “You were a child, Judy, and what was done to you is shameful. And criminal. Don’t you dare take on that responsibility!”

Judy stared at them in turn, eyes filled with disbelief that they not only didn’t blame her, but actually supported her. She put her hand over her mouth, squeezed shut her eyes, and sobbed.

Her father was soon on his knees before her, taking her hands in his. “They’re absolutely right, my darling. It was not your fault, and how ashamed am I that I didn’t do more to help you.”

“Judy,” Kimberly said, “you would be hard-pressed to find anyone at this table, other than the children, without skeletons in their closet.”

“You’d be surprised,” Quinn said. “My sophomore year in high school, I slept with my boyfriend’s best friend, got pregnant, lied about the paternity, and then gave my baby up for adoption. That crushed her father and he’s never really recovered from it.” She looked down. “I doubt he ever will, even though we both know it was the right decision.”

“Oh, sweetheart,” Judy sighed, “the only reason I didn’t stop you when you left the house was because, had you stayed, I believed your father would have hurt both you and the baby.”

“Like he hurt you?” Quinn whispered.

“What?” Kurt barked, staring at her before turning toward their mother. “What!”

“Kurt!” Burt thundered, pointing at his son. He knew it would only take one call from him to Katrine or Helena. “Promise me you will leave Russell Fabray alone.”

Kurt was so enraged he was physically unable to speak, his eyes wild and face flushed. He caught a slight movement from the side and locked eyes with Shane, who gave him a smirk so fleeting a lesser mortal might have missed it.
It was enough.

“Fine,” he spat.

Shane smirked again and offered a slight nod.

“Your word,” Burt demanded.

Kurt crossed his arms and huffed. “I promise,” he ground out. “I won’t do anything.”

Thankfully his father was too emotional to notice no one else made any such oath.

He looked at his mother. “What did this Corelli person know?”

Judy released a slow breath. “Nick was part a part of an organization who trafficked girl from Europe into the States. After he died, I found his ledgers. They were very detailed.”

Shane sighed. “And his superiors learned of your discovery.”

She nodded. “They almost killed me, which is why I left Salem so suddenly, not that there was anything here for me.” She took a deep breath. “I went to the Department of Justice and turned over what I had. They then put me into WITSEC and gave me a new identity.”

“Did Russell know?” Quinn asked.

“Yes. He was a member, too. He was involved in organized crime, doing accounting, and turned state’s evidence to avoid a prison sentence.”

“Well, let me put on my big surprise face!”

Judy gave a rueful chuckle. “Believe me, sweetie, he wasn’t my first choice, but I got you and your sister out of it. In the end, that made everything else bearable.”

Quinn’s breath hitched. “Have you ever been happy?”

“Oh, baby, of course. I was thrilled when I had Emily and then you.” She took her husband’s hand. “Now I have your father and brother. I’m the happiest I’ve ever been in my life.”

She smiled. “And the danger has passed. Those involved with the trafficking ring were sentenced right about the time you found out you were pregnant with Beth. I was free. I no longer had to stay in a loveless marriage to protect my children.”

Quinn felt so incredibly guilty for everything her mother had sacrificed.

“I would do it again in heartbeat,” Judy insisted, sensing her daughter’s feelings. “You and Emily are everything to me, Quinnie. No matter what I felt about Russell, he gave me the two of you and I will always be grateful to him for that.

“Once everything was settled, I was finally able to kick him out of the house. His affair was just the poisonous icing on a rotten cake. I know you’ve wondered, though you’ve never asked, but I don’t know where he is. I don’t care. My handler somehow convinced him to sign the adoption papers. For once, Russell did the right thing, giving you the father you deserve.”

Quinn nodded, a sad smile on her face. “He never loved us, did he? Not really.”

“Oh, baby, I think he did. I really do. He just didn’t know how to express it. Don’t let him interfere with our happiness. He’s not worth it.”
Sami stared down at the table, very much aware this could have been her life. She had made so many mistakes, so many wrong choices, and she knew how lucky she was that her family continued to put up with her. She hadn’t yet made complete peace with her past, but she was getting there and, now, more than ever, she was realizing how worth it would be.

Hope and Melissa were listening very carefully so that they might relay this conversation to Jennifer later. They had both known Eve Donovan well, and this woman was not Eve. She had suffered more than they had ever realized and had long since paid for her sins. She was now simply a wife and mother, and obviously reveled in it.

Judy delicately cleared her throat. “Melissa, Hope, I am so very sorry about Mrs. Horton. She …” Her breath caught. “She was so kind to me, so lovely, especially considering I didn’t deserve her generosity. I know how close you both and Jennifer were to her. When I heard the news, I could only imagine your pain. You have my sincerest condolences.”

“Thank you, Judy,” Hope said warmly. “Knowing how many people loved and respected Gran is her greatest legacy. She would have been very proud of what you’ve accomplished.”

Judy looked at her with startled eyes.

Melissa nodded. “It’s true. So many people believe themselves undeserving of Grandma’s kindness, but if she hadn’t seen beneath the surface to the person you truly are, she would never have bothered.”

Maggie smiled, warmed by her daughter’s graciousness.

“Thank you,” Judy whispered.

Kimberly looked fondly at Kurt and Quinn. “You did well for yourself, Judy. Very well.”

Judy smiled through her tears. “I know.”

Three hours later and five hours away to the east, the glee club of McKinley High School were about to adjourn their meeting, though very little singing had been involved.

“I can’t believe that skinny white boy hasn’t returned my calls or texts!” an outraged Mercedes howled, throwing herself roughly into her chair. “What the hell?”

Tina rolled her eyes. She and Artie had been Kurt’s best friends for years, since kindergarten, and though that had somewhat fallen away when they began dating, they still thought they knew Kurt better than anyone else. His best friends might now be his sister and Sam, as well as Brittany and Santana, but they knew Kurt held a very special place in his heart for them.

“Did you ever think,” she said pointedly to the loud girl, “that Kurt and his diagnosis are not about you? That maybe he wants to celebrate his good news with his family? Seriously, what’s your problem?”

“Word,” Artie grunted, glaring at Mercedes. “Isn’t it more important that he’s still in remission?”

Mercedes heaved a dramatic sigh.

“Well, of course it is,” Rachel said primly, “but that’s no reason to be discourteous. I’m very disappointed in Kurt. I thought he had better manners.”
“You are fucking unbelievable, Berry,” said an astonished Puck. “The Princess has better things to do than update you on his every thought and feeling.”

“He’s my best friend!” she protested.

Everyone rolled their eyes.

Finn just stared, wondering what the hell he had ever seen in her. He had always known she was self-centered, but for her to turn Kurt’s successful treatment into yet another diva moment was just obnoxious.

He once again kicked himself for letting Kurt slip through his fingers. He had loved him so much, wanted him so badly, but he had thrown it all away because of fear. He had been terrified the cancer would take Kurt from him, and rather than dealing with his fear, he had instead allowed it to rule him. And it had cost him dearly.

Then Sam had just swooped right in.

He clenched his teeth, wanting to kick his own ass. He had all but physically put Kurt into Sam’s arms so they could ride off into the sunset together. He knew how desperately Sam was in love with Kurt and, though they weren’t yet together, Finn suspected it was only a matter of time.

He was somewhat comforted by the fact that at least Sam was worthy of Kurt. He was perhaps the only guy who was.

“I just wish he were here,” Puck said quietly. “It’s not right he wasn’t with us at Nationals. He helped start this club. He should’ve been there.”

Artie and Tina exchanged a look.

“Um,” she began nervously, “actually, Kurt is gone.”

“What do you mean?” Finn demanded.

“He’s not coming back,” Artie said with demented glee. “He conferenced in me and Tee last night after he got his test results and Quinn texted everyone. The original plan was for her to turn in his assignments, but he spoke with Miss Pillsbury, and she coordinated with the other teachers. Kurt’s allowed to send in his work electronically and will be mailed his diploma. He only has two papers left anyway and I’m taking notes for both of them. Kurt’s staying in Salem.”


Artie shrugged. “He didn’t really get into it, but it was pretty obvious there was something going on. I think it’s major. He was so happy I’d be surprised if he wasn’t high.”

Tina giggled.

“What about finals?” asked a concerned Will.

She shrugged. “If a senior has an A average, they’re exempt from the class final. Kurt has straight As. Besides, he received early decision at Salem University and will probably start summer classes in a few weeks.”

“I thought Brown was his dream,” Finn murmured. Jesus, he didn't know anything about Kurt anymore, and it was his own damn fault.
“He got in to Brown,” Artie said, “but SU offered him a full ride. Sam, Brittany, Santana, and Quinn will also be going.”

Mercedes stared and curled a lip. “So … what? We’re not going to see him? He’s just going to ditch us?”

“If you want to see him so badly, drive to Salem,” Tina spat. “It’s not that far. Artie and I are going after graduation.”

“Why are you so pressed anyway,” Finn asked Mercedes. “You never even visited him in the hospital!”

“Neither did you!” she shrieked.

“I went,” he said stiffly. “He didn’t want to see me, and I sure as hell don’t blame him, but at least I tried.”

Mercedes couldn’t think of a comeback to that and fell silent. “I didn’t think he would make it,” she finally whispered, tears in her eyes. “He looked … I couldn’t say goodbye.”

“And what about when he went into remission and came back to school?” Tina barked. “Where was your concern then? You avoided him at all costs. It’s not like you can catch cancer, Jones!”

Mercedes flushed and looked down. “I was ashamed.”

“Good. You should have been. You still should be.”

“Tina,” Will warned.

She laughed. “Yeah. You would defend her over Kurt, just like you’ve always chosen everyone over him.”

“I … I … what?”

She glared. “The only reason he didn’t quit this club was because he knew we needed him to compete. It wasn’t as though he owed anyone anything and he long ago accepted you were never going to give him the spotlight he deserved and had earned.”

She smirked. “And just so you know, he is the only reason Artie and I stayed. He’s the only reason the Gleerios and Sam didn’t bounce as well. He’s the one who convinced Sugar to step in for him at Nationals this year so we could qualify.”

Will flushed and looked down.

A pregnant silence descended only to be broken when every phone began trilling. Most of them ignored it, too caught up in how much this year had been nothing like they expected.

“Holy shit!” Artie bellowed as he stared down at his phone. “Kurt’s getting married!”

“What!” Rachel and Mercedes screamed.

Artie grinned and fidgeted in his chair. “Facebook announcement. Kurt Hummel is engaged to Eric Brady.”

“Who the fuck is that?” Puck demanded, pulling out his own phone as everyone quickly followed.

They were immediately met with the status update and a picture of two hands, one laid slightly
atop the other and featuring two beautiful titanium bands. A ruby was centered in the band on the smaller hand, while an aquamarine adored the other.

“Dr. Brady is Kurt’s oncologist,” said a giddy Tina, “and he is one delicious hunk of man!” She smirked with satisfaction. “I thought I sensed some vibes, but wasn’t totally sure.”

“His doctor?” Rachel exclaimed. “Then he’s way too old for Kurt! That's highly inappropriate! Is this even legal? What did Mr. Hummel say? I can’t even believe this is happening!”

“Damn,” Puck moaned. “If the Duchess hadn’t already made my dick twitch for guys, this dude sure as hell would have. Look at him!”

“Kurt’s marrying Dean Winchester?” Finn gasped, staring at the picture.

Will discreetly looked over Finn’s shoulder and gaped. “Well, they certainly make a very attractive couple.”

“Attractive?” Tina laughed. “It’s like porn come to life!” A dreamy smile fixed itself on her face. “I wonder if I can stalk them on their honeymoon?”

“Pics,” Artie demanded, “because nobody is that straight.”

She nodded.

“This … this man is too old!” Rachel insisted. “Why can’t he find a man his own age? What could he possibly see in Kurt?”

Mercedes slowly stood. “Bitch, I’ve waited four years to cut you and you know what? It was worth it, because I am going to kick your ass.”

Rachel’s eyes widened in alarm. “I didn’t mean it that way! You have to acknowledge the age difference! He’s ten years older and a doctor!” Her eyes narrowed. “He’s probably after Kurt’s money.”

“Not everyone is like you,” Finn said dismissively.

Her stare was incredulous but went ignored.

“There’s more pictures,” Puck said. “Must have been a party or something. Here’s one of Kurt, Quinn, and their parents. Hot Doctor is with them in the next one. Hummel Senior sure doesn’t looked like he has a problem with Doctor Feelgood.”

He continued to scroll and looked appreciatively at a picture of Kurt and Sam with their arms thrown over each other’s shoulders, cheesing for the camera. He wondered how hard it would have been to have talked them into a threesome.

He blinked owlishly at the caption.

Who knew? Sam and I are actually cousins!

“Cousins!” Finn said. “That’s probably why they never got together.”

Artie shook his head. “Looks like they just found out. Look at the next picture.”

Sam with his parents, Scott and Savannah, his brother and sister, Stacy and Stevie, and their cousins Dr. Marlena Evans, Dr. Eric Brady, Sami Brady DiMera, and Will Horton.
Puck stared at Will Horton. Now there was a hot piece. He wouldn’t at all mind getting up on that. He smirked. Good thing he had also been accepted at Salem.

“DiMera?” Artie softly repeated, the name niggling at his consciousness.

Mom, her father Shane Donovan, and her stepmother Kimberly Brady Donovan.

“He’s calling her mom,” Mercedes said quietly, a gentle smile on her face. “I’m so happy for him.”

Tina and Artie sniffled. They knew how difficult it must have been for Kurt. If he was now addressing Judy as his mother, he must have really meant it.

Eric Brady, my heart and the love of my life, his twin sister Sami, and our sister Carrie.

“He really is in love,” Rachel murmured.

Finn felt tears threatening, and though he tried to blink them back, it was in vain. That could have been him. He could be marrying Kurt right now if he hadn’t been such a spineless douche.

Me, Eric, and his parents, Dr. Marlena Evans and John Black.

“Now that is a Grade-A MILF,” Puck said appreciatively. “Look at that chick! Damn!”

“Why do you always have to be so vulgar?” Mike barked.

He shrugged. “Saves time.” He then frowned. “When did you get here?”

Mike just grunted and shook his head. Even though he and Tina were together, ever since Matt had left, Mike felt like he was mostly invisible.

“Wait,” Finn said, frowning, “if Kurt and Sam are cousins, and Sam and the doctor are cousins, doesn’t that mean Kurt’s marrying his cousin?”

They looked up and stared blankly at each other.

“Probably by a very distant degree,” Will suggested. “I doubt a doctor would marry a close relative. Most people are distantly related in some manner or another.”

They nodded. It made sense.

“No way!” Mercedes screeched.

They quickly returned to their phones.

I’m so incredibly lucky to have not one, but three mothers. Mom has been gone for so many years and, though I still feel her with me every single day, I am fortunate to have two other amazing women in my life: my new mother, Judy, and this fabulous woman, Anna DiMera. She has long been my fashion idol, but I learned only yesterday she is so much more than that. She was my mother’s best friend during boarding school. When she learned Mom couldn’t carry a pregnancy to term, Anna performed the most selfless act I can imagine: she carried me for Mom.

Thus, ladies and gentlemen, I present the first family portrait of my mother Anna DiMera, her daughter, Carrie Brady, whom I now consider my sister, and myself. Admittedly, it’s somewhat strange, as Carrie is also Eric’s sister.

No, we’re not really all related. Eric and Sami are the children of Marlena Evans and Roman
Brady. Carrie is the daughter of Anna and Roman. Yes, Eric and I are very, very distantly related; so are me and Sam. It’s all very complicated, but it’s not incestuous. I suppose I’ll have to draw up a family tree to prove it, LOL!

“He’s making jokes?” Rachel seethed. “It’s not funny! It’s … it’s gross!”

“What the hell, Rachel?” Finn asked. “It’s not gross, it’s their family. Do you know how much Kurt has always wanted a big family? You should understand that; we all should. Now he finally has one and he’s happy! Why does that bother you so much?”

Tina arched a brow. “Good question.”

Rachel offered a defensive huff and said nothing.

*My very gorgeous and sexy new aunt and uncle, Detective Hope Brady and Captain Bo Brady. They told me if Eric screws up, they’ll marry me! At last, my awesome is recognized!*

“Wow,” Artie murmured, “she really is gorgeous.”

Puck nodded. “What kind of family is this? It’s not normal for everyone to be so hot!”

*My other new aunt and uncle, Dr. Kayla Brady Johnson and her husband Steve. Beauty runs in this family. It’s only right I will now be a part of it! ;)*

*Stay tuned for future developments! The engagement party will be held later this month at the estate of my wonderful great-godfather, Victor Kiriakis.*

*xoxo*
The Honesty's Too Much

Chapter Notes

Wow! I've now published over 1.5 million words on AO3! Thanks to everyone who has read and recommended my stories! I love your comments, so, please, keep them coming!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Olivia Pope was sitting in her Georgetown apartment, nibbling on popcorn and silently praising the vintner of the gorgeous bottle of wine she was worshiping. She cycled through the news stations, determined there was nothing that required her immediate attention, and then settled on The Bachelor, cursing reality television and herself for watching it.

She rolled her eyes when her phone began ringing, yet couldn’t stop herself from glancing at the screen. Fitz again. She gave him credit for his persistence, but raged he refused to do ask she asked and leave her alone. It was past time for her to reassess whatever it was they had. She couldn’t even define what it was. Was she his lover? His mistress? His home?

What possible future could she expect with a man who wouldn’t leave his wife? No matter how much Fitz and Mellie despised each other, they were also incapable of cutting the strings. The only one being strung along was Olivia herself and she knew she deserved better. If a friend or client were in a similar situation, she would advise them to cut all ties and run for their sanity.

He didn’t leave a message because of course.

She sighed and pulled up her Facebook.

“The hell?”

Over one hundred new notifications? How in the name of cabernet was that even possible? She had just checked an hour ago! In spite of her better judgment, she pressed the red flag and scrolled down.

Kurt Hummel is engaged to Eric Brady.

She stared for a moment and then burst out laughing. Obviously this was Kurt’s precious idea of a prank and people had fallen for it. He must have been giddy after learning his cancer was still in remission and posted he was marrying his doctor as some kind of joke.

If this were true, he would have told her over the phone rather than in such an impersonal manner. Unless, of course, he was afraid of what she would say. Kurt did try to avoid conflict whenever possible.

She saw the picture of the joined hands and spit out her red wine. All over her white angora sweater. She was absolutely sending him the dry cleaning bill before she strangled him.

She couldn’t even process the idea of her little godson getting married, still trying a day later to reconcile everything Stefano DiMera had done to Kurt and his family, and instead began thumbing through the pictures. She narrowed her eyes in confusion at the first one.
Kurt was marrying Dean Winchester?

She quickly sat up and looked around, just to make sure no one overheard her silent admission that she was a *Supernatural* junky, though she was firmly on Team Sam; specifically Sam and Castiel, or Sassy, because *pretty*.

What in the world was a grown man doing with a teenager? She curled a lip. If Brady had been in any way inappropriate with Kurt during the course of his treatment, she would slit his throat, dissolve his body with lime, and use the remains to fertilize the White House Rose Garden.

Eric Brady was certainly a beautiful man, no one could say otherwise, and, yes, Kurt was gorgeous, but he was *so young*. At least chronologically. In terms of life experience and pain, he was ancient.

She looked down at her godson’s face and gently stroked the screen, tears filling her eyes.

“Oh, baby,” she whispered, “you’ve fought so long for so hard. You just want some happiness, don’t you? You’ve goddamned earned it.”

She closed her eyes and sighed. She knew if she did anything but support this union, no matter how ill-advised it was, Kurt would just shut her down before shutting her out. She couldn’t bear that. He was as close as she was going to get to having her own child. He was the only one in this world who loved her unselfishly and believed the best of her, even when she couldn’t believe in herself.

She took another sip and swiped right, smiling. The picture of Kurt, Quinn, Judy, and Burt was lovely. Burt looked so happy and content, something she hadn’t seen since before Suzanne had been diagnosed. Judy was good for him, that much was certain, and Olivia was sure Burt was thrilled to have a daughter.

From everything Kurt had told her, Quinn was basically the female version of him, which meant there was a lot of class and sass happening in the Hummel homestead. She giggled and hoped they were giving Burt hell, just to keep him on his toes.

She blinked and narrowed in on the caption, tears again springing to her eyes. Kurt was now referring to Judy as *Mom*. That was beautiful. She missed Suzanne every hour of every day. Theirs had been one of those once-in-a-lifetime friendships. To this day, Olivia still picked up the phone to call her. There was no one to whom she was as close as she was to Suzanne; she doubted there ever would be.

But Kurt had been trapped in his grief for far too long. He would always miss his mother, that was only natural, but it had reached the point where it was negatively affecting his social and emotional development, something that would have devastated Suzanne.

She smiled at the picture of Kurt and Sam, though it was somewhat sad. During Kurt’s course of chemotherapy, she and Burt had discussed Sam Evans at great length and both had believed Kurt and Sam would eventually get together. Sam had been at the hospital constantly, staying with Kurt for every chemo appointment, radiation treatment, and surgery. He had held Kurt’s hand, read to him, sang to him. He was the kind of boy she and Burt had so desperately wished Kurt might find for himself one day.

But it appeared they weren’t meant to be anything more than the greatest of friends, just as she and Suzanne had been, and that was okay. That they had turned out to be distant cousins would only cement the bond between them. That Kurt was now apparently marrying Sam’s other cousin was ironic and somewhat bizarre, but you couldn’t help with whom you fell in love.
She thought of Fitz and growled.

The picture of Sam’s family was adorable. They looked like such happy, shiny people and Olivia hoped it was true. Families like that gave others hope.

Marlena Evans was a stunning woman and Olivia was very angered by the things Kurt had told her DiMera had done to her. What kind of sick, morally bankrupt human being could do that to another? Yet Marlena had quietly rebuilt and gone on with her life, raising her children and treating patients to the best of her ability. That was the kind of heroic story that too often went untold.

She frowned at Sami DiMera, filled with disbelief the woman could marry into the family which had so ravaged her own. She could only imagine there were some mental illness issues involved. And the stories Kurt had told her! Supposedly, however, Sami was trying to pull herself together for the sake of her children, which perhaps suggested she wasn’t a lost case.

She continued scrolling until she stopped on the picture of Kurt, Carrie, and her.

“Hello, bitch,” she seethed, staring at Anna’s smiling face.

“Good evening, my darling.”

Nikolas Cassadine repressed a groan and looked up from his desk, frowning at his grandmother who, for whatever reason, held two large and expertly giftwrapped packages in her hands.

“It’s a little early for Christmas, Grandmother,” he drawled, “and you make a horrible Santa Claus.” He turned thoughtful. “Although you are the right age.”

Helena’s eyes turned artic though the smile remained on her face. Nikolas suspected tainted Botox.

“You really should be kinder, Nikolas,” she scolded. “We are family.”

He grunted. “Say what you want and then leave. I’m busy.”

It stung, but she had long ago written him off. “Very well. Your cousin has just gotten engaged and the wedding is in only a few weeks. Obviously I cannot attend the festivities, but I assume you will be invited. Please deliver these for me. If you are not invited or cannot attend, please be sure these are sent on.”

He frowned. “Sam is getting married? News to me.”

She laughed, the sound surprisingly light and girlish. “Why on earth would I care if the illegitimate daughter of Alexis Davis, herself illegitimate, found some poor deluded man to slip a ring on her finger? Samantha McCall is of no interest to me. No, these are for Kurt.”

Nikolas gave an owlish blink. “Kurt? Don’t be ridiculous, Helena. Kurt’s only fourteen.”

She sighed with disappointment. “It’s sadly no surprise you have taken no interest in your true family, Nikolas. Kurt will be soon eighteen and has announced his engagement on some inane social media network, though I admit the pictures were quite lovely.”

Nikolas stood. “He’s a child! He’s much too young to get married!”

Helena shrugged a shoulder. “He is in love and, from what I have unearthed, his partner is an
attractive, accomplished young man from a solid family. Kurt could have followed your example and married someone entirely inappropriate. Thank goodness he has better sense.”

“Who the hell is he marrying?” Nikolas demanded, knowing he was becoming irrationally angry.

“Oh, dear,” Helena purred, “what is this? Surely you’re not jealous, my darling. After all, you refused the betrothal.”

Nikolas scowled. “I refused to marry family. Kurt was a child at the time and his father never would have agreed anyway.” He winced at his possessive and petulant tone. Kurt was not an option, and he knew he had to accept that.

Helena smirked, placed the packages on the nearest table, and sat down. “It’s such a shame you and Kurt fell out of touch, Nikolas. You were so close when you were younger. I’m sure he could have used your support these past two years.”

She widened her eyes and covered her mouth. “Oh, my! You did know poor Kurt had cancer, didn’t you?”

“What?” he asked faintly, sitting down. “What did you just say?”

Helena sobered. Nikolas was owed her rancor, but Kurt was an innocent. There had been nothing amusing about his diagnosis. No child should ever have to fight for his life, yet she was very proud of him for rallying and defeating his first serious enemy.

“He had cancer, Nikolas,” she said lowly, “the same general type which killed Suzanne, though his was of a different form. He went through the surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, and all of the pain associated with them. Last year he went into remission and, as of two weeks ago, he is still in the clear, so to speak.”

Nikolas looked down. “I had no idea.” He slammed his fist on the desk. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“That was neither my responsibility nor my right. If Kurt had wanted you to know, he would have told you. Don’t blame me because you couldn’t be bothered to pick up the telephone.”

He ground his teeth, knowing she was right. “Who is he marrying?”

“His oncologist, Eric Brady, who is a fine, upstanding young man.”

Nikolas was shocked. “And who is far too old for Kurt!”

“He’s younger than you,” Helena said slyly.

He set his jaw.

“He saved Kurt’s life, Nikolas,” she said with a sharp tone. “That matters to me. It should matter to you, as well.”

“It does, but that doesn’t mean he’s owed Kurt’s hand in marriage!”

“We could debate the merits of this all night,” she said, brushing it off, “but Kurt has made his decision. His father and Katrine support it, which is all that matters.” She frowned. “However, there is one matter about this union that concerns me greatly. I know you tend to disregard my worries, but I must ask you pay careful attention to this one.”
“What is it?” he asked with suspicion.

“Dr. Brady’s twin sister, Samantha.”

“I thought he came from such a solid family,” he said snidely.

“He does. It is not the girl herself who troubles me. She is a conniving shrew, but I know Kurt will handle her easily if she becomes an inconvenience. No, it is her husband that is the issue.”

He raised a brow.

“EJ DiMera,” she said. “Stefano’s son.”

He curled a lip.

The next two weeks passed in a blur and, while it was stressful, Kurt and Eric couldn’t have been happier. They spent as much time alone together as possible, though friends and family were constantly clamoring for their attention. And that was all right with both of them.

Kurt had fallen completely in love with the Brady family, an affection which was entirely returned. They embraced him fully as one of their own and also extended that line to Quinn, who, though initially overwhelmed, soon came to adore all of her new aunts, uncles, and cousins.

Well, most of them. Her mother’s aloofness toward her siblings was unusual.

Needless to say, Andrew and Jeannie Donovan were not too terribly thrilled to have their long-lost sister drop back into their lives. Andrew didn’t even remember Judy, and Kim had still been pregnant with Jeannie when Judy had left Salem. It wasn’t so much they resented her – she was twice their age with children of her own – but it was very odd that they were no longer the center of their parents’ world.

Their parents had taken them and Judy to lunch so that they might get to know each other better. Jeannie was mostly quiet, but Andrew got on well enough with his big sister, though it was strange to think her children were Jeannie’s age.

But then he had made a very thoughtless comment about Kurt and Eric. He hadn’t meant anything bad, truly, but he had a tendency to use his friends’ vernacular and they were, well, douches.

He had felt the temperature inexplicably drop around him. Then Judy had stood up and made her excuses.

“She’s my son,” Shane had pleaded, grabbing her arm.

“Judy,” she had forcefully corrected. “My husband told me everything that happened in the Pub that night. You all sat there and listened to what Kurt had been put through in Lima.” She angrily shook her head. “I won’t put him through that again. You’re my family, but he is my son. Nothing is important than my children.”

She had then stalked away.

Andrew couldn’t blame her. He had been cruel. Unintentionally, yes, but cruel all the same. His sister was no longer speaking to him, his father was so disappointed that it was physically painful, and his mother’s fury had been righteous. She was tiny, but she was mighty.
It was awful, but he hoped Judy wouldn’t tell Kurt what he had said. Eric was his cousin. Kurt was, like, his *nephew*. He was so angry and disappointed in himself. He knew he had to apologize to Judy, but was frightened to do so.

One day Eric was at the hospital and Kurt found himself at loose ends. He had received his diploma in the mail and put it in a drawer. Four years of fighting to be himself had ended so anticlimactically and he wasn’t sure how he felt about it. Mostly relief that it was over, he supposed.

A smile overtook his face. He was free. He didn’t feel like celebrating his first real day of freedom away from McKinley and Lima in a hotel room. His dad had gone back to Ohio to oversee the move. He had initially protested when Kurt decided to pay to have everything done for them, but at last relented when Judy put her foot down squarely on the side of Kurt.

He knew his new mom wasn’t thrilled to be back in Salem, but also knew she was glad to see the back of Lima and all of the memories it held. The house had already sold, to Sue Sylvester no less, though Kurt didn’t want to dwell on why she had bought his old house.

On a lark, he dropped by Bo and Hope’s house under the guise of meeting their daughter. Ciara quickly fell in love with her new cousin and attached himself to his hip, following him around the house. It made Hope happy to see it. Most of Ciara’s cousins were twice her age and had known her since her birth, so while they loved her, she was also seen as a bit pesky.

Kurt was so good with children, Hope sincerely wished that eventually he and Eric would have some of their own. When she had asked, Kurt replied that it was definitely in the cards, but that hand wouldn’t be dealt for several years. Both he and Eric had personal and professional goals they first wanted to meet, which she respected. She did, however, vow to take up his offer to babysit.

He had taken Ciara outside to play and burn off some energy, and they came across Bo and Steve in the driveway, both of them working on Bo’s motorcycle. They greeted Kurt with big hugs, holding their anger inward when they saw how he flinched. They hugged him again, this time with more gentleness, happy when he returned their embraces.

Kurt predictably flirted with Steve, calling him the sexiest pirate alive, and Steve flirted back just as relentlessly. Bo complained that he felt abandoned and misled by both of them. Ciara had no idea what was going on, yet she couldn’t stop giggling.

“So what’s the problem?” Kurt chirped, resting his hip against Steve.

“Don’t know,” Bo admitted. He then tried to imitate the sounds his bike was making.

Kurt nodded and looked down at the array of tools on the ground. He frowned and shook his head before heading into the backyard, Ciara skipping alongside him. He returned with a broom he had found on the back porch.

Bo frowned in confusion as Steve cocked a brow.

“Alternator,” Kurt explained. He banged on it a few times with the handle, turned the key, and it started right up.

They stared at him in worship.

“Mechanic,” he said, shrugging. “Fully-certified. No autographs, please.”
Hope and Melissa had taken Jennifer to lunch at the Grille to discuss Judy’s return to Salem.

Jennifer whined and complained that they didn’t understand her pain as her cousins patiently listened while rolling their eyes at each other.

Hope then laid two fat file folders on the table and gestured for Jennifer to examine them.

“You’re a reporter,” she said. “Tell me what you make of this.”

Jennifer frowned but complied, studying them for twenty minutes as their drinks arrived and Hope and Melissa indulged.

It was hard reading. It was actually devastating. One folder was comprised solely of violent offenders convicted of every sex crime imaginable, as well as human trafficking, false imprisonment, a variety of physical assault charges, and drug charges.

The second folder broke her heart. Faces of victims stared back at her and she knew these women, most of whom had been only girls at the time, would never truly move past what had been done to them. But they were free and she had to believe that counted for something. She fervently prayed they had received help and were rebuilding their lives.

“Why did you show me these?” she whispered, wiping away her tears.

Hope was silent for a long time, twisting her glass back and forth in her hand. She then took a long sip of her screwdriver.

She tapped the first folder. “Each and every one of these offenders was convicted based on information Judy Hummel brought to the Department of Justice. She found numerous blackmail files in Nick Corelli’s house after he died. His superiors learned of this and attempted to kill her. They failed and she fled Salem when they threatened Kim’s children.”

Jennifer inhaled sharply as her tears began anew.

Hope regarded her coolly and tapped the second folder. “These are the women Judy saved by sacrificing her freedom.”

“What do you mean?” Jennifer murmured.

“Judy went into the witness protection program, Jen,” Melissa said quietly. “They put her with a man who had turned state’s evidence against the mob boss whose books he cooked. He’s the father of Judy’s girls. He was not kind to them. From what Quinn said, she and her sister received verbal and emotional abuse. For Judy, it was much worse.”

“Oh, god,” Jennifer whispered, closing her eyes.

Hope was quiet for a moment. “She’s not Eve Donovan anymore,” she finally said, “and hasn’t been for a long time. Eve did bad things and Judy has paid for those sins.”

“You need to let this go, Jen,” Melissa counseled. “Whether or not you forgive Judy is your own business, but this vendetta has to stop.”
Will and Sam had become very close very quickly and he could frequently be found at Marlena’s old penthouse, in which the Evans family had taken up residence. In her free time, Marlena often took Scott and Savannah around town, leaving Sam in charge of his siblings. Sam had needed to return to Ohio for a few days to complete his finals, but he told Will that he now considered Salem his home.

Will had never been more grateful for anything than this new addition to his family. He adored Stevie and Stacy, who were just as enamored, though they missed Kurt and wanted to be with him whenever possible. Neither of the kids were dealing very well with Kurt’s engagement. They were always nice and polite to Eric whenever they encountered him, for he was their cousin, but their resentment was obvious.

Will found much joy in Kurt and Eric’s relationship. It provided him something he had desperately needed: proof that happy gay couples existed and loved each other and wanted to spend their lives together. They gave him hope. He was grateful.

He was more than mortified that he had developed a bit of a crush on his uncle. Eric was just so gorgeous and accomplished. He had gotten out of Salem and made something of himself, returning on his own terms. He wasn’t afraid or embarrassed of his sexuality, instead embracing it as an important part of who he was. There was definitely a bit of hero worship on Will’s part.

That also extended to Kurt, who was one of the most awesome people he had ever met. And the most beautiful. He had no trouble imagining how Kurt and Eric had fallen so hard for each other. They were different in many ways, but alike on the issues that mattered. Sometimes it was really hard to believe Kurt was the same age as he and Sam. Kurt was just so much more adult than them.

He and Sam loved to play video games and gorge on junk food and tease the kids. They complained about school and their parents and the state of popular music. They were so in sync on so many things, and that was just really, really cool.

Will had been lonely most of his life, shuffled back and forth between his parents, sent off to Europe to his aunt and uncle, dealing with everything that came with being both a Brady and a Horton. He’d never had a friend like Sam before. Hell, he’d never really even had a friend.

He felt like he could tell Sam anything.

Except one thing.

He couldn’t even admit it to himself, he was so ashamed, and he was terrified because he didn’t know what to do.

He wasn’t just crushing on his stepfather. He thought he might be falling in love with EJ.

The worst part was that EJ was maybe encouraging it. Will wasn’t entirely sure, but he felt as though he was being seduced. He knew it was sick and wrong, that he was a pervert of the highest order, but he couldn’t help himself. He shied away whenever EJ tried to touch him – not in a gross way, just a hand on the shoulder or whatever – but he wanted EJ to touch him. He wanted it badly. And not on his shoulder.

He was pretty sure EJ wanted it, too.

Carrie and Austin knew he was gay and supported him completely. He was pretty sure his dad knew, or at least suspected. Sam knew. Kurt and Eric did, too, but they were waiting for him to come to them; they wouldn’t force the issue.
The only person to whom he had actually said the words was Grandma, and she had been amazing. She always was. She had given him the approval and validation he didn’t even know he’d been so desperately craving. She had told him she loved him without question, that he could always come to her, and if he needed to move in with her because of his mom, she would always have a room ready.

It had been such a relief. One of his biggest fears was that his mom would throw him out, but now he knew he had someplace to go if the worst happened, someplace where he would be loved and everything would be okay.

He loved his mom. She had hurt him a lot, just like she had hurt everyone, but he loved her. He couldn’t even look at her anymore, he was so ashamed. What was he supposed to do? Tell her that he wanted her husband to bend him over the couch and fuck him into oblivion?

He shuddered.

Sam paused the game before turning toward his cousin and frowning. “You okay, man?”

Will shook his head to clear it and forced a smile. “Yeah, dude, I’m fine. You need to get your head in the game, man. I’m totally killing you here!”

Sam said nothing but resumed play.

As Will’s fingers flew across the controls, he knew Sam’s eyes were on him.

He wanted to tell Sam, he did, but he couldn’t bear the idea that the disgust he saw every day in the mirror might this time look back at him through his cousin’s eyes.

When she wasn’t watching her youngest children and fretting over Will, Sami was up to her ears in wedding preparations. She had bitten off more than she could chew, but she was flailing in her personal life and thought doing something nice for her brother would give her some sense of satisfaction. She was constantly telling that little voice in her head that all she was really doing was trying to show up Carrie.

To her sister’s credit, Carrie welcomed the help. There was a lot to pull together in a relatively short period of time and she knew she couldn’t do it all herself. She couldn’t say she was thrilled with the partnership, but could see Sami was honestly trying, if for no other reason than to show her support for Eric. That counted for something.

She looked down at the preliminary guest list Kurt had given her. “Have you seen this?”

“What?” asked a distracted Sami as she peered over. “Oh, is that Kurt’s list?” She frowned. “It’s, um, kind of small.”

“It’s anemic,” Carrie said, “particularly when compared to Eric’s. I mean, look at his! Almost two pages and that’s only family! That doesn’t take into account the others. All Kurt has listed are his parents, his grandmother, and his godmother, plus a few friends from school.”

Sami looked down. “He’s had a really hard life, hasn’t he? Kurt, I mean.”
“Yeah,” Carrie whispered.

“You really feel like he’s your brother, don’t you?”

Carrie shrugged a shoulder. “I do. I know it’s fast and the circumstances are strange, but … he’s from Mom, you know? He might not be hers biologically, but she still gave birth to him.”

“I think it’s nice you feel that way,” Sami said quietly. “From what they said, Kurt and his dad were alone for a very long time. Kurt has other family, but it’s distant and they’re a little bit terrifying. Quinn is his sister now, but that doesn’t mean he doesn’t have room for another.”

Carrie looked over and gave her a small smile. “Or two more.”

Sami snickered. “Three, if you count Belle.”

Carrie grinned but then sighed. “She still feels guilty.”

Sami scowled. “What Belle said was stupid, but it was thoughtless, not cruel. Still, you could tell she pissed off Shawn-Douglas.” She pursed her lips and shook her head. “She would feel a lot better if she just went to Eric and apologized, but she’s too embarrassed.”

Carrie bit her lip. “I was very proud of you for sticking up for Eric and Kurt the way you did.”

Sami stilled and turned wide eyes on her sister. “Really?” she whispered.

Carrie gave her a kind smile and nodded. “Really.”

Sami blushed and looked down. “Thanks,” she said bashfully.

They quickly returned to their work.

“Has Kurt said anything about his wedding party?” Sami next asked as she shuffled around some papers.

“Quinn will be his, well, maid of honor, or head groomswoman, or whatever you want to call it.”

Sami sighed. “The terminology is confusing me too. I don’t know what to say or how to say it and I’m scared I’ll offend Kurt and Eric.”

“They both think it’s funny,” Carrie said. “I really don’t think they care what we call it. For the sake of argument, let’s just refer to everyone in both wedding parties as best man, best woman, groomswoman, or groomsman.”

Sami nodded. “Works for me. So, Quinn for Kurt?”

“Yes. She’s his best woman, and Santana and Brittany will be attendants.”

“I’m honestly surprised he doesn’t have more.”

“Well, I think he wants more, but he’s not sure whom to pick. I think his only friends are in his glee club, but one is his ex-boyfriend, so that would be awkward. Even more awkward is that Burt used to date the ex’s mother.”

Sami blinked. “Well, they certainly fit right into Salem.”

Carrie sniggered. “And the ex and the mother are both invited to the wedding.”
“Maybe we should consider making all place-settings plastic.”

They looked at each other and laughed.

“What about Eric’s attendants?” asked a casual Sami.

Carrie snorted. “If that’s your subtle way of asking if he asked me, the answer’s no. He didn’t want to bother us because he figured we were busy enough. He’s asked Will and Shawn-Douglas, and both agreed, but I think there will be more, especially if Kurt decides to add to his party. As it is, Eric’s still one short.”

Sami did her best to let on that she’d had no idea Eric had asked her son. Every day it seemed Will was growing further and further away from her.

“Any ideas who else he might choose?”

“I think he might ask Lucas,” Carrie said, “which is probably why he didn’t ask us. We get along with Lucas now, but we were both married to him. I think Eric’s just trying to minimize any awkwardness or chance of fights breaking out.”

Sami nodded. It made sense.

“They chose Ciara as the flower girl and Sam’s little brother Stevie will be the ring-bearer.”

They then fell back into planning.

Ten minutes later, Sami looked up and blew a lock of hair out of her face. “Okay, I’m not sure how to say this without being heteronormative or whatever, but is one of them going to be walked down the aisle?”

Carrie looked up in confusion. “Hm? Oh!” She took off her glasses. “Sorry, I forget to tell you. Kurt and Eric decided they both wanted to be given away, so there will be two aisles. They’ll be laid diagonally at the ends and meet at the altar.”

Sami slowly nodded. “That would actually work well. Who’s giving away whom?”

“Eric asked Dad, Marlena, and John to walk him down the aisle, and they agreed.”


Carrie smiled, nodding her head.

“But what about Kurt? I presume it will be Burt and Judy, but won’t that look, I don’t know, lopsided?”

Carrie looked down. “Kurt asked Mom to stand with him, too.”

“I think that’s lovely.”

“Really?”

“I don’t know Anna well, Carrie, and I have to say that a lot of what I know, I don’t really like.”

“What do you mean?” Carrie asked, an edge to her voice.

Sami sighed. “Look, you know that you and I have almost never gotten along, and I think part of why I resented you so much was because of how close you are to Mom.” She held up a hand.
“That’s not a bad thing and I’m not angry anymore. Ever since Eric came back, I’ve been thinking a lot and realize how wrong I’ve been about almost, well, everything.

“I know you and Anna are close now, and that’s good. Tony loves you as the daughter he’s never had, and that’s good, too, but the fact of the matter is that Anna abandoned you, Carrie. She left you with Mom and John while she went off to seek fame and fortune. I know she’s apologized, I know she feels guilty, but you know what? She should.”

Carrie said nothing. These were arguments she had made to herself for years, and while she had forgiven her mother, part of her would always be that little girl wondering why she had been left like a bottle of milk on a doorstep.

“I never realized before just how angry I am at her for doing that to you. And you … you just fit so much better with Mom and Dad, and John, than I ever did. I know you think it’s not true, but I know that it is. I always resented you. I resented Eric and Belle. Nothing any of you ever did gave me cause to feel that way, I just always did. It’s something innate within me. I think Mom must have been a little psychic when she named me after her crazy sister.”

Sami sighed. “I don’t know. Maybe it’s just middle child syndrome. You were the firstborn and just so good at everything …”

“But I wasn’t.”

Sami rolled her eyes. “Okay, honey, the bashful overachiever thing got old when you were ten.”

“No, Sami, I’m Dad’s firstborn, but not Marlena’s.”

Sami looked down. “DJ.”

Carrie nodded. “Eric told me Mom talked about DJ with him.”

Sami looked up, eyes huge. “Really?” she whispered. “She’s never said anything to me about him.”

“Me either. I think it was always just too painful to her.” She sighed. “I don’t know. Eric said he and Mom had this really long talk in the middle of the night, and I think DJ is only the tip of the iceberg.”

“Maybe it was easier to talk to him because he’s been gone for so long,” Sami murmured, closing her eyes. “I can’t even imagine that pain, walking into your son’s nursery and finding him that way.”

Carrie’s breath caught as she nodded.

“I’ve hurt Mom and Daddy so badly over the years, but that pales in comparison to what I did to John.”

Carrie hesitantly put a hand on her sister’s shoulder. “John loves you, Sami.”

Sami clenched her jaw as tears appeared in her eyes. “I treated him like shit, Carrie. He is the only constant presence all three of us have ever had, and I was horrible to him. He did so much, sacrificed so much to keep us safe, to make us feel loved, and I threw it in his face. That he’s forgiven me is amazing and certainly more than I deserve. That he continues to love me is a blessing.

“But I will never, ever forgive myself for what I’ve done to him. I can’t forgive myself because I
refuse to allow myself to forget for even one second how I treated him.”

“Don’t hold on to the anger, Sami,” Carrie said quietly. “All that matters is that you love John, that you recognize you always have. Loving him is not a betrayal of Dad, any more than how much we loved Isabella is a betrayal of Mom.”

Sami turned away and nodded, quickly wiping away her tears. “Have you talked to Brady?”

Carrie sighed. “He’s actually in London with Austin. He doesn’t want to come to the wedding.”

“Why the hell not?” Sami barked.

“You know how he feels about us, Sami.”

“Well, fuck him! I’m so tired of his martyr complex, Carrie. I don’t know when it was he turned into this obnoxious little shit, but it needs to stop. He was such a sweet and adorable boy, who was given all the love and privilege Belle received, so what the hell is his problem? He treated Mom like shit for years, even though she’s the only mother he’s ever known.

“She raised him like her own but, when he became a teenager, he invented all of this bullshit drama about how Mom had replaced Isabella and she had never really loved or wanted him, which was such a load. I know they made their peace, thank god, because it was destroying Belle, but what’s wrong with him now?”

She angrily shook her head. “I don’t get it! He and Mom have gotten their relationship back on track and are closer than ever. He worships John. If Brady doesn’t want to interact with me, fine, I don’t care, but doesn’t he want to see Belle? And what the hell did you or Eric ever do to him?”

Carrie frowned. “Brady and Belle are John’s biological children, but he’s always loved each of us the same. He’s never played favorites, but Brady has always been …”

“Too much like me?” Sami asked, smirking. “Yeah, I think there’s some truth to that. He resented you for being the eldest and for doing everything first. He resents me because I treated John so horribly and, hey, I deserve that. But Eric? They barely know each other.”

Carrie nodded. “I think Brady always resented he had a brother who didn’t appear to take an interest in him. Brady was too young to realize just how introverted Eric is, which, let’s be honest, is not a trait the rest of us share.”

She winked at Sami and nudged her shoulder, grinning when Sami burst out laughing.

“I get that,” Sami said, “I do, and maybe part of it is also that Eric always played Switzerland. He never allowed himself to choose sides or get caught up in our drama. Perhaps Brady feels Eric should have stepped in, but those are weak excuses at best. Even if he doesn’t want to come to support Eric, he should at least be there for Mom and John.”

“You’re right.”

Sami raised a brow. “Can you repeat that so I can record it?”

“And we were getting along so well,” Carrie pouted.

“If we had started drinking when we were teenagers, we’d probably be best friends now.”

Eric and Kurt were sitting in the living room of Marlena and John’s brownstone, discussing a few
new wedding ideas before taking them to Sami and Carrie, who had sequestered themselves in Marlena’s office. Eric wasn’t sure where his parents were. They had gone to dinner at Tuscany with his dad, Burt and Judy, Anna and Tony, and Scott and Savannah.

“Are you sure you don’t mind?” Eric asked for the umpteenth time, voice teetering on a whine.

Kurt had given up not trying to roll his eyes. “I love you, Doogie, but you’re becoming extremely annoying. For the last time, no, I do not mind that you asked Sam to be one of your attendants. I think it’s wonderful!”

Eric gave him a skeptical look.

“Eric, what is it you’re looking for me to say? Just tell me so that I can say it and we can move on.”

Eric blinked in confusion. “Are we having our first fight?”

“If you don’t stop acting like a dick, then yes.”

“You love my dick!” He grinned. “Or you soon will.”

Kurt scowled. “Stop trying to distract me with suggestive comments about how our assumed sex life will commence with enthusiastic and acrobatic intercourse that will leave us boneless, dehydrated husks.”

Eric’s pupils dilated. “Acrobatic?”

Kurt smirked and raised his left leg at the knee, using his left hand to grab his heel. He then brought his extended leg into a vertical split, perfectly perpendicular to the floor, before reaching over with his right hand and slipping it behind his left ankle, pulling his foot over his head. Finally, he brought his left arm through the space between his leg and head and simply stood there.

Eric began panting.

Kurt grinned, tipped to the right, and brought his head down to his right ankle while still holding the split. He then dropped his leg as he brought his head back upright, and was entirely smug about all of it.

“Marry me,” Eric breathed.

Kurt yawned. “You already asked and I agreed.”

“Right,” Eric murmured. “Right! Well, so, can you, like, get in me now?”

Kurt turned coy and averted his eyes. “Why, Doctor Eric, you’re a naughty boy.”

Eric nodded with great enthusiasm. “Very naughty. You should punish me!”

Kurt looked at him, slowly cocking his head. “Do you need to be punished, Eric?” he purred.

“Oh, fuck,” Eric moaned.

Kurt raised his brows. “I must say I never saw this coming.”

Eric blushed. “Neither did I.”
“I would, however, very much enjoy seeing you coming.”

“Kurt, you’re going to see exactly that if you don’t stop saying words.”

“What about singing them?”

Eric stilled. He’d never heard Kurt sing. He’d seen the videos of the glee club performances, but Kurt had never been featured. Sam, Quinn, Santana, and especially Brittany had made quite clear they believed Kurt’s to be among the most beautiful they’d ever heard, but the chemo and radiation had been difficult.

Kurt thought, probably unjustly, that they had affected his voice and would not sing in public, though he continued to train himself privately.

“I didn’t think you were ready,” he said softly, not wanting to rush him.

Kurt blushed and looked down. “You make me strong.”

Eric forced his the sob in his throat into a croaky chuckle. “I thought I made you horny.”

“That too.”

He walked over and took Kurt’s hands in his. “Sing for me?”

Kurt suddenly felt very uncertain. This performance would be perhaps the most important of his life. He wasn’t trying to outdo Rachel or fight for Schuester’s notice. He was going to sing to the love of his life, his future husband. That mattered to him and, when he had considered this moment, he had agonized over just what it was he would sing.

How could one song ever encapsulate the depth of his feelings for this man? Eric had saved his life, body and mind, and delivered him unto a new one filled with love and the promise of forever. The truth was there no one single song worthy of Eric Brady. He deserved a symphony.

How could one song every convey everything he wanted to say? How much he loved Eric, how much he desired him, and how much he needed him.

And then inspiration struck.

Kurt smiled shyly and nodded. “Okay.”

As he reached into his bag, Eric noticed his sisters coming down the hall, obviously heading toward the kitchen. He held up a hand and then slowly brought a finger to his lips. They gave him a quizzical look, but moved no further.

Kurt pulled out his phone and turned to drop it into Marlena’s docking station.

And of course that’s when Eric heard his mother’s key turn in the lock. He sent pleading puppy eyes at Carrie, who toed off her shoes and skedaddled to the front door to let the family inside. He noted she drew a finger across her throat and then heard nothing else, though they soon enough appeared, hovering on the threshold of the room.

Neither of the boys noticed, far too interested in each other. Eric stood watching as Kurt centered himself, steadying his breathing and rolling his shoulders. As the gentle notes of synthesizer and an electric guitar began filling the room, Kurt’s entire body relaxed and a small smile appeared on his face. Eric couldn’t remember Kurt ever looking more beautiful than in this moment.
Once Carrie realized what was about to happen, she immediately took out her phone and began filming. Santana, to whom she had become somewhat close, confided that Kurt hadn’t sung in over a year. If he was about to do so now, she wanted it recorded. She knew Eric would appreciate it.

Burt and Judy wrapped their arms around each other, as did Scott and Savannah, ignoring the other couples who were looking at them in confusion.

Kurt took a breath and continued looking at the floor. The song was very vocally demanding and he wasn’t sure he was up to the challenge, but he would do his best. It sounded simple, but required him to sing in multiple keys, utilizing both his head and chest registers, to belt, and to know when best to use vibrato.

“I don’t need a lot of things, I can get by with nothing.”

And it was true, he realized. So many things he had once thought were so important were no longer relevant. He didn’t need fame, something for which he had so often craved, mistakenly believing it would offer him the validation Lima and its citizens never had. Over the years, thanks to his dad and friends, he had learned to find that approval from within, and it was so much more satisfying than the fickle attention of people who would never even know him.

“Of all the blessings life can bring, I’ve always needed something.”

He was truly blessed. He had loving parents and wonderful friends. He was attractive and intelligent. He had ambition and a force of will which demanded its due. He had money that meant he could do anything he wanted. He was grateful for these things, absolutely, but until Eric, he had believed they were all he needed.

Now he understood they meant very little unless he had someone with which to share them. He could live a very fulfilling life without companionship, but the presence of Eric made his blessings so much richer. He had known love, but until Eric, he had never known what it was to love.

His smile grew. “But I’ve got all I want when it comes to loving you.”

Eric was honestly surprised Kurt could produce such a low tone, but it was gorgeous. It was smooth and assured, although still vulnerable, but above all, it was achingly honest. He believed every single word. Kurt was content, he was happy, and Eric had given that to him. It was the most important thing he had ever done or would ever do in his entire life.

Kurt raised his head and looked into Eric’s eyes. “You’re my only reason, you’re my only truth.”

Eric’s breath caught in his throat as tears pricked at his eyes. He should have known Kurt would make him cry. He was thankful he wasn’t an ugly crier like his sisters, because he didn’t want this moment ruined. He cried like his mother; when Marlena cried, copious tears slid down her face like a waterfall, but she never made a sound.

“I need you like water, like breath, like rain. I need you like mercy from heaven’s gate.”

Eric’s eyes widened as Kurt raised his voice a key and began projecting more loudly, in perfect time with the instrumentation. It was perhaps the first time he realized the voice itself was an instrument, and he was in awe of what Kurt could accomplish. His tone gentled and slid up a key at the last word of each measure. His lower voice was dead sexy, but those high notes were absolutely angelic. He suddenly understood why Sam’s nickname for Kurt was Angel.

“There’s a freedom in your arms that carries me through, I need you.”
Sami couldn’t stop staring at what was perhaps the most romantic thing she’d ever seen. She had no idea anyone actually serenaded their loved one anymore, but promptly decided it needed to be brought back immediately. This was like something out of one of her mom’s old movies and it was beautiful. Lovelier than Kurt’s voice, however, were the words. She knew he meant them. She had four children and had been married more times than even she could count, but no man had ever looked at her the way this man was looking at her brother.

Roman wasn’t surprised Marlena and Anna were crying. Of course Burt and Judy were; they were Kurt’s parents and were justifiably proud. No, the surprise was John. In thirty years, Roman couldn’t recall ever seeing John cry; which was not to say John didn’t cry, only that he did it privately. He felt a surge of envy when John tightened his hold around Marlena’s waist and she leaned her head on his shoulder, but that was an old hurt. He knew they belonged together.

Maybe it was just the song, its beauty and power. Then he realized he was crying, too. If these past two weeks had shown him anything, it was this his son was deeply in love with this boy. Now he understood that love was fully returned. He liked Kurt as a person, he couldn’t do anything but, considering how happy Kurt made Eric, but this … Kurt truly loved his son.

He had always worried about Eric. His heart had been broken by Nicole and then Greta, and Eric had left Salem to pull his life together. He had stayed in contact, though it was always brief and intermittent, but Roman had always heard the loneliness that underscored Eric’s phone calls home. He hadn’t seen anything like that since his son returned to town. Now there was only happiness and joy, and Kurt had given that to Eric. Roman was so grateful.

Finally, at least one of his children was truly happy.

“You’re the hope that moves me to courage again,” Kurt sang, the notes again dipping low.

He was often frustrated by Eric’s insistence that he had done nothing other than deliver the treatment, but that couldn’t have been further from the truth. Eric was the only reason he had gotten through it. Eric had believed he would get well, that he would recover completely, and had refused to accept any other outcome. Eric’s belief in him encouraged Kurt to once again believe in himself.

He had stopped thinking of himself as a victim. He had stopped mourning that he was destined to succumb to the same disease that had killed his mother. He had decided to fight the cancer like he had fought every other adversary in his life; not just to prove that he could do it and win, but to prove to Eric that his belief wasn’t misplaced.

“You’re the love that rescues me when the cold winds rage.”

Even now, Kurt could barely believe this was happening, that Eric had chosen him. That a man had chosen the skinny, pale, bitchy Kurt Hummel was shocking in and of itself, but that a man who was as kind as Eric humbled him. Eric was gorgeous and smart and a doctor, and all of those many other good things but, above all, he was kind.

“And it’s so amazing, but that’s just how you are,” he continued, slowly crossing the small space separating them as his first tears began to fall. He gently took Eric’s face in his hands and used his thumbs to wipe away the tears.

During his course of treatment, after Kurt had insisted Sam go home, Eric had appeared after every chemotherapy and radiation appointment to hold him with gentle arms as Kurt fought the nausea and cried from the pain, from the burns in his mouth. Eric held the bucket and wiped Kurt’s mouth and told him he was still beautiful. When Kurt’s hair first began to fall out, Eric had been running his fingers through it at the time, then tried to hide it so Kurt wouldn’t be upset.
Kurt’s heart had been slowly breaking during that time as each day he fell more and more in love with Eric, never believing, never even conceiving, Eric would love him back.

“And I can’t turn back now,” Kurt sang before taking a breath, “because you’ve brought me too far!”

Eric startled when Kurt’s voice jumped an octave and he began to belt. Jesus, where the hell did that voice come from? It was like church bells, so pure and bright. Then the words registered.

No, he hadn’t saved Kurt. If anything, Kurt had saved him. Saved him from a life lived in muted colors and aching loneliness. Before Kurt, the idea of having a partner had filled him with anxiety. He had lived so long without love, he was scared of never finding it; but he had been even more scared of finding it and then it being taken from him.

He had been terrified Kurt would die. His greatest fear was that he had filled Kurt with false hope and unrealistic optimism, only to lose him in the end. But Kurt had survived. Sometimes Eric still pinched himself to remember that was real. That Kurt had returned his love, that quiet hope he nursed in his secret heart, was more than he knew he deserved.

“I need you like water, like breath, like rain. I need you like mercy from heaven’s gate. There’s a freedom in your arms that carries me through. I need you.”

Kurt decided to forgo restraint altogether, as he sensed Eric was slipping into denial and some dark thoughts he had seen threaten when Eric didn’t know he was watching.

He smiled and held a finger to Eric’s lips, nodding his head. “Oh, yes, I do.”

He slipped his fingers up into Eric’s hair and held his head in place, forcing the other man to look into his eyes. “I need you like water, like breath, like rain. I need you like mercy from heaven’s gate. There’s a freedom in your arms that carries me through. I need you.”

He ended belts with falsetto, gave terse vibrato before softening it to the point it disappeared, but his tone had become simultaneously commanding and pleading. I love you. Believe it, please. Believe in me, in us, as much as I do. We will make this work. I love you so much.

“I need you,” he sang, the final note caressing the very edge of his upper range, and then turning it into a fermata, ending it just before his voice gave out. “I need you.”

And then it was over and they were left standing there, staring at each other, both of them crying silently.

Sami had her hand over her mouth to stifle her sobs. The others were in similar states. Carrie managed to send the video to Quinn, Santana, Brittany, and Sam before her tears caused her vision to blur.

“Why me?” Eric whispered.

Kurt tilted his head upward and captured Eric’s lips in a chaste but passionate kiss, before then pulling down the other man’s head, their foreheads resting against each other.

“Because you saw me, Eric. You saw me, not who everyone needed or wanted me to be, and you loved me.”

“I always will.”

They smiled and shut their eyes.
A moment passed, and then it ended, as all moments do.

“Eric Roman Brady!” came Sami’s strident voice. “If you don’t give that boy a proper kiss right
the hell now, I’m going to do it for you!”

Eric smiled and did as he was bid. Sometimes his sister got it right.

Chapter End Notes

The song Kurt sang is *I Need You*, by LeAnn Rimes off the album of the same name.
The Hummel family, along with Santana, Brittany, and Eric, were enjoying a late breakfast at the Penthouse Grille. The girls had registered for courses for both summer sessions, and were due to start them next week. They had made sure to allot enough time to help with the preparations for Kurt’s engagement party and wedding, though Carrie and Sami had it all well in hand.

Plans for the wedding party had already gone through several drafts, but Kurt and Eric had finally settled on their choices. Quinn would be Kurt’s Best Person, while Brittany and Santana were his attendants. They hadn’t planned it, but all of Kurt’s attendants would be women, while all of Eric’s were men. Eric had four, which left Kurt scrambling to fill another slot.

He had thought about asking Tina. They were still close, though not as they once were, but he knew if he did, Mercedes and Rachel would bleat about the unfairness of it all. He understood he’d never get a moment’s peace until he added them, and then Eric would have to choose two more. The wedding party would become completely out of control.

It was now too late to ask Carrie or Sami. He would’ve liked Carrie to stand with him, but it would have caused problems and hurt feelings. Not that he would’ve cared, but he wanted to keep the peace for Eric’s sake. Besides, both women had done more than their share by acting as the unofficial wedding planners. Kurt also felt he should select another woman, just to balance everything out. Finally, he had asked Sue Sylvester, and was stunned when she joyfully accepted.

He wasn’t sure why he hadn’t asked her before. The woman had done a lot for him and he even loved her in some way. That she was even willing to wear a dress, knowing it would be lovely because Kurt had chosen it, was shocking.

Eric had selected Will as his Best Person, with Sam, Shawn-Douglas, and Lucas as his attendants. He wasn’t too sure about Lucas, actually. They’d known each other for years, but had never been much more than acquaintances, despite the fact Lucas was Will’s father and had been married to both Sami and Carrie. Not to mention that business with Nicole.

He had actually considered asking Nicole to stand with him, but it would have caused gossip he didn’t want and Sami would have had a complete meltdown. Regardless, Eric had found he actually liked the person Nicole had become. She was so much more honest and real than when they had been together, and she had a truly wicked sense of humor.

They had met up for coffee a few times, sometimes with Kurt joining them, and Eric now found Nicole to be extremely witty, blunt, and not a little vicious. It was therefore no surprise that she and Kurt got along extremely well. Eric was happy Kurt held no jealousy toward Nicole, only regarding her as a friend of Eric, and thus himself.

Nicole had been hesitant and unsure at first, not wanting to come between them, but it was obvious how much she relished having friends. Eric had done some discreet snooping and gotten several earfuls about what Nicole had been up to in Salem these past years, and while he didn’t necessarily approve of her actions, he also knew it wasn’t his place to pass judgment. That Nicole felt so alone and unloved bothered him. No one should be made to feel like that.

The more time they spent together, which truly wasn’t all that much, the more she blossomed and revealed the unguarded parts of her personality. He also enjoyed that Nicole genuinely liked Kurt. He would listen to their fashion judgments of strangers and laugh his ass off. He couldn’t wait to see Nicole and Santana together; it would probably be the harbinger of an apocalypse.
“So the first four rows are for immediate family?” Judy asked after a sip of coffee.

Kurt nodded. “On my side, it will be you and Dad; Katrine; Nikolas and his plus one; Anna and Tony; Uncle Victor and the Kiriakis family; my guidance counselor, Miss Pillsbury; New Directions and Mister Schuester; Artie and Tina’s parents; Sam’s family; and Olivia.”

He startled. “Oh, and Rachel Cory and her husband, Carl Hutchins. I need to remember to tell Carrie to add them to the final list.”

Burt blinked. “What about Camille?”

Kurt gaped at him.

Burt closed his eyes. “Jesus, Kurt. Please tell me you didn’t forget to tell your aunt that her only nephew is getting married?”

“Oh, shit!” his son exclaimed.

They stared at his use of invective.

“You’d better call her,” Burt advised.

“Aren’t you kidding?” Kurt shouted. “It’s far too late now just to pick up the phone. I have to go to DC and tell her in person. Oh, god! Uncle Seeley, too! How could I have been so stupid?”

Eric pulled him into a hug and soothed him. “Baby, everything has been crazy with the wedding plans and trying to find a house, not to mention my work and you getting things ready to start school. I’m sure she’ll understand. All that matters is that you’re happy. That will be enough for her.”

“You’ll come with me, right?” asked a panicked Kurt. “She’s less likely to kill me if you distract her with your hotness!”

Eric’s laugh rumbled. “Sure, baby. You know I won’t start full-time at University until after the honeymoon. Do you want me to book tickets?”

“No time! We’ll go private and be there this afternoon.”

Eric stared and watched as Kurt drew his phone from his pocket and chartered a fucking Lear jet to get them to DC and then return them to Salem by evening. He had then called Seeley Booth of the FBI to meet them at National Airport and get them to the Jeffersonian. Kurt hadn’t given specifics, only that he was bringing someone special to meet them.

Eric had taken his mother’s advice and had a long discussion with Kurt about money. Marlena, of course, had been right: a lot of Kurt’s identity and independence was tied up in his wealth. He didn’t let it rule him, but he was insecure that Eric was older and more established. He wanted to bring something to their marriage other than his young age.

Eric had decided that Kurt’s feelings were more important than his own insecurities. He agreed that Kurt should purchase their new home, but insisted he would dedicate a portion of his own income, that which would have been applied to a mortgage, to a specified account they would use for things like remodeling and landscaping. Kurt would buy the house, but Eric would pay for the upkeep. Their machismos were both satisfied with the arrangement.

Kurt then abruptly stood, pulled Eric to his feet and, in a flurry of hugs and kisses to the others, rushed out of the restaurant, yanking Eric after him.
Burt waited until the elevator doors closed before breaking into laughter.

“You don’t think Camille will be angry, do you?” asked a worried Judy.

Burt snickered. “Oh, she’ll be furious, but it will die quickly. Kurt was smart to bring Eric with him; her ensuing interrogation of the evil man who stole her baby nephew will detract some of her anger away from Kurt. Cam always wanted to help plan Kurt’s wedding, stepping in for Suzanne. She’ll be a little hurt, but Kurt is in remission, wants to become a doctor, and is marrying a doctor. That will go a long way in mitigating any outrage.”

Quinn frowned and looked at Brittany and Santana. “I didn’t think about this until just now because we’ve been so busy, but we shouldn’t have let Carrie and Sami assume total command of the wedding planning.”

Santana nodded. “It’s great that they’re doing it, but they’re Eric’s sisters and don’t know Kurt well enough to represent his interests. We would have caught this thing with his aunt right away. Not to mention, there will be far more Bradys and Hortons at the wedding than Hummels and extended family. We have to make sure Kurt’s wedding will be everything he wants.”

“Eric has his sisters,” Brittany said, “but we’re Kurt’s sisters. We need to do our part.”

“No, girls …” Burt began.

“No, Dad,” Quinn interrupted. “We all know this will be the only time Kurt gets married. We want it to be everything he deserves, and while Carrie and Sami have done excellent work, this is Kurt’s wedding, too. We’re not going to run roughshod over them, but we want some input.”

Burt nodded as Brittany pulled out her phone to call Carrie.

With their daughters so busy with the wedding preparations, Marlena and Anna had volunteered to handle the engagement party. In truth, there was very little work involved. Maggie Kiriakis, Marlena’s best friend, had graciously offered Tuscany as a venue. The restaurant’s new manager, Adrienne Kiriakis, insisted on catering the affair and organizing the menu herself. She had known Kurt for years and was familiar with his tastes.

Adrienne knew Kurt would have preferred French cuisine over Italian, so she had talked to Maggie, who demanded the right for Chez Rouge to cater the wedding. After all, her husband was Kurt’s honorary godfather, and she had grown quite fond of the boy herself.

Marlena had hired a DJ and planned the decorations while Anna appointed herself everyone’s personal shopper, insisting on finding the formalwear for the happy couple and their friends and family. She would have loved to have designed the clothes herself, but simply didn’t have time. As an internationally renowned designer, however, Anna had connections at every major fashion house of note and could thus get the clothing at cost, if not gifted outright.

All they needed now was a finalized guest list.

“Do you think we should have involved Judy more?” Marlena fretted over her coffee.
“I actually spoke with Kurt about that,” Anna replied, “and he preferred Judy be under as little stress as possible. He knows there are some problems with her integrating back into her family.”

“It might help her to stay busy,” Marlena countered.

Anna nodded. “She’s been looking for a new house for her and Burt, as well as helping Quinn prepare for college. Don’t worry; she’s not at loose ends.”

Marlena nodded. “I can’t believe my baby’s getting married,” she whispered.

Anna smiled and laid her hand on Marlena’s arm. “I know how you feel.”

Marlena turned toward her and smiled. She never would have expected the friendship that had blossomed between them. They had known each other most of their lives and often been allies, particularly against Stefano, but they had never before been friends. There was a lot of baggage between them, particularly Roman and Carrie, but that was in the past. They had been divorced from Roman for years and were now happily married to other men, and Carrie was an adult.

Kurt and Eric’s love had touched so many, and it had also brought them together. Marlena found she greatly enjoyed Anna’s company, her sophistication and raucous wit, while Anna appreciated Marlena’s strength and steadfastness.

“How are you enjoying your new home?” Marlena asked.

Anna huffed. “Living in a cardboard box would have been preferable to living with Stefano. The only reason I stayed so long was because I knew Tony was desperate to have a better relationship with his father, but he’s finally accepted the man is irredeemable. Stefano, of course, had a fit about us leaving, but didn’t protest too much.”

She paused. “I almost wish he had. There’s a lot I’d like to say to that man.”

“You shouldn’t antagonize him,” Marlena murmured.

“Perhaps,” Anna acknowledged, “but I’ve lived in fear of him for half my life, Marlena, and I’m tired of it. He took my husband from me for almost twenty years. He destroyed my daughter’s life numerous times. He’s come for my son. Thankfully, Kurt has resources the rest of us never did and is practically untouchable. The only reason Stefano has gotten away with as much as has is because people are either afraid of him or they don’t believe he can be stopped.”

Marlena nodded thoughtfully. “You think he can be now?”

Anna shrugged a shoulder. “I think it’s possible. Kurt brings his grandmother and Helena Cassadine to the table, and that’s a frightening prospect. Further, his relationship with Victor ensures Kiriakis involvement. Victor has always been reluctant to interfere in Stefano’s schemes to keep the peace, but a network is slowly being formed.”

“That’s true,” Marlena said. “We’ve all faced him, sometimes together but often alone, and he’s usually come out the better. We’re older now, though, and certainly wiser, and we’ve come together in ways Stefano could never conceive.”

“It’s odd, isn’t it?” Anna asked. “To have hope.”

“But so very nice,” Marlena said, smiling.

Anna nodded. “Back to your question: I love the penthouse. It puts us right in the middle of the city. It’s convenient but private, and I love having Scott and Savannah as our only neighbors.”
They’re wonderful people.”

Marlena grinned. “They are, aren’t they?”

“Did you know Carrie and Justin offered them jobs?”

“No! I had no idea, but it’s wonderful!”

“Carrie and Justin have already drawn up the paperwork for their new firm and put a down-payment on office space in Titan Tower. Carrie will handle the corporate side, while Justin will focus mainly on criminal law. I’m sure it’s only a matter of time before Victor contracts them to handle Titan’s affairs.

“At any rate, they saw the advantage of hiring Scott and Savannah. Bringing Scott aboard as a CPA opens the firm to a lot of additional business, and Savannah is a top-notch paralegal. It’s just so unfortunate they worked for the same firm back in Ohio. When it folded, they were laid-off at the same time. They’ll be back on their feet soon.”

Marlena heaved a sigh of relief. “That’s terrific news. I know Scott in particular has felt badly about staying in the penthouse. He keeps trying to give me money for rent, despite me knowing they need every penny right now. His pride reminds me a lot of Roman.”

Anna nodded. “I agree. I also love having Stacy and Stevie so close. They’re amazing kids and so much fun. They make me feel young again.”

“You’re hardly old,” Marlena drawled.

“Well,” Anna said slyly, “it’s true I’m not a grandmother yet.”

Marlena glared at her before giggling. “It’s one of the great joys of this world.”

Anna beamed. “I’m anxious for Carrie and Kurt to have children, but Kurt said he and Eric decided to wait until he finished medical school. I just want to be young enough to enjoy my grandchildren.”

“What about Carrie?”

Anna sighed. “She doesn’t want children.”

“What?” asked a surprised Marlena.

“I know I should be supportive, but it’s disappointing. I think she’d be a wonderful mother, but I have to respect her decision. It wasn’t easy for her to tell me. She already told Roman, who accepted it, but was unhappy.”

“I’m sure.”

“It’s a fine line,” Anna said. “On the one hand, I don’t want her to have regrets; on the other, I don’t want to be one of those women who looks down on another for not wanting children. It’s Carrie’s choice but, admittedly, it’s not one I thought she’d ever make.”

“I’d offer to talk with her,” said a sympathetic Marlena, “but I don’t want her to feel we’re ganging up on her. Besides, she might change her mind.”

“I think she’s scared,” Anna said. “She banked so much on her marriage to Austin being successful. When it failed, I believe she felt responsible. Austin supported her decision to become
a lawyer, but she dropped enough hints that he resented it.”

Marlena soured. “I shouldn’t be so surprised, but I am. Austin is a wonderful man, but he’s much like Roman in his belief that men should be the breadwinners of the family. I spoke with Eric about this very matter. He was intimidated by Kurt’s fortune.”

She held up a hand. “Don’t worry. I set him to rights about that. I don’t want them to quarrel over it like I did with Roman.”

Anna heaved a sigh of relief. “Thank goodness. They’re too perfect together to be divided over something so unimportant.”

Marlena raised a brow. “Anna DiMera decrying the necessity of money?”

Anna threw back her head and laughed. “I’m not that far gone. I love money and always will, but experience has taught me it’s a tool and nothing more. It’s not a goal in and of itself. Granted, it can help you achieve goals sooner, but, at the end of the day, my goal is to be surrounded by friends and family, not sitting in an empty castle counting my gold.”

Marlena wondered if Anna had simply matured, or if she herself hadn’t bothered before to look beneath the surface.

Rachel Cory Hutchins walked into the parlor of her palatial Bay City home and noticed the mail sitting on the small desk beside the entryway proper. She found the sight depressing. Since the advent of social media and online bookkeeping, the mail now rarely held anything of interest or import, mostly advertisements for products people neither wanted nor needed.

She sighed, crossed to the desk, and began thumbing through the post. As usual, she was underwhelmed, until she came across a stiff envelope which suggested stationery and an actual letter. She turned it over and smiled when saw the Delacroix coat of arms. She was so pleased there was someone who still appreciated the fine art of correspondence, and even happier that it was someone as young as Kurt Hummel.

She thought back to when she first met him, about sixteen months previous. Kurt had started keeping a diary after his diagnosis and continued journaling throughout his treatment as he entered remission. His best friend, Sam Evans, had copied and submitted it to Cory Publishing without Kurt’s knowledge or approval.

The company was mostly run these days by her children, Amanda and Matthew, but every once and a while, they would bring to her attention a manuscript they thought worthy of her notice. Matthew had done so with this manuscript. Kurt’s diary had been compelling reading, not only because of the subject matter, but because he was a truly gifted writer.

His prose was sophisticated and unbelievably articulate, most uncommon for a boy his age. The copy editor had declared it almost flawless. Most impressive, however, was the way Kurt used vocabulary to spin a tale. The words all but leapt off the page, inviting and drawing in the reader from the first sentence.

She had sat up all night reading it, often sobbing, filled with disbelief that one so young had endured so much, yet was still so loving and optimistic. It was a story that needed to be told, particularly to young people, and especially those who were going through similar trials. It offered
so much hope and was filled with gratitude for friends and family.

She had forced her husband Carl to read it, for she knew of no one who appreciated literature as much as she, and he had been similarly overwhelmed. The next morning, they had debated its merits, finding it faultless and absolutely necessary. She had then passed it to Amanda, who had devoured it in one sitting and written up a contract, wanting to jump on this immediately, lest it fall into the hands of another publisher.

She had contacted Kurt, who’d had no idea his work had been seen by anyone, let alone submitted to one of the most prestigious publishing houses in the country. He had been furious, but politely thanked Amanda before declining the offer. His diary had been private, meant only for him, and he had no desire to lay himself bare before consumers and critics.

Amanda had wheedled and cajoled before outright begging, but Kurt had still refused. Finally, she had appealed to Rachel directly, for some reason thinking her mother would have better luck convincing Kurt. Rachel had been doubtful, but at last agreed, flying to Dayton and then driving to Lima to ambush Kurt in his home.

Their meeting had been one of the most eventful of Rachel’s life. She had been inordinately impressed with Kurt, especially because he was, in person, just as commanding and erudite as he was on the page, which was unusual. Instead of pressing him about the manuscript, she instead engaged him in discussions of literature, finding him extremely knowledgeable about the Western canon, as well as more obscure tomes ignored by academics and audiences alike.

She had only ever conversed this way with her late husband, Mac, and then with Carl. This was a boy who not only devoured books, but truly and honestly adored them. He loved words and the way they framed language and narrative. Apparently books had often been his only solace in a life filled with misery and oppression. How he had retained his ability to love and his sense of wonder were a mystery to her, but she was so very glad for his presence in this world, and now in her life.

She had left without discussing the book at all, other than extracting a promise from Kurt to consider the opportunity more carefully. She was willing to wait for as long as he desired; to see if his remission would remain stable; through high school graduation; through college graduation, if he so wanted. He had a unique and unparalleled gift which she would have hated to see go to waste. He had agreed and they spoke no more of it.

Instead, she had elected herself to be a sort of surrogate grandmother, checking in with him often, counseling him regarding college selection, and in general being a sounding board for whatever might be troubling him. She was very close with her own grandchildren, but her relationship with Kurt was different in that, despite the age difference, she regarded him more as a peer than just another young person. He was so complex and interesting, and she found herself thinking about long-held views in new and exciting ways.

He had captured her heart and she now looked forward to each and every encounter. He had texted her a few weeks back, announcing he was still in remission, and she had been overjoyed. She was curious as to what this letter contained.

“Good morning, my darling,” Carl said, breezing in and softly kissing her cheek. “What do you have there?”

She smiled. “A letter from Kurt.”

Carl offered an indulgent smile. “How lovely. I’m thankful to whatever force brought that boy into our lives. What news does it bring?”
“I haven’t opened it yet. Sit with me?”

“Of course.”

They retired to the sofa and Rachel carefully opened the envelope, withdrawing the letter and devouring its contents, her eyes widening with every line.

“Rachel?” Carl prompted.

“Oh, honey, Kurt’s getting married!”

“I beg your pardon? He’s not yet eighteen! Surely this is too soon?”

Rachel waved a dismissive hand and reached into the envelope, where she found a few photographs. She looked at them lovingly, her eyes welling, before she passed them to her husband.

“Oh, my,” Carl murmured. “They do make a very fetching couple, don’t they?”

“His fiancé is Eric Brady, who was Kurt’s oncologist. Oh, how romantic.”

“If not exactly proper,” Carl demurred.

She pursed her lips. “Darling, don’t be such an old stick in the mud.”

He regarded her with affront, which caused her to snicker.

“Sweetheart, it’s a beautiful love story! Kurt found happiness with the man who healed him from what possibly could have been a premature and entirely unwarranted demise. You and I both know when happiness finds you, you hold to it tightly and never surrender it.”

His eyes filled with warmth and he leaned over to press a passionate kiss to her lips.

“Does he mention anything else about his young man?”

Rachel nodded. “It’s actually quite a tale. Eric is the son of a police commander and Dr. Marlena Evans.”

“Truly? She’s internationally renowned, one of the best psychiatrists currently practicing.”

“Obviously the practice of excellent medicine runs in the family.” She returned to the letter. “Oh, my … Kurt only just learned that he was actually born to a surrogate, one of his mother’s best friends.” She turned toward her husband with wide eyes. “Anna DiMera.”

Carl reared back. “I know you own a few of her designs. I encountered her once or twice in Europe. She’s a stunning woman, thoroughly charming and quite witty, but somewhat flighty. I can’t imagine her doing something so selfless but, admittedly, I barely know her. What an incredible gift she gave that family.”

He then frowned, his eyes darkening. “That means Kurt is now orbiting, even tangentially, around Stefano DiMera.”

Rachel grimaced and moved closer to him. “He mentions that abomination of a man. Read with me?”

He leaned his head on her shoulder and, together, they read things which absolutely should not have been possible and were an outrage to humanity itself. They felt soiled.
“How well do you know Stefano DiMera?” she asked.

“Not well,” Carl said, “but what I do know is despicable. Even at my worst, I was never as wretched as that vulture. I find everything Kurt wrote all too plausible. It’s horrifying.”

Rachel continued scanning. “His grandmother is Katrine Valois?” she gasped. “His aunt is Helena Cassadine?”

Carl closed his eyes and released a controlled breath. “This is actually good news. Stefano is wary of Katrine and everyone with a functioning neuron knows not to engage Helena. The woman is terrifying.”

“From what I’ve heard, I would agree.” She shook her head. “Oh, look! Kurt has asked us to read at the wedding! He writes the selection is our decision, but that he wouldn’t be averse to a bit of Shakespeare.”

His eyes sparkled. “How fortuitous that Shakespeare is in our bailiwick. When is the wedding?”

“At the end of July,” Rachel said, “though the engagement party is in two weeks. We’re going, of course.”

He inclined his head. “Naturally.”

She arched a brow. “The wedding will be at the estate of Victor Kiriakis. Well, Kurt certainly doesn’t do anything by halves.”

“This should prove very interesting,” Carl agreed.
her son when he became unruly. Even his father struggled with it. Just the idea of hurting her had so devastated Kurt that he had insisted upon this trip. He owed his aunt a personal announcement at the very least. He just hoped that, when she looked at Eric, she would see how happy the man made him.

It would kill him if she disapproved, because he knew she would be forcing a decision that would not go in her favor. Eric was going to be his husband and would always come first, no matter how much he loved someone else, even his family. He just hoped Aunt Camille would understand and respect it. He rather thought she would.

He also had a secret weapon up his sleeve, which he coordinated with Uncle Seeley, who was actually hoping Kurt would have to resort to using it.

At last they entered the massive laboratory and Kurt could hear his aunt’s dulcet tone as she barked out orders to underlings. He smiled. He and Eric were easily able to hide behind Seeley as he scanned his identification card and climbed the dais. They quickly scanned their temporary credentials as well.

“Booth?” asked a tired Temperance Brennan. “Do we have a new case?”

“Nope. We’re on a well-deserved break, and though I know you hate spinning your wheels, I plan on doing nothing more than parking my tight ass on a sofa and watching hockey while drinking cheap beer.”

Brennan soured. “Then why are you here?”

He grinned. “Got a surprise for Cam.”

Camille looked up from her microscope and turned to glare at him, arching an eyebrow. “If this is another …”

Grin still in place, Seeley merely stepped aside.

Camille’s eyes widened to the size of small planets as her mouth fell open. She then released a scream so loud, test tubes began quaking in their racks. Brennan immediately covered her ears, Hodgins whimpered, and Zack stared in wonder at the decibel she produced. Angela came running from her office with a baseball bat in her hands, eyes darting about in search of a target.

“Kurt!” Camille screeched, diving at him and grabbing him in a frantic embrace, her hands touching whatever part of him on which she could gain purchase, just to assure herself this was actually happening and that her nephew was all right.

“What are you doing here? Why didn’t you tell me you were coming? What’s wrong?”

“Who is that?” Brennan murmured to Booth.

“That’s Kurt, Cam’s nephew.”

“Biological?”

“Yes.”

“I appear to be missing something.”

“Word of warning, Bones: don’t ask Cam about it unless she initiates conversation. It’s a sensitive subject.”
“All right, I suppose,” Brennan said slowly. “Why does she look like she wants to wrap him in cotton wool?”

Booth furrowed his brow and looked down. “Kurt was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer two years ago. It was a very, very close call, but he went into remission last year. A couple of weeks ago marked his first-year anniversary.”

“Oh,” she said softly. “I’m very glad he’s all right, for Cam’s sake.” She shook her head. “Such a horrible, insidious disease. How old is he?”

“About to turn eighteen.”

“So young,” Brennan whispered, “and even younger when it happened.”

“I’m fine, Aunt Cam!” protested a laughing Kurt. “Nothing’s wrong. I have exciting news and wanted to tell you in person.”

“Better than your remission holding?”

He nodded.

Her eyes gleamed. “Does it have anything to do with why Dean Winchester is standing next to you?”

“Why does everyone think that?” Eric demanded.

“Hush,” Kurt said, “and just accept that you’re movie-star gorgeous.”

Eric blushed and moved closer to him, taking his hand.

“Oh, my god!” Angela squealed, lacing her fingers together and resting her chin upon them. “Beautiful boys in love! This is the best surprise ever!”

“In love?” Cam blankly repeated.

“In love?” Seeley growled.

Kurt smirked. “Aunt Cam, Uncle Seeley, Dr. Brennan, Dr. Addy, Dr. Hodgins, and the stunningly gorgeous and talented Angela Montenegro …”

Angela swooned as the others wondered how he even knew who they were.

“… for those who don’t know me, my name is Kurt Hummel, and Dr. Saroyan is my aunt.” He looked at Brennan and then Zack. “Yes, my blood relation on my maternal side.”

They blushed.

“This is Dr. Eric Brady, the sexiest and most delicious man alive. I am honored to introduce him to you as my fiancé.”

“Fiancé!” Seeley roared, as he lumbered toward them, only to be stopped when Kurt reached under Seeley’s blazer and ran his fingers across his ribs.

“No fair using family knowledge of secret tickle places!” he wheezed.

Zack stared in confusion and wonder. How could a Terminator like Agent Booth be ticklish? It simply didn’t compute.
Cam immediately launched into a litany of protests, speaking so quickly even Angela was winded. Indeed, Brennan’s eyes were bulging at the quantity and quality of information being expelled from the woman’s lungs.

“Is your aunt the reason you want to become a doctor?” Eric asked, turning toward Kurt.

Camille abruptly shut up and gaped.

“Of course,” Kurt easily replied. “Aunt Cam and Aunt Liv, along with my parents, are my role models. I chose medicine to honor my parents’ struggles and my own, as well as Aunt Cam. I thought about law and politics, but I don’t believe I’d be able to censor myself as required.”

“That’s one of the things I love most about you,” Eric said softly, pressing a sweet kiss to Kurt’s lips.

Angela sniffled as Seeley snorted like a bull ready to charge.

“You want to be a doctor?” Cam cooed, heart in her eyes.

Kurt blushed and nodded. “Because of you. Long ago you taught me that medicine is only a practice; it’s the practitioner who makes it a noble art. Eric reinforced that by saving my life.”

Cam’s eyes filled as she looked at Eric. “You were his oncologist.”

Eric nodded.

She flew into his arms as Seeley completely deflated.

“Thank you,” Camille fervently whispered in Eric’s ear. “Thank you so much for saving my nephew’s life. I couldn’t go on without him.”

He pulled back and looked into her eyes. “I understand exactly what you mean.”

She looked at him, tilting her head. “You really do,” she whispered. “You love him.”

“With all of my heart, and I will love him until the moment I die and whatever exists beyond that.”

She hugged him again, pulling Kurt into the embrace.

Seeley glared at Camille’s crumbling defenses and snarled at Eric. “Tell me everything there is to know about you, boy. And it better match up with what the agency has on file, because I will be checking.”

Eric sighed. “What do you want to know?”

“Parents’ names.”

“My father is Roman Brady, Commander of the Salem Police Department. My mother is Dr. Marlena Evans.”

Seeley was somewhat mollified that the boy’s father was police, but he was stunned by his mother’s name. “You’re Marlena’s kid?”

Eric frowned. “You know her?”

“She’s done some profiling for the agency,” was all Seeley would say.
That was certainly news to Eric, who planned to question his mother about it in the very near future.

“A psychiatrist,” Brennan sneered, looking away when Eric narrowed his eyes at her.

“One of the best in the world,” Seeley said stiffly, “and who helped collar the Salem Strangler and the Salem Slasher, both of whom attacked her and killed members of her family, Bones. So maybe you should learn to censor yourself on occasion.”

Brennan blushed and stared down at the floor.

Seeley turned back to Eric. “What else?”

Eric sighed. “I have an elder sister, Carrie, who’s an attorney. I have a twin sister, Samantha, who goes by Sami, and is a mother of four children.”

Kurt nudged him. “Tell Uncle Seeley who Sami’s husband is. If he finds out from someone else, he won’t be happy.”

Seeley stood at attention and waited.

Eric heaved a deeper sigh. “Sami is married to EJ DiMera, son of Stefano.”

Seeley was about to explode, but Kurt cut him off.

“Aunt Liv already knows, Uncle Seeley, and you can be sure she’s on the case. She’s already discussed the matter with Uncle Fitz.”

Seeley snorted and then fell silent.

Kurt turned to Eric. “We have to visit her while we’re here or I’ll never hear the end of it.”

Eric nodded.

“Who is Aunt Liv?” Brennan asked. “How many more sisters do you have, Cam?”

Camille shook her head. “My only sisters are Felicia, whom you’ve had the displeasure of meeting, and Suzanne, who was Kurt’s mother. Incidentally, Felicia and Suzanne are not related. Liv was Suzanne’s best friend and is Kurt’s godmother.”

Seeley grinned. “Perhaps you’ve heard of Olivia Pope, Bones?”

Hodgins and Angela gasped as Brennan and Zack stared.

“So then Uncle Fitz …” Angela began.

“Is the President of the United States,” Seeley finished.

Eric sensed the potential for drama and rushed to head it off. “I have another sister, Isabella, who goes by Belle. She’s married to her childhood sweetheart and has a young daughter, Claire. Then there’s Brady Black, the son of my stepfather, John Black. Brady doesn’t like to think of himself as my brother, but I consider him to be mine.”

“John Black?” Seeley repeated. “Of the ISA?”

Eric nodded. “Shane Donovan, who is married to my Aunt Kimberly, is also an ISA agent.”
“And Shane is also my stepmother’s father,” Kurt chirped.

Seeley frowned in confusion. “I need to write this down. Or get a subscription to ancestry.com.”

Eric snickered. “My Uncle Bo and his wife Hope are detectives with the Salem PD. My Aunt Kayla is a physician, and her husband, Steve Johnson, used to be, well . . .”

“A mercenary,” Kurt said happily. “He is so hot.”

Eric turned toward him and raised a brow. “You have a bit of a daddy complex, don’t you?”

Kurt flushed. “Well, I’m marrying you, aren’t I?”

Eric leered. “Does this mean you’re going to call me Daddy?”

“Would you like it if I did?” Kurt volleyed.

Eric’s eyes glazed over.

“Ooh, new kink,” Kurt purred.

“That will be quite enough of that,” said a prim Cam.

“It’s so adorable!” Angela exclaimed, breaking into applause.

“Kurt, I’m very concerned about this DiMera connection,” Seeley said quietly.

“You should be,” said a protective Eric, as he launched into detail about what Stefano had done to his family, as well as to Kurt.

When he was finished, everyone looked a little green.

“How in the hell is this even possible?” Brennan asked of no one. “How can one person be so unabashedly and unashamedly perverse?”

No answers were offered.

“When’s the wedding?” Angela asked, grinning. “From the way you two look at each other, I’m betting you’re waiting to seal the deal until after you’ve taken the vows.”

Kurt and Eric blushed in tandem. Camille and Seeley felt ashamed by the relief they experienced, but it helped to know that Eric hadn’t taken advantage of their nephew.

“The end of July,” Kurt said, “and you’re all invited. I do hope you can come. My side of the aisle is rather anemic compared to Eric’s.”

“You’re inviting us?” asked a surprised Brennan.

Kurt shrugged. “You’re not only Aunt Cam’s colleagues, but her friends and, like I said, against all of those Bradys and Hortons, my part of the guest list is small.”

“We’ll be there!” Angela insisted.

Kurt beamed. He looked so happy, even those who considered trying to get out of it felt their hearts melt.

“Terrific!” he enthused. “The invitations will be mailed out shortly. The ceremony will be held at
the estate of Victor Kiriakis.”

“What!” Seeley exploded.

“Uncle Seeley, stop,” Kurt barked. “You know there’s nothing Uncle Victor would ever do to hurt me. He was Mom’s godfather and is honor-bound to protect me. I’m lucky he’s right there in Salem to head off Stefano, if need be.”

Seeley grumbled, but didn’t disagree.

“Also, he knows how to handle my grandmother and her sister.”

Seeley paled.

Kurt smirked at Camille. “Should we tell them of my other relatives?”

She snickered. “I don’t know if they could handle it.”

“Of course we could!” said an offended Brennan.

Kurt grinned. “Great! My grandmother is Katrine Valois. I believe your family is acquainted with her, Dr. Hodgins.”

Hodgins blanched and nodded.

“And Katrine’s half-sister is Helena Cassadine.”

“Even I’ve heard of her,” said a shaken Brennan.

Camille actually had a pleasant relationship with Katrine, who had never treated her as a bastard child, but the beloved sister of her only daughter. She had only met Helena once, but once was more than enough. She’d had the feeling Helena would’ve gladly slit her throat.

“Is Helena coming to the wedding?” Cam croaked.

“Of course not,” Kurt said. “She has several outstanding warrants and isn’t so stupid as to put in an appearance. I’m assuming she’ll send Nikolas as her representative.”

Cam nodded. She could handle Nikolas with no problems.

“Nikolas Cassadine?” Hodgins asked. “Prince Nikolas Cassadine?”

“That’s the one!” said a happy Kurt. “I hope Nikki will come. I haven’t seen him in years.” He turned to Eric. “Did I ever tell you that Helena actually tried to have Nikki and I betrothed?”

“What!” Eric yelped. “But you’re cousins!”

Kurt nodded. “Second cousins, and don’t forget Helena and Katrine are half-sisters. Of course, Nikolas and I are both boys.”

“I thought you said Nikolas was married to a woman?”

Kurt nodded sadly. “Yes, Emily Quartermaine. Sadly, she was murdered not long ago.”

“I’m sorry,” Eric murmured, wrapping an arm around Kurt’s shoulders. “Were you close to her?”

“No, not very,” Kurt admitted, “but she was a lovely woman. I think you would have really liked
her. She was a doctor, too. Now that I think about it, Carrie reminds me a lot of her.”

Eric’s heart pinged and he resolved to be kinder to Nikolas when the wedding rolled around.

“I didn’t hear about that,” Cam said softly. “Granted, I really have nothing to do with the Cassadines, but that’s awful. How did she die?”

“She was strangled by Anthony Zacchara.”

“That mobster in Port Charles?” Seeley barked. “Didn’t he attack several women?”

Kurt nodded. “I’d really prefer not to talk about it, Uncle Seeley.”

“That’s fine, honey,” Seeley said. “While you’re here, do you have time to meet with Parker? He misses you like crazy!”

Kurt began bouncing. “I’d love to see him! You’ll bring him to the wedding, won’t you?”

Seeley and Camille began shepherding Kurt and Eric toward the stairs.

“And you didn’t even have to sing the song,” Seeley said to Kurt.

“Oh, Kurt!” Cam wailed. “Would you have really done that to me?”

“I’m Kurt Hummel. Of course I would have.”

“Brat prince,” she muttered.

“It was so nice meeting all of you!” Kurt called out over his shoulder.

They all stared as the party departed.

“That’s quite a family,” Brennan noted.

Zack and Hodgins merely nodded.

“I wonder what the song was?” asked a curious Zack.

“Hot gay boys!” Angela cheered. “That is so my jam!”

Hodgins rolled his eyes. “1992 called. They want their slang back.”

She punched him.

Eric noted with no small wonder and just a touch of fear that Kurt was apparently much more familiar with the White House, having no problem keeping up with Seeley as both chattered a mile a minute. An awed Cam stuck closely to Eric as they watched all of the hubbub in fascination.

People were racing up and down the hallways, dashing in and out of unmarked offices, and talking miles per minute on cellphones, into wrist mics, and on Bluetooth devices. Almost every male was dressed in the same black suit and, while the women were a bit more generous with color, they still appeared somber and terribly dignified.
Kurt smiled and nodded to a few people, waving at others, which only reinforced to Eric that his fiancé was well-acquainted with how insane all of this was. He couldn’t believe he was here, in the White House, where the President of the freaking United States lived.

It was just so weird, because Kurt didn’t often discuss the movers and shakers he knew. He didn’t namedrop, perhaps because he didn’t feel the need. Even though Kurt had no plans for a national platform of his own, had he desired it, it would have been delivered to him with little more than a wave of his hand. Of course, given some more of his nefarious relatives, it wasn’t too much of a surprise Kurt longed for a quiet life out of the spotlight.

And to think, Eric had felt suffocated in Salem because of his family’s local reputations. Here was Kurt, who deemed the President an honorary uncle, and he wasn’t even breaking a sweat.

Eric smiled when he looked down and saw Kurt was tightly gripping Seeley’s hand. Maybe this wasn’t all as de rigueur to Kurt as he’d originally thought. Frankly, he was relieved, though he was also embarrassed. Kurt was showing more elegance and sophistication as a teenager than Eric had ever mustered in his entire life.

“Okay,” Cam whispered, “can we just agree this is crazy?”

“Totally,” Eric hissed. “You’ve never been here before?”

“Uh, the White House really isn’t my bag, Dr. Brady. I barely know Olivia. She had been friends with Suzanne long before I found out I even had another sister. Sometimes I’ll see Liv at a fundraiser and we catch up on Kurt or exchange memories of Suzanne, but we’re not close. This is her world. It definitely isn’t mine.”

Eric exhaled. “Mine neither, but it’s apparent that Kurt fits in just fine.”

She nodded. “Actually, I’m very grateful to Olivia for that. Kurt was an incredibly shy and reserved boy, far more so than he is now. By bringing him here on his vacations to DC, Olivia forced him to see such powerful people as actual people, flaws and all, which is a good thing.

“So many of his friends in Ohio thought him conceited or a snob, but that’s not true at all. He just isn’t easily impressed, which in turn causes other people to relax in his presence.”

Eric slowly nodded. “That’s true. He put everyone in my family at ease. They embraced him as one of us immediately, which was a huge relief. I had been worried about how they would react.”

“To someone so young?”

“To me having a boyfriend,” he mumbled.

“Oh,” she said.

“I was never self-loathing,” he rushed to say, “but I grew up in a fishbowl. People in Salem seem to know everyone’s business, and that just made me a very private person. I don’t really understand the need so many have to document their every bite of food on social media.”

She smiled and looped her arm through his. “Then you’re going to make a wonderful addition to the family.”

He patted her hand and gave her a wobbly smile. “Thank you for that. It means a lot.”

“You were worried about fitting in?” she asked, surprised. “With your pedigree?”
“That pedigree was created by my family and is no real reflection of me or my accomplishments,” he said, “and when you hear names like Olivia Pope and Prince Nikolas and, yes, Camille Saroyan, bandied about so casually, you can develop a bit of a complex.”

“So how do you deal with it?”

“Wine helps.”

She smirked. “You and Olivia will get along just fine.”

“What about you and me?” he asked nervously.

“You love him. That’s all I need for us to be good.”

Olivia Pope was not enjoying yet another worthless and emotionally-scarring détente with the POTUS and FLOTUS. She detested those acronyms.

Fitz and, surprisingly, Mellie were attempting to bully her into running his reelection campaign, which was just too strange, even for her. That Mellie had either the audacity or humility to address Olivia as her work-wife was horrifying. Not only was she thoroughly uninterested, but she had more than enough work on her plate to keep her occupied.

Unfortunately, Fitz and Mellie weren’t too interested in taking no for an answer and had now resorted alternately to bribery, whining, and threats and intimidation. She was more thankful than ever that she had called it off with Fitz. He was such a Peter Pan caricature, refusing to grow up and make a decision, always expecting a woman to do it for him.

Well, she had counted herself out and thought it was the best decision she had ever made. Let them posture and cajole. They knew as well as she that she not only knew were all the bodies were buried, but had even dug some of the graves. They could take no action against her that wouldn’t be revisited tenfold upon themselves. Sometimes karma truly worked, albeit in a deeply regretful and masochistic manner.

Fitz heaved a sigh and glared at the ringing telephone as Mellie stared with longing at a bottle of scotch. The last thing any of them needed was for her to start indulging, though at least she hadn’t hidden a jar of moonshine in the Oval Office. So far as Fitz was aware.

He rolled his eyes and snatched up the phone, growling into the receiver. As he listened, his eyes and smile brightened. He quickly rang off, donned his blazer once more, and surreptitiously checked his breath. Mellie and Olivia quickly followed suit, suspecting someone important was about to enter.

Fitz dashed to the door and threw it open. “Kurt!”

Olivia stilled. “What?”

Mellie beamed. She absolutely adored that boy. Not only was he wise and savvy, he was extremely loving and had a vicious wit. He actually reminded her of herself. She had made a few unplanned and unannounced visits to his hospital in Dayton while he was receiving treatment to
spend time with him. It was Kurt Hummel, far more so than her own husband, who had helped her come to terms with her eldest son’s death.

Kurt also reminded her that Olivia Pope was an actual person and not just a talking head who had built for herself an impressive brand. Sometimes Mellie resented this. It was a lot easier to pigeonhole the woman as nothing more than the President’s mistress. Having to acknowledge her as something else, something more, as someone who was adored by one whom Mellie herself adored, was sobering.

Camille, Seeley, and Eric stood slightly shell-shocked as their President took Kurt into his arms and embraced him like he would a relation or dear friend. They then gaped as Kurt stood on his toes and pressed a gentle kiss to the President’s cheek before immediately starting to flirt with him.

Their eyes bulged as the President easily slipped into the banter, carding his fingers through Kurt’s hair, resting his hands on Kurt’s shoulders before slowly running them up and down Kurt’s arms. Finally, his hands encircled Kurt’s small waist and they stared into each other’s eyes as they proceeded to titillate one another. The President offered rakish grins and roguish winks as Kurt vamped it up as the perfect coquettish courtesan.

Seeley, who had never before seen either his honorary nephew or his Commander in Chief act in such a manner, was thoroughly bewildered. Sometimes he and Kurt would exchange lascivious comments as a joke, but there was something far more charming yet serious about this. Apparently Kurt really did have a thing for older men.

Fitz wrapped his arm around Kurt’s shoulders and pulled the boy flush against him. His eyes sparkled and his white teeth flashed as he extended a hand to Seeley.

“It’s good to see you again, Agent Booth!” he enthused.

A confused Seeley nodded and took the hand. “Yes, Sir. Thank you, Sir. You too, Sir.”

Fitz arched a brow in amusement. “And the rest of your party?”

Seeley cleared his throat. “Sir, please allow me to introduce you to Dr. Camille Saroyan of the Jeffersonian Institute, and Dr. Eric Brady.”

Fitz cheerfully shook hands with Camille and complimented her superior work at the Jeffersonian. He then shook hands with Eric, his eyes and grip hardening. Fitz gazed at him with approval.

Eric repressed a sigh and wondered how many more protective older men to whom he would have to defend himself. He was glad that Kurt was so loved by so many, but these people needed to be made to understand that Kurt was his, not theirs.

He widened his smile to bare his teeth and increased the strength of his own grip. President or not, he was not going to be put in the situation of having to prove himself to anyone other than the man he would soon marry.

“Well, come in, come in!” Fitz said. “I know two ladies waiting to see you, young man.”

Kurt’s eyes lighted as he looped his arm through that of the other man before crossing the threshold.

“Aunt Mellie!”

“There’s my beautiful boy!” Mellie cooed, rushing over and throwing her husband off Kurt before she exchanged double air kisses and a warm embrace.
“You’re as stunning as always,” Kurt said.

“And you look happier than I’ve ever seen,” she said quietly. “For that, I am most grateful.”

“I really am happy,” he whispered into his ear. “Sometimes I worry that it’s too much.”

“More like not enough,” she insisted. “You deserve happiness, sweetheart, and have been without it far too long. You’re owed this, so take it and run with it. Don’t you ever apologize for being happy.”

He tightened his hold and she returned it fully.

Olivia was deeply touched. She could say a lot about Mellie, and she certainly had over the years, but she couldn’t deny the woman held a strong affection for her godson. Sometimes she wondered how she and Mellie would have fared as friends if not for Fitz. At the very least, they would have been successful colleagues. Olivia didn’t personally agree with all of Mellie’s political views, but she believed that Mellie could’ve been the first female president of their nation. And Olivia Pope would’ve been the one to put her there.

Bygones, she supposed. They were who they were.

Kurt quickly introduced the others to their First Lady, noting that Eric in particular fell under Mellie’s spell, as most properly-raised men did. He kissed Mellie’s cheek and then turned.

“Aunt Liv!”

She threw her arms wide open and he dove into them, surprising them both with her strength to keep them upright. He put his face in her neck and inhaled deeply, smelling love and family and home and just a bit of his mother.

“I missed you so much,” he whispered.

Her eyes wetted and she pulled him up so she could look into his eyes. “Don’t cry, honey. All that matters is you beat that vicious beast into submission, which I always knew you would.” Her tears spilled over. “You are the strongest person I’ve ever known, Kurt Hummel, and I am so damned proud of you. Your mother would be, too.”

She blinked rapidly and cleared her throat, adjusting his hair and collar. Jesus, she loved this boy. She loved him so much more than she ever thought herself capable of loving another. He was the closest she supposed she would ever come to having her own child, so she felt no compunction about showing that love to him whenever or wherever it was needed.

She looked into his eyes, and they both nodded and smiled.

“Now, I know Camille and Seeley,” she said, turning to both of them with a smile, “and it’s lovely to see them again, but I insist on a proper introduction to your young man.”

Kurt blushed.

“Excuse me?” Camille said, tilting her head. “You already knew about this?”

Olivia’s eyes widened. “You didn’t?”

Camille crossed her arms and set her jaw.

Olivia slapped Kurt upside his head. “What the hell is wrong with you?”
Camille smirked, silently admitting she felt a grim satisfaction from Olivia’s action. Oh, she knew Kurt loved her as only blood could love blood, but his relationship with Olivia had always been almost otherworldly. They understood and connected with each other on such a deep level that, whenever they were together, anyone who witnessed it was humbled and envious.

“It’s not my fault Aunt Cam can’t be bothered to check her Facebook!” Kurt squawked.

“Oh, honey,” a wincing Eric murmured, shaking his head, “no.”

Camille appreciated his comment and knew it wasn’t lip service. She knew he had introduced Kurt to the Brady clan in person.

Kurt sighed. “I have no good excuse. I was so wrapped up in the remission and then all this nonsense with Stefano DiMera …”

He unleashed the Eyes of Doom, in which his eyes widened just shy of comically and every color contained therein unfurled and gleamed like kaleidoscopes.

Eric had never before seen this maneuver and was totally bowled over, as were Mellie and Fitz. Olivia and Camille, who had previous exposure, were not as yet completely inoculated and began clucking over him. Seeley stood in a corner, arms crossed over his chest and smirking. Now he knew who had taught his son that trick. There would be repercussions. Oh, yes, there would be repercussions.

“That,” said a breathless Eric, “was an unfair play.”

Kurt stuck his tongue out at him. “Totally fair. They were ganging up on me!”

Camille nodded. “It’s a little thing we like to do from time to time, especially when you deserve it.”

Kurt raised a brow. “I could still sing the song.”

Olivia blinked. “Kurt, are you singing again?”

He blushed and looked away.

“He sang for me,” Eric said. “Would you like to hear it?”

“You recorded it?” demanded an aghast Kurt.

“No, Carrie did. She sent me a copy, as well as one to Quinn, Brittany, Santana, and Sam.”

Kurt’s eyes narrowed to slits. “How did she even get it?”

Eric suddenly found the ceiling absolutely fascinating. “Well, she and Sami might have been there.” He winced. “Our parents might also have been there. And have their own copies.”

A mortified Kurt flushed to his roots.

“I didn’t know you sang, Kurt,” Mellie said kindly.

“He has an almost four-octave range and a whistle register,” Olivia absently remarked.

Mellie, who sang herself, stared at her, and then at Kurt, before turning to Eric. “Play it.”
Eric grinned and looked at the President, gesturing toward the docking station. “With your leave, Sir?”

“Call me Fitz, Eric, and by all means.”

“Oh, no,” Kurt moaned, covering his face with his hands.

Kurt didn’t even really know why he was bothered. He knew his voice was good and he was proud of that performance. His song to Eric was the first he had sung in over a year, but it was fueled with all the love he had for his fiancé and he had nailed it.

When had he had become embarrassed to sing in front of his friends and family? Performance had always been such a deep and intrinsic part of who he was, his way of making himself unique and expressing himself, his true emotions, in a way he often couldn’t with words.

He still loved singing and he had loved singing for Eric but, for whatever reason, he now associated it with privacy, a special gift he chose to give to another. He no longer felt the urge or need to sing every thought or feeling. He wasn’t in competition with Rachel for solos. He wasn’t trying to show he could handle alleged masculine songs just as well as the other boys. He wasn’t begging for notice.

He was done with trying to prove himself and, he supposed, he was done with performance for the sake of it. He had sung to Eric because he was moved, which he felt was a much better use of his gift than adding his voice to a chorus that didn’t need him. He no longer had to sing to define himself; he defined his singing.

His shoulders relaxed and he sighed, fighting the urge to critique his performance. Instead, he watched those around him, interested in the effect his voice produced.

Camille had tears in her eyes. She usually did when he sang, for it reminded her of his mother, from whom he had inherited the ability. Camille was a powerhouse vocalist who could easily rival Mercedes, but her voice also had a maturity and gravitas that only time could develop, giving her notes a complexity absent in younger singers.

Olivia was seated and looking down at her lap. Her love for music was unparalleled, except perhaps by Kurt himself, and though she couldn’t sing, she felt music on a level most others couldn’t. It sank deep into her bones and caused her blood to race, touching her in a way almost nothing else could. That she believed him not only to be a competent singer, but a good one, offered more validation than he had ever received in four years with New Directions.

Surprisingly, Mellie and Fitz were crying, an act he had never before associated with them. He wondered as to the emotions behind their tears, for he wasn’t so vain as to believe they were that in awe of his talent. He knew their marriage was problematic. He knew the space Olivia occupied within it. He wasn’t sure how he felt about it, ultimately determining it was none of his business. He loved all three of them and it wasn’t his place to take sides.

He wanted Olivia to be happy. She deserved it and had more than earned it, but he sincerely doubted she would find it with Uncle Fitz, who was tied to Aunt Mellie in ways beyond their vows. As much as Olivia and Fitz were connected, so too were Mellie and Fitz.

From what he had observed, Mellie and Fitz had a much more egalitarian relationship, whereas he
often viewed Olivia as an appendage. His love for her was consumptive to the point of possessiveness, which was unhealthy. Kurt wanted Olivia to find a love that was for her alone, that recognized her beauty and genius were the result of hard work and determination, not just a reflection of a man strong enough to garner her attention.

He couldn’t even imagine what his mother would have said about Olivia and Fitz. His father had certainly said his share. Dad looked at Olivia as a sister, and he wasn’t impressed by Fitz continuing to string her along. His distaste was only equaled by Olivia allowing herself to be led.

Seeley looked suspiciously teary, but Kurt had no idea why. He often wished Seeley and Aunt Cam had stayed together, for theirs had been a fun and loving relationship, but he knew his uncle had designs on Temperance Brennan, an officious person Kurt knew he might have once become himself, had the cancer and then Eric not intervened.

The song was finally over and Mellie and Olivia fought over who would hug him first, as the others congratulated him on a job well done.

“That really wasn’t necessary,” he said to Eric.

“I disagree,” Eric easily said. “No one has ever sung to me before and it was gorgeous. I reserve the right to play it to whomever I deem worthy of hearing it.”

“I like him,” Camille said to Olivia, who nodded.

“You should have asked me first,” Kurt scolded.

Eric rolled his eyes. “Oh, pardon me. However can I make up this lapse in judgment, my liege? Shall I sing to you?”

Kurt slowly tilted his head, a smile growing on his face. “Yes. Yes, you shall.”

Eric stared.

“Can you sing?” Olivia asked him.

Eric blinked. “I can carry a tune, I suppose, but nothing even approaching what Kurt can do.”

“Few people could make that approach,” Camille said, “but it never hurts to try!”

He glared at her, eyes narrowing as she smirked. He turned to Kurt. “Do you honestly expect me to serenade you in front of two of the most important women in your life and our President and First Lady?!”

“Hey, buddy,” said a grinning Mellie, as she sat on a sofa and crossed her legs, “you made the offer. We all expect you to come across.”

Fitz snickered. “I fully support my wife’s executive decision in this very important matter.”

Eric gave him a betrayed look. “I expected better of my President. This is cruel and unusual punishment and I feel like my Constitutional rights are being violated.”

Olivia cleared her throat. “As a highly-skilled and much sought after attorney, I can unequivocally state that your case is without merit.”

Camille and Mellie burst out laughing.

“Objection!” Eric protested.
“Overruled,” Olivia said flatly. “Proceed.”

Seeley and Fitz snickered.

Eric rolled his eyes. “Oh, fine,” he seethed, stomping over to the docking station as he began scrolling through his phone. “I’m still convinced this is treasonous behavior, but since I don’t want to end up in a holding facility, I’ll participate in this farce.”

“Oh, you brave, strong man!” Kurt simpered.

“Just don’t tell anyone at home,” Eric warned, “or I’ll never hear the end of it.”

“Are you the only one in your family who can sing?” Fitz asked.

“Most of my family is Irish,” Eric said, “so we can all muddle through, some better than others. Except for my twin sister; she’s tone-deaf. Although she can produce some truly piercing high notes when she’s screeching.”

He looked at Kurt. “Don’t expect much. I can’t do what you do.”

“Very few can,” Seeley said.

Kurt shot him a shy look of appreciation and gratitude.

“True,” Eric acknowledged, nodding his head. “This was still be awful, but maybe not completely hopeless.” He looked around. “Is the Oval Office soundproofed?”

“Of course,” Fitz lied.

Eric gave an absent nod and continued scrolling through his phone, anxious to make a good selection. This counted, he knew, and he wanted to sing a song which would illustrate just how much he loved Kurt, and how much Kurt meant to him. You only got one opportunity to serenade your true love.

Christ, this was some hokey shit. Still, Kurt had done as much for him, so who was he to welch? He just wished he’d had the time to warm up his voice, by which he meant permanently delay this atrocity he was about to commit against music.

He finally found a song he felt would suffice, relieved that the vocals weren’t very demanding. He just had to make sure he stayed on key. The lyrics and the sentiment behind them, however, were beautiful. He believed they truly captured everything Kurt was and meant to him.

He dropped his phone back into the docking station and took a deep breath before slowly releasing it, trying to calm his nerves. He forced himself to block out everyone other than Kurt, which was actually surprisingly easy to do.

As soon as the opening piano chords sounded, Kurt’s eyes filled. This was one of his favorite songs by one of his favorite artists from one his favorite movies. He had watched it frequently these past two years, imagining himself and Eric as the two protagonists helplessly falling into a doomed love. He had never told Eric of this, for he had never imagined Eric would ever return his feelings.

Now that he did, now that they were to be married, and now that Kurt was healthy, the song took on an entirely new meaning: one filled with hope, rather than hopelessness.
Eric crossed the room and stood before him, meeting his eyes.

“There’s a song that’s inside of my soul,” he quietly began, his singing voice as pleasantly deep and rumbly as his speaking voice, though it was tempered with a surprising sweetness and a slight rasp.

Kurt thought it was the most beautiful sound he had ever heard as instinctively moved toward its source.

“It’s the one that I’ve tried to write over and over again.”

Eric knew he had problems expressing himself. He truly was the middle child of his family. Even though he and Sami were twins, he had been born first and felt keenly his position for as long as he could remember.

Carrie was the golden child who did no wrong because she couldn’t imagine doing otherwise. She was sweet and kind and everyone loved her. She was the standard to which her siblings had always been compared. It was through no fault of her own, of course; Carrie couldn’t be expected to be average just because it would be easier for those who came after her.

Sami was the loud, emotive child, who never hesitated to tell you what she thought or felt, whether it was good or bad, and if it hurt your feelings, so much the better. She never took responsibility for herself, but was the first to point out, criticize, and ridicule the actions of others. She held everyone but herself to these ridiculous standards they couldn’t ever possibly hope to meet, then she would sit back and scream when they inevitably disappointed her.

Carrie acted, Sami reacted, and Eric tried to take no action at all. They were all so much older than Belle, the baby of the family, that she had never affected their bizarre dynamic.

He liked being in the background and mostly unnoticed. He had strived so long to be average, to attract no attention, that it was a long time before he discovered his talents and abilities. He was twenty-eight and only did his life feel as though it was truly ready to begin. A huge part of that was because of Kurt.

“I’m awake in the infinite cold, but you sing to me over and over again.”

Eric sometimes felt badly that Kurt still didn’t know Quinn had given him a copy of every song Kurt had performed at every rehearsal since sophomore year. Hell, Kurt probably didn’t know that Quinn had recorded him, for they weren’t even friends at that time.

He had spent so much of his life just existing; then, when he couldn’t stomach it any longer, he had started running. After he left Salem, he had bounced around from state to state, mediocre job to mediocre job, trying to score photography assignments on the side, trying to convince himself his passion for the art hadn’t died a long time ago.

His personal life had been a bust after Nicole and then Greta. He had finally accepted that girls just didn’t do it for him, though he didn’t suddenly start chasing guys. There had been a few hook-ups to test the waters, just to determine if it was guys who stoked his fire. He did like guys, and he really wanted a boyfriend, but most of the men he had encountered didn’t want anything serious, let alone permanent. They wanted him because he was hot, not because he was Eric.

Finally he had ended up in Santa Barbara and met Eden. She and Cruz had helped him realize he wasn’t living the life he wanted because he wasn’t only running from fear of failure, but a fear of success. He’d finished up undergrad, earned his medical degree, made some great friends, but was still alone.
At the time, he had felt pathetic. Looking back on it now, however, he was glad he had waited, that he’d saved himself for the right guy. It had taken him a long time to find Kurt and there was nothing he wouldn’t do to keep him.

All of those lonely nights in Dayton, a town much like Salem, as he finished his residency and then his specialization, it was Kurt’s voice that had comforted him. It was Kurt’s voice in his ear that touched him, body and soul, and gave him hope and a sense of purpose. Every night, he imagined Kurt was singing only to him, praying one day that it would come true, praying that Kurt could love him back. And then had did. Kurt had saved him.

“So I lay my head back down and I lift my hands and pray to be only yours. I pray to be only yours. I know now, you’re my only hope.”

Eric had no idea how he would go on if this didn’t work out. Just the thought terrified him every single day. He felt as though he and Kurt had been made only for each other. He couldn’t face the idea that they weren’t forever, so he refused to consider it. There would never be anyone other than Kurt.

He took Kurt’s hands in his own. “Sing to me the song of the stars, of your galaxy dancing and laughing and laughing again.”

Even Kurt’s laugh was musical; magical. When Kurt truly laughed, not just snickered or chortled, it was the very personification of joy. It rang in ears and in hearts, people turning to stare in search of the source. It was infectious and melodious and it was all Eric wanted to hear for the rest of his life.

“When it feels like my dreams are so far, sing to me of the plans that you have for me over again.”

Their relationship was odd, he knew, but not for the reasons so many believed. Even though Eric was the elder, he felt in many ways that he had been guided toward Kurt to learn from him, not teach him. Kurt was very much in charge of their union, and Eric wouldn’t want it any other way. Kurt was driven and ambitious. He knew who he was and what he wanted, and what he wanted most was for Eric to be his partner in this life. It was an enormous honor.

“So I lay my head back down and I lift my hands and pray to be only yours. I pray to be only yours. I know now, you’re my only hope.”

Eric took a breath and looked up into Kurt’s eyes, his own filled with determination and complete trust. “I give you my destiny, I’m giving you all of me. I want your symphony singing in all that I am.”

Tears began slipping from his eyes, knowing the note he couldn’t reach, even in falsetto, was on the horizon. He was going to ruin everything. He had tried so hard, so very hard, to communicate everything Kurt meant to him, and he was going to fail, betrayed by his own weakness. He startled when he felt Kurt’s hands tighten in his.

Kurt smiled and opened his mouth. “At the top of my lungs!” he sang, in a key higher than even he thought he could reach, the final note triumphant in its gentleness. “I’m giving it back.”

Eric choked on a sob. Kurt had taken the bridge and guided them over it. Once again, Kurt had saved him.

“So I lay my head back down,” they sang together in perfect harmony, “and I lift my hands and pray to be only yours.”

“I pray to be only yours,” Eric sang.
“I pray to be only yours,” Kurt repeated.

Kurt leaned in and rested his head on Eric’s shoulder as they slowly began to sway. “I know now,” they sang, voices softening, “you’re my only hope.”

Eric smiled and closed his eyes as he hummed the final notes and, as the song started to die, he leaned down to press a gently but passionate kiss to Kurt’s lips. At least he didn’t need Sami to tell him what to do this time.

“When’s the wedding?” he heard Mellie ask Olivia.

“The end of July,” was the happy response.

“Have they selected a menu? Put me down for the chicken. Fitz will have the beef.”

Eric and Kurt startled, turning toward the First Lady, who had just invited herself and the President to their wedding.

“Huh?” they asked.
I don’t play second fiddle to anyone.
Carrie was thrilled with the additional help for the wedding planning offered by Quinn, Brittany, and Santana. She hadn’t wanted to admit it but, even with Sami’s aid, she was beginning to feel overwhelmed. The new firm she was opening with Justin had been a spur of the moment decision – and a good one, she felt – but it was encroaching more and more upon her time.

Sami didn’t say anything to the girls, but Carrie knew her sister was perturbed and saw the girls as interlopers, which was just ridiculous. They were Kurt’s closest friends; this was his wedding, too, and should reflect as much of him as it did Eric. Thankfully, after a bout of surliness, Sami apparently realized this on her own and decided to be an adult.

Carrie was glad. She and Sami were both too old for her to explain life to her sister.

She felt badly for Belle, who was a little disappointed she hadn’t been drafted to help with the planning. Sami also felt guilty, but the truth of the matter was they both knew that, as much as Belle and Eric loved each other, they weren’t very close and she didn’t know him as well as they did. Belle seemed to accept this with her usual aplomb, but Carrie made a mental note to talk with her sister about it later, as well as ask Eric to speak with her.

One of the things she loved most about moving back to Salem was the chance to see her family whenever she wanted. She, Sami, and Belle were having lunch together at the Pub, joined by Santana, Quinn, and Brittany. They had commandeered the largest table and Caroline was happily fussing over them all, but was most enamored of Brittany.

Truthfully, they all were. She was absolutely the sweetest person Carrie had ever met, but she also sensed the girl had a darker side just lingering beneath the surface. Brittany was completely guileless, and Carrie didn’t believe it was a front, but she also knew this was someone who shouldn’t be pissed off. As much as Santana appeared the dominant partner, it was apparent to those who truly looked that Brittany called the shots.

Adding the girls into the equation was a fairly seamless process. Quinn knew all of Kurt’s tastes because they were also her own, so she took Carrie and Sami’s notes and retooled some ideas while jotting down others. When she had questions, she posed them to Santana, who responded with simple yes or no answers. While Quinn understood Kurt on an intellectual level, Santana knew him on an emotional one.

Those matters which stumped them both were referred to Brittany, and Carrie began to understand that while Quinn was Kurt’s sister and Santana his best friend, Brittany was akin to an opposite-sex life partner.

She gamely asked Brittany how long she and Kurt had been friends.

“Oh, gosh, ages!” the girl said cheerfully. “Kurty and I were in the same dance classes forever, starting when we were about three. I was even his first kiss!”

Carrie, Sami, and Belle stared at her. Santana and Quinn tried and failed to hide their jealousy, which the others thought bizarre, considering Santana was a lesbian and Quinn was Kurt’s sister.

“Kurty is a very special person,” Brittany patiently explained, “and he inspires a lot of devotion in his friends. Even those who only know him, but who aren’t particularly close to him, love him. Heck, even his enemies do. It’s hard to explain because Kurt is very complex. He’s spent most of his life compartmentalizing its different aspects, and I’m probably the only one who knows him
completely.”

Quinn and Santana nodded.

“Most people, even those we have in common, didn’t know how close he and I are until junior year. Kurt wanted it that way because he got a lot of grief in Lima and he didn’t want any of that spilling over onto me. I told him hundreds of times that I didn’t care, that I could handle it, but he refused. See, most people think I’m kind of retarded, but Kurt was the first person to see that I’m actually awesome. He didn’t want to take away from that.”

She stared down at the table. “I could have helped. I could have protected him. I’m pretty popular, and most of the crap would’ve stopped if he had just let me tell people to leave him alone. But he said that wasn’t my job, that I was too special and too important to him, and that he couldn’t allow me to fight his battles. I didn’t like it, but I had to respect it, because I knew if I interfered, he would distance himself from me.”

Her breath caught as she shook her head. “I couldn’t bear that. So I made the selfish choice, one I’ll regret it for the rest of my life.” Her lip quivered. “When David …”

She put her hand over her mouth and sobbed silently.

Santana pulled her into her arms and held her tightly.

Quinn snarled. “That goddamned son of a bitch,” she hissed. “If we’d had any idea what he was really up to, that all of his intimidation and harassment was really about wanting Kurt for himself, we would have ended him long before he put himself out of our misery.”

“We were too self-involved and too up each other’s asses to see what was happening right in front of us,” Santana barked. “And Tink being Tink, of course never told us until it was far too late. I’m glad that bastard is dead. I’m only sorry I didn’t get to kill him myself.”

“I understand,” Carrie said quietly.

“How?” Santana demanded.

“When I was nineteen, I was attacked by someone I knew, or thought I knew. I never had a clue who he really was or what he wanted, or just how despicable he truly was. I was out of town with the man I would later marry when Alan came for me. He wore a mask. I didn’t know who it was. I have never been more terrified in my life. I fought him off, but didn’t learn it was him until after he had targeted and raped my sister.”

She cracked her knuckles. “I’m a good person, at least I try to be, but I will always wish I had killed him that night. I should have killed him for what he did to Sami.”

Sami took her hand. “It wasn’t your fault.”

Carrie turned toward her and raised a brow.

Sami flushed. “I was wrong to blame you. I blamed you because it was easy, easier than dealing with what happened. I knew there was something wrong with him, but all I saw was an older man who was once interested in you and then turned his attention to me. I thought I was finally getting something you didn’t have, that you couldn’t have. You tried to warn me. You told me he made you uneasy. Lucas tried to warn me. Mom tried to warn me. But I ignored all of you because I was convinced I knew best, that you were trying to prevent my happiness.

“After the rape, I was furious, not only for making myself vulnerable to him, but for not listening
to those who only ever tried to help me. He blamed me, and a part of me believed that it was my fault, because I defended and encouraged him.”

“You don’t think that anymore, do you?” Belle whispered.

“No. Alan raped me because he’s a rapist. It wasn’t my fault. It wasn’t Carrie’s fault. It wasn’t Mom’s fault. It’s no one’s fault but his.” She turned to Brittany. “How is Kurt dealing with this, really?”

“Pretty well, I think,” she said. “He went into therapy immediately. He never blamed himself because David had spent years making him miserable. No one really could have foreseen the root of the abuse.” She paused. “I think Kurt’s wrong to keep it from Uncle Burt, but I understand why he did. In the end, it happened to Kurt, so he should be the one to decide how he handles it. As his friends, we need to respect his choice.”

“Does anyone else know?” asked a concerned Sami.

“Only Sam,” Quinn replied. “Kurt has two other good friends, Artie and Tina, who will actually be coming to stay in Salem for the next two months for the engagement party and wedding. Artie has been in a wheelchair for most of his life, so there was little he could do to defend Kurt from all the harassment he suffered. Kurt worried if he told him, Artie would’ve had a stroke. Tina …”

“… is a scary bitch,” Santana finished. “She comes off all meek and shy, but when she gets seriously pissed off, it’s game over. Kurt didn’t tell her because it was more than probable she would have killed Karofsky, and I mean she would have killed him, just as Kurt would have done had the situations been reversed.”

Belle paled. “You really think Kurt could kill someone?”

Santana stared into the other girl’s eyes. “To protect or defend someone he loves? There’s no question. It runs in the family, after all. If Stefano DiMera or anyone else ever targeted Eric, Kurt would deal with them efficiently and ruthlessly, and no one would ever find the body.”

Sami and Carrie smirked. The more they came to learn of Kurt, the more they were convinced he was exactly the right guy for their brother.

“Would you do any less for your husband or daughter?” Santana challenged.

“I don’t know,” Belle said softly, eyes darkening, “but I hope to god I wouldn’t.”

Santana gave her a nod of respect.

“Let’s get back to the planning, shall we?” Quinn asked briskly. “One of the major holes I see is that, now that Kurt and Eric have agreed on two wedding aisles, we need another flower girl and ring-bearer.”

Carrie blinked, filled with disbelief she hadn’t realized this before.

“D’oh,” said Sami.

Santana snickered.

“I suggest Stacy,” Quinn continued. “I’m sure Kurt was just too frazzled to realize it, but she was probably hurt that Stevie was asked to be in the wedding and she wasn’t. It would be best if Stevie and Stacy were in Kurt’s wedding party, and we shift Ciara to be Eric’s flower girl.”
Carrie and Sami nodded.

“The question is, who can we get to be the other ring-bearer?”

The table descended into silence as they pondered over the possibilities.

Sami sighed. “I’d say we could have my son Johnny do it, but he and Allie are twins and are at the stage that if one has something the other doesn’t, the universe implodes.”

“Who do we know that has a young son?” Belle asked of no one in particular.

They were startled from their thoughts when Carrie’s phone rang. She glanced down.

“It’s Kurt. Maybe he’ll have an idea.” She answered the call. “Hey, soon-to-be brother. How’s DC?” She grinned and then burst out laughing. “Glad everything went well.”

She looked up and saw her parents, and Marlena and John, enter the Pub. She waved them over.

“Listen, while I’ve got you on the phone …” She trailed off and listened to his sudden rush of words. “That’s no problem. I assumed when I added your Aunt Camille to the guest list, there might be more additions. Yeah, let me just get a pen.”

She dug around in her purse and at last emerged triumphant. “Okay, go!”

She nodded a repeated the names as he spoke them. “Special Agent Seeley Booth.”

Marlena raised a brow. That was a name she hadn’t heard in a while.


She took furious notes. “Anyone else?”

The resulting silence was far too long, and everyone turned toward Carrie, who was chalk white, her hand trembling as if with palsy.

“Can you repeat that, please?” she whispered. “I think I just went temporarily deaf.”

They others looked at one another in worry and confusion.

Carrie cleared her throat. “Kurt, are you serious?” she roared. “Mellie and Fitzgerald Grant are going to be guests? Are you saying that the President and First Lady of the United States are coming to this wedding?!”

Apparently they were, because the next words out of Carrie Brady’s mouth were, “Holy shit!”

The others were far too busy clucking like chickens to be of any use, so Brittany assumed control of the situation and snatched the phone from Carrie’s hand.
“It’s Brittany, bitch. Start talking.”

He did, and she began writing things down as she indicated she was following via monosyllabic grunts. After about ten minutes, many pages of notes, and being very conscious of everyone’s eyes on her, Brittany smiled.

“Sounds good, Dolphin. When are you and Dr. Feelgood coming back?”

Santana snickered.

Brittany nodded. “See you then!”

She hung up and passed the phone back to Carrie, who stared at her.

“What?”

“Was Kurt punking me?” asked a shrill Carrie. “Are the President and First Lady really coming to the wedding?”

Brittany shrugged a disinterested shoulder. “Sure. Kurt has known them forever through his Auntie Liv. He stopped by the White House today to say hi to her, and bumped into the Grants. They invited themselves.”

A wide-eyed Sami looked around. “Is this life?”

“It is for Tink,” Santana drawled. “He doesn’t much talk about his connections, but a few of us know he’s in tight with the tasty President and his frosty wife.” She turned to Brittany. “Didn’t you tell me Kurt and Fitz were all over each other when he took you to Washington?”

“Yeah. Kurt calls him Uncle Fitz and has known him since he was a kid. They flirt a lot. It was weird when I saw Kurt sit in his lap.”

“Excuse me?” Anna said. “He sat in the President’s lap?”

Brittany nodded. “Sure. That was, hm, right after freshman year? Kurt took me to DC with him when he went to see Olivia. She hired this really awesome tour guide to take us all over the city while she was working, and then every night she’d take us out to the most amazing restaurants. We also looked at a lot of colleges. Olivia was trying very hard to convince Kurt to move to DC after graduation.

“Anyway, we went with her to the White House one day and I got to meet the President. Kurt ran inside the Oval Office, grabbed President Fitz and gave him a big kiss on the cheek. President Fitz laughed and pulled Kurt into his lap and they cuddled for, like, an hour. But it wasn’t gross. It was very sweet. They flirted a lot, but I think they were trying to get a rise out of Aunt Liv and Mrs. President. It worked.”

She looked down. “The next year, Kurty got sick.” She swallowed. “Then Gerry Grant died. Kurt was heartsick over that. No one knew, but he and Gerry had kind of a puppy love thing going on.”

Santana stared as Quinn gasped.

“It never really went anywhere, they never even kissed, but Kurt was devastated he couldn’t go to the funeral to say goodbye and to comfort Gerry’s parents. I know that Kurt talked to Fitz a lot over the phone after that, and no one but Uncle Burt knew that Mrs. Grant visited Lima several times to be with Kurt. I think he helped her come to terms with it.”
Quinn’s eyes turned distant. “I remember the reports after Gerry died. They circled like vultures around Mrs. Grant. She was grieving so horribly and they wouldn’t leave her alone, taking pictures of her sobbing at his grave. They said execrable things about her, but the nation rallied. It’s one of the only times I can remember people turning on the media.”

“She was a mother who lost her child,” Marlena said quietly. “I was glad to see the country supporting her. It’s nice to be reminded that people, on occasion, can be gracious.”

Carrie and Sami looked at her with sadness, but not so overtly anyone would be suspicious.

Brittany pulled on her ponytail. “At any rate, Kurt and Eric decided on the final plans. They both thank everyone for all their help, but now it’s going to be turned over to Abby Whelan.”

“The Press Secretary?” said an incredulous Tony.

Brittany nodded. “The White House is going to have to coordinate security. No one will know the Grants are attending until just before the ceremony, but they still have to be cautious.”

“Makes sense,” Carrie said, shrugging. “It’s kind of a relief. We did good work, but I’m just as happy that, should something go wrong, we can’t be blamed.”

“Spoken like a good lawyer,” Santana grinned.

Carrie smirked.

Brittany rolled her eyes. “Anyway, for those who are interested, the wedding party will be as follows.” She looked down at her notes. “This is final and irrevocable, so you all are going to have to suck it up.”

They stared at her.

“I guess Kurt and Eric decided to go for broke, because this whole thing just got a lot bigger. Kurt will be escorted down the aisle by Anna, Uncle Burt, and Aunt Judy. Eric will be escorted by Marlena, John, and Roman.”

They nodded. Nothing new there.

“Eric’s Best Man will be Will and his Best Woman will be Sami.”

“Huh?” Sami asked.

Brittany ignored her. “His other attendants will be Carrie and Mike Horton, Kayla and Lucas, Shawn-Douglas and Belle, and Sam and Nicole Walker. You’ll walk down the aisle in pairs.”

“Nicole!” Sami barked, blanking out the rest.

Carrie shook her head. “I feel sorry for Lucas. Him and all three of his ex-wives traipsing down a wedding aisle?” She said nothing about Mike escorting her, instead trying to fight off the blush threatening to erupt.

“Kate might have a stroke,” said a thoughtful Sami. “This works for me.”

Marlena rolled her eyes as Roman sighed.

“Eric really wants me?” Belle whispered.
Brittany gave an enthusiastic nod. “Yep! I think he always did, but he was trying to keep it small because Kurty didn’t have that many people at the time. Oh! And Stevie and Stacy will be Eric’s ring-bearer and flower girl.”

Marlena smiled. “That’s lovely.”

Brittany grinned. “Kurt’s Best Women will be Quinn, Santana, and me. Our escorts will be Justin Kiriakis, Tony, and Steve Johnson, followed by Bo and Hope. Ciara will be the flower girl, and Teddy Grant will be the ring-bearer.”

Roman grinned. “I see Kurt has co-opted a number of Bradys.”

Anna smirked. “Please. He has Bo and Steve wrapped around his finger, and Justin is reduced to acting like a ridiculous older brother whenever he’s in Kurt’s presence.”

“I’m greatly honored Kurt would consider me,” said a humble Tony.

“You’re important to Anna and Carrie, so you’re important to him,” Brittany said kindly.

“The President’s son is going to be a ring-bearer?” asked a surprised John.

Brittany nodded. “Kurt and Teddy are close.”

“What about Sue?” Santana asked.

Brittany smirked. “She’ll be escorted by Puck.”

Santana and Quinn stared at her before lapsing into hysterical laughter.

Nikolas Cassadine stepped onto one of the main elevators of General Hospital, inadvertently bumping into his aunt, Alexis Davis.

“You look like you’re in a rush,” she noted.

“Not so much a rush as mentally preparing myself to ask a huge favor of a friend.”

She arched a brow. “Well, you certainly can’t be asking for a loan.”

He rolled his eyes. “My cousin is getting married and I need a date for the wedding. I plan on asking Elizabeth, because, well, frankly she’s my only friend. The only problem is that it’s in Salem, so child-care might be an issue.” He shrugged a shoulder. “Of course, we could probably just bring Cameron with us.”

Alexis stared at him. “Your cousin.”

He grinned. “Not your daughter. My other cousin.”

She tilted her head in thought before gasping. “Not Kurt! He’s twelve!”
Nikolas sighed. “Seventeen, actually, though he’ll be eighteen before the wedding occurs.”

“I … I …”

“Believe me, I know,” he said. “I was just as surprised when Helena told me.”

“Helena’s in town?” Alexis hissed.

He waved a hand. “She’s already gone. She just dropped off some gifts she wants me to take to the wedding.”

She narrowed her eyes. “Were any of them ticking?”

He snickered. “Surprisingly, no, but these are for Kurt and you know she adores him.”

“Yes. It’s horrifying. I’m surprised he hasn’t entered therapy for it.” She shook her head in wonder. “I can’t believe little Kurt is getting married. Who’s the lucky guy?”

“Dr. Eric Brady,” was the surly reply.

She frowned. “Nikolas, just how much older than Kurt is this man? A doctor, really?”

He sighed. “He was Kurt’s oncologist.”

She stared at him. “On … oncologist?”

“Kurt had cancer two years ago,” he said quietly, staring down at the floor. “He’s been in remission for a year.”

“He’s just a baby,” she whispered, eyes dampening, recalling her own diagnosis and cancer struggle.

“Not anymore. He had to grow up very fast, Alexis. Helena told me it was pancreatic cancer, what killed Suzanne, though a different form. He’s very, very lucky and attributes part of his success to the efforts of his doctor. Eric is about twelve years older than him, but apparently extremely devoted. He proposed in front of his parents and Burt, all of whom approved and are supporting it.”

“I can’t believe Burt Hummel would give permission for his son to marry anyone,” she said, astonished. “Ever.”

Nikolas shrugged. “Well, he did and it’s happening. Even Helena approves, which I’m not sure could ever be considered a good thing, though she appreciates Kurt has chosen someone older and settled, with a career. Eric also comes from a good family. His father is a police commander and his mother is a renowned psychiatrist.”

“I guess that’s good, right?” she asked helplessly. She couldn’t even imagine if her Krissy, also Kurt’s age, came to her and announced she was marrying. She’d probably kill the boy who dared propose. If she didn’t, Sonny certainly would.

“The only thing concerning Helena is that Eric’s twin sister is married to a DiMera.”

Alexis froze and slowly turned toward him. “As in Stefano?” she asked, her tone chilling.

“One of his sons,” Nikolas gruffly affirmed. “She wanted me to be aware and keep an eye on it, but not to make any overt moves unless or until Stefano makes a play.”
“Do you think he will?”

He set his jaw. “You know Stefano has had his eye on Katrine’s business ventures for years, but Helena and Victor Kiriakis have helped to keep him in check. I honestly don’t know what, if anything, he would believe hurting Kurt could accomplish. I think he’s too smart to make a direct play, but going after Kurt’s husband?”

Alexis bit her lip and nodded. “That’s much more his style.”

Stefano DiMera sat in the study of his mansion, contemplating recent events.

Tony had moved out and taken Anna with him. That was no great loss. Tony had been a complete disappointment as a son since his birth, and Anna had been little more than a pedigreed bimbo. Still, he felt their absence. He had always enjoyed being surrounded by family, even if he couldn’t stand them.

There was EJ, of course, and his wife Samantha and their children, but he knew Samantha wanted to leave. He didn’t really blame her. As much as he relished his offspring being married to one of Marlena’s children, Samantha was troublesome, though he admired her gumption. She was more clever than intelligent, and her temper was extraordinarily volatile. She was, however, a good mother and had produced two DiMera heirs, which could not be discounted. She was also morally flexible, which he appreciated.

The problem was EJ. Stefano loved his son, but EJ had been making some questionable and downright abhorrent decisions these past few years. His infatuation with Samantha had been all well and good at the time, but then came that reprehensible night in which EJ had forced Samantha to sleep with him before he would agree to save the life of Lucas Horton. The loss of Lucas wouldn’t have been troublesome, but for EJ to use it as leverage to commit such an act was noxious.

Stefano knew he was not a good man and it had never bothered him, but there were lines even he dared not cross. Rape was certainly one of them, but his son had crossed that line by negating Samantha’s choice. For a girl who had already been violated once, which EJ well knew, his action was unconscionable. Why Samantha remained married to his son was a mystery which eluded Stefano. He doubted it would last much longer. You couldn’t build a marriage upon poisonous roots.

Even more grotesque was the attention EJ was of late paying to young William. It was thoroughly heinous and he vowed to put a stop to it soon. He hated having to bide his time but he needed his ducks in a row before he made his move. EJ was too slippery not to have him dead to rights. He would not allow EJ to ruin the son as he had nearly ruined the mother. It was mortifying to know his child was a sexual predator.

Stefano held great affection for William, who reminded him so much of Marlena. He was a pure soul, a truly good person who only ever desired to do the right thing, yet he was not a milquetoast. The boy had a strong backbone and no qualms about using it. He was the kind of child Stefano
had always wanted, the one he had hoped he might have one day with Marlena.

The only other person who came close to William and Marlena’s light was Samantha’s sister, Carrie. The young woman was very intriguing. Her outward behavior clearly hallmarked Marlena, and even all these years later, it was difficult to believe Carrie was not her biological child. Still, there was something about Carrie which suggested she was not one to be crossed, that she was far more dangerous than Samantha could ever hope to be.

These past years had been so very difficult. He had outlived most of his children. Lexie was his pride and joy and, while he knew she loved him, her disapproval was disheartening. He knew he was growing soft, because never before would it have mattered.

But he was old. He had some good years left, but to what end? His obsession with Marlena had accomplished nothing more than her total disgust with him. His surviving children were taciturn and very reluctant to have their children even in the same room with him.

And now, Kurt Hummel had come to Salem.

That was a scheme that had been ill-advised, one which he truly regretted. It had been conceived at the height of his desire to destroy the Bradys, a failsafe designed to drive Marlena into further despair with the added bonus of devastating Anna. Yes, he had wanted to assume control of Katrine Valois’ holdings, but that had just been a means to an end. Once he realized no good could come from it, he had abandoned his plans.

He was older now, and certainly wiser, and he knew he would most likely never defeat Katrine, let alone with Helena Cassadine and Victor Kiriakis standing at her sides. Victor he could handle, but Katrine was a literal genius and Helena had no compunction about slitting the throats of people who annoyed her. He knew she would kill his remaining children without sparing it a thought.

And then, of course, there was Kurt to consider. The boy was young, yes, but Stefano had kept an eye on him over the years. Kurt Hummel was a formidable person. He had been tortured, both from outside forces and his own body, and had suffered, yet had ultimately triumphed. Stefano strongly believed this was due to the boy’s own will rather than mere luck.

Kurt Hummel was an extremely intelligent and cunning boy. He was decent and hardworking, with a very strict moral code. He was honorable. He had high expectations, but none higher than for himself, and he strove to meet them in every circumstance. He was beautiful and had more money than he could ever spend in several lifetimes. He had connections most people couldn’t even conceive.

He also had a penchant for vengeance and a ruthless streak. Yes, he was moral, but his dedication to his family and friends superseded his values. He had weathered the many personal attacks leveled against him in provincial Ohio, but Stefano doubted anyone knew the lengths to which Kurt had gone to avenge his friends. He could be … very creative.

Now, what was to have been his greatest creation had come into town with Marlena’s son on his arm and answers to questions no one had ever known to raise. It was disconcerting, but it was also interesting.

Stefano found he hadn’t been interested in much for a while. So, for the moment, he was content to let this play out. He would watch what Kurt would do, the inevitable havoc he would wreak, and perhaps he might step in to make things even more fun. Or maybe he would do nothing.

In truth, he was bored of the Bradys. He admired their courage and fighting spirit, but it had been
more than thirty years and he was tired. Besides, there wasn’t much more he could do to them.

Well, except reveal a few secrets sure to turn the family on its head. That had the potential for a great deal of fun, and he could really use a good laugh.

Judy opened her hotel room door and was surprised to see her brother standing on the other side, looking forlorn and unsure.

“Andrew,” she said cautiously. “What are you doing here?”

He stared down at his shuffling feet. “I want to apologize.”

She raised a brow and waited, but he said nothing further. “Did Dad and Kim ask you to do this?”

He shook his head. “I knew I was wrong the moment I opened my stupid mouth.” He grimaced. “I don’t even know why I said it. I’m not homophobic, I swear. I don’t even know Kurt and Eric’s my cousin.”

She sighed, realizing that while Andrew was her brother, he was also very young, as young as her own children and prone to stupid exhortations and posturing, just as those who had so tormented Kurt. It wasn’t an excuse of course, but it was a reason, no matter how immature and offensive.

She stepped aside and allowed him entrance.

He hesitantly stepped forward and looked around.

She closed the door and walked toward the bar, pouring them both a glass of water and handing him one. “I think there was more behind it than a complete lack of mindfulness.”

Andrew quickly gulped half the water and flushed. “Jeannie and I were jealous. Mostly me, though.”

Her brows gathered. “Jealous,” she slowly repeated, “of me?”

He nodded, ashamed. “I know Dad loves us, but it’s like part of him has always been kind of removed from us. He was looking for you for so long, I think we kind of lost sight of the fact that you were his child, not just a member of the family. Jeannie and I always thought you had just abandoned him and us. We figured if you wanted to be part of our lives, you would’ve been. We never gave much thought beyond that.”

He sighed. “Then, Mom and Dad told us what had happened, about why you had stayed away, and that you probably saved our lives by doing so.” He winced. “That was a real eye-opener.”

“I’m surprised Daddy told you.”

“He didn’t. He’s still not talking to me. Mom told us. I think she was so furious at us that she
couldn’t stop herself.”

Her eyes bulged. “Kimberly was defending me?”

He averted his eyes. “She told us some of what it was like before you left. Not everything, I don’t think, but enough so that it was pretty obvious she had regrets where you were concerned.”

“I didn’t make it easy on her, Andrew,” Judy said softly. “Frankly, I was horrible to her. That she even still talks to me is a lot more than I deserve.”

He shrugged. “Well, she disagrees, and if she doesn’t hold anything against you, who the hell am I to say otherwise?”

She gave him a soft smile. “That’s very mature of you.”

“I have my moments.”

“Thank you, Sunshine.”

He stared at her.

She blushed. “I used to call you that when …”

“I remember,” he said softly. “I just didn’t remember it was you. You used to sing to me when I was little. Sometimes I still hear it.”

She blinked back tears.

“I didn’t know it was possible to miss someone so much when you couldn’t even grasp your memories of them.” He swallowed heavily. “I’m so sorry, Judy.”

She took him in her arms and held him. “It’s okay, Sunshine. I’m just happy you’re here.”

“I’m happy you’re here, too,” he whispered, hugging her back.

Burt had finished closing on the house, reluctantly handing over the keys to Sue Sylvester, still very curious as to why she had bought it. It was a nice house in a good neighborhood, but nothing particularly special. He still had second thoughts; this was the house where he had lived with Suzanne, where he had raised their son. It was hard to let go.

After hesitating too long, he found the keys snatched from his hand as Sylvester nodded and began walking away. She had the temerity to whistle.

“See you at the wedding!” she called over her shoulder.

He shook his head, determined to eject her from his mind as he took a final walk through the
The hallway between the kitchen and the foyer was where Kurt had taken his first steps, toddling toward the door to welcome him home from work. On the first step is where Suzanne always took off her shoes. The inside of the pantry door was where they had measured how much Kurt had grown every year.

It stood empty now, waiting to begin a new life as his family began their own in Salem.

He was still surprised Kurt had surrendered the dresser, but his had found a perfumery online that sold Suzanne’s signature fragrance. He had ordered all of their stock and, one day when walking into his son’s hotel room, Burt had smelled the fragrance near the bed. He knew Kurt had sprayed it on his pillow.

Kurt was always better at this sort of thing. The only reason he had kept the dresser as long as he had was because he wanted to keep something of Suzanne in the house. But he no longer needed it; now, he carried Suzanne with him wherever he went. Burt, meanwhile, would have liked nothing better than to climb the stairs, crawl under the dresser, and inhale memories he was struggling with each passing year to recall.

He was lucky Judy was so understanding, but she claimed she was the lucky one. She had found a man who remained loyal to his wife even after death, knowing he would be just as loyal to her. Judy had made room in their marriage for Suzanne, even though it wasn’t necessary. Burt knew how fortunate he was to have found a woman who respected and appreciated Suzanne as much as he had.

He stood in the living room and sighed. Maybe it was good Sylvester had bought the house. He didn’t like her, but he knew that Kurt did. He also knew Sylvester respected his son, that she perhaps the first one to do so. That counted. Maybe it wasn’t so much about keeping Suzanne’s memory alive as it was keeping Kurt’s legacy alive.

Kurt had won. He had triumphed. He had endured Lima and, through hard work and sheer determination, had lifted himself up out of it. He was starting over in a new town where college and then medical school loomed on the horizon. He had found a man who loved him the way he deserved. He had found a new family in Anna, Carrie, and the Bradys. And he had brought his father with him, along with his stepmother and sister. He had brought his friends. Burt was humbled by the man his son had become, honored to have been part of it.

So many claimed that life was all about the journey, but now Burt wasn’t sure. Perhaps life was about the people you loved along the way, through all the pain and glory, and the memories you held in your heart and could share with others.

It was memory that made people immortal, not things or places.

His hand lingered on the knob of the front door. Slowly, he turned and looked over his shoulder, eyes filled with tears but with a lightness in his heart. He smiled.

“Goodbye.”
As the date of the engagement party drew closer, the Brady and Hummel clans drew a collective sigh of relief they had pulled it off in so little time. The credit went to Marlena and Anna, who had planned everything – with input from their sons – and then hired the appropriate staff to ensure it was done to their exacting specifications.

Maggie Horton and Adrienne Kiriakis were thrilled to host the event at Tuscany, though each was a little miffed Kurt refused the discount they offered. They knew he could cover the cost but, in the spirit of celebration, they wanted to show him their gratitude for selecting their restaurant when there were other options. He patiently explained that he appreciated the thought, but he was only getting married once and the money didn’t matter to him.

Instead he suggested they donate the difference to their favorite charity, so Horton House found themselves the recipients of a very large and unexpected check.

Kurt and Eric had selected a high-end department store for bridal registry, only to be told by management that they did not cater to same-sex marriages. Kurt merely shrugged and walked away, dragging a seething Eric with him, perfectly happy to find another store to take the money of his friends and family. The manager in question called Kurt the next day, apologizing profusely after getting a visit from Carrie and Justin, who threatened to file suit and dropped a few tidbits to Jennifer Deveraux, who related them to Jack, who printed them in the new online-only edition of the Salem Spectator.

Kurt and Eric then decided to ask their guests to contribute to one of their preferred charities in lieu of presents. Kurt selected the Trevor Project and the Joyful Heart Foundation, and Eric chose Doctors Without Borders and the American Cancer Society. As the checks began pouring in, they received several calls each from said charities. Apparently the guests made their generous donations in both Kurt and Eric’s names and the organizations were overwhelmed with gratitude.

Kurt had accepted his position at Salem University in April, but the girls and Sam were required to make formal declarations, which they had done in person. Kurt and Sam had gone together to explore Salem University and meet with admissions counselors to select their classes for their first semester. Will tagged along, which was of no surprise; lately, wherever Sam was, Will was sure to be found. Sami was thrilled Will showed an interest. She had come to regret not attending college herself and wanted better for her children.

Will, with some reluctance, decided to accept his offer from SU. He applied because he was a state resident and a legacy through Lucas, but had intended the college only as a safety school. He had applied to numerous universities, most far outside of Salem, but determined instead to remain in town now that Marlena and Carrie had moved back on a permanent basis.

Quinn, Santana, and Brittany had already selected their courses for the fall term. Santana had declared a pre-law concentration with a Political Science major, while Brittany had chosen the pre-veterinary medicine track, majoring in Biology. Sam, unsure as to what he wanted to do for the rest of his life, already felt as though he had fallen behind his friends, all of whom insisted that was untrue. Kurt had intimatied that Sam had career goals, but wasn’t sure he’d be able to meet them, and thus kept them quiet. Will had chosen Psychology, which thrilled Marlena to no end, though Sami was less enthused.

Kurt and Quinn had chosen extremely difficult paths, but they were also the most academically advanced of their friends. Due to their Advanced Placement exams and Achievement Test scores, each would be beginning as second-semester sophomores, drastically reducing the time they
would spend as undergraduates. Santana and Brittany also had AP scores, albeit in different
subjects, which allowed them to be given credit for some of their prerequisite courses. All of them
were given Performance Arts credits for their work with New Directions.

Kurt had declared pre-medicine, but chosen to double major in Physics and English Literature. It
was only with great reluctance that Kurt admitted to Eric he had written a book which Cory
Publishing was trying to option. He wasn’t terribly confident in his writing ability, however, so he
was resisting. He also felt the story didn’t have a satisfactory ending and wanted to revise it later.

Eric was desperate to read it, but Kurt had said he wasn’t ready for it to be read by anyone. Eric,
though disappointed, respected the decision, but still often wheedled Kurt about it. He was also
slightly jealous that Sam had already read it.

Eric was very interested in which specialization Kurt would eventually select. The opportunities in
medicine were greater than ever, especially for someone as intelligent and ambitious as his fiancé.
Eric anticipated Kurt selecting a field as exacting as he was, or something glamorous, along the
lines of elite surgery, but Kurt had neither confirmed nor denied his suppositions.

Marlena had been subtly encouraging Kurt toward psychiatry, as she believed his struggles with
his physical and emotional health had made him an incredibly empathetic person. Kurt had
confided to Eric that, while he appreciated Marlena’s specialty and had grown a lot due to his own
therapy, he wasn’t interested in following in her footsteps. He wasn’t sure how to break it to her,
but Eric assured him she would support whatever avenue he wished to pursue.

Kurt was glad that the Salem branch of the Evans family, particularly Will and Marlena, were so
welcoming to their new members. Eric wanted to spend more time with Sam and get to know him
better, but had the sense Sam was still trying to work through his feelings for Kurt. He had
accepted that Kurt and Eric were in love and getting married, but Eric still detected traces of
hostility from Sam whenever they were in the same room. He hoped it would be over soon.

Quinn had chosen to double major in Business and Sociology, which meant she would be neck-
deep in projects and papers for the foreseeable future. She had concrete goals, but hadn’t yet made
a final decision as to her career. Giving birth to Beth had changed her on a profound level and was
still helping to define the woman she wanted to be. She was considering becoming a lobbyist, but
was also interested in starting a non-profit geared toward ensuring education and job training for
unwed and single mothers.

Eric thought it was a noble endeavor, realizing he really hadn’t a clue as to whom she truly was.
Most of their interactions merely reinforced her role as Kurt’s sister or Judy’s daughter. He knew
she would eventually come to mean as much to him as Carrie, Sami, and Belle, but was looking
forward to knowing her as a person.

He was exceedingly grateful that he got along so well with Burt and Judy. He only vaguely
remembered Judy from when she was Eve, but he had heard the stories. He found her all the more
interesting for them; she had made a conscious choice to be a better person, to be more than she
had been. She had also retained her edge, however, which meant it was impossible to pull any
wool over her eyes. She didn’t take shit from anyone.

His relationship with Burt was terrific, and Eric knew Kurt was thankful for it. He had heard
about the friction between Burt and Finn, but Eric felt it was probably down to Burt sensing that
Finn wasn’t right for Kurt. Eric had initially believed he wouldn’t fare much better, for the truth of
the matter was Burt Hummel probably thought no man was good enough for his son.

Eric fully agreed on that point, which Burt appreciated. Burt treated him like a man, like a friend,
but not like a son, and that was okay. Eric already had two fathers and didn’t need a third. Instead,
he viewed Burt as a favorite uncle, someone he knew he could talk to about anything and everything, even Kurt. Burt would listen and offer advice, but never made demands.

Kurt’s relationship with his future in-laws was far more interesting. He and Marlena got on like a house afire and Eric often stumbled upon them engaged in deeply intellectual conversations about literature and philosophy. It was revelatory. Eric knew his mother was highly intelligent, but she so often downplayed it so as not to overshadow anyone else. He liked that his mother was not only comfortable with Kurt, but so obviously respected him as a person and not just as her son’s future husband.

He was also humbled. Eric knew he was smart but, despite the years and experience he had on Kurt, he was nowhere near his league. Kurt just got stuff on an instinctual level, making connections between theories and fields that never would have even occurred to Eric. He was also incredibly well-read and, since he spoke several languages, could easily add a degree in comparative literature.

Eric wasn’t intimidated by it; he liked it. He liked that someone as smart as Kurt wanted him, found him worthwhile.

Kurt and John had bonded over weapons and ammunition. Eric had no idea Kurt had ever fired a gun, let alone was a skilled marksman. He knew Burt had guns and liked to threaten potential suitors with them, but Eric hadn’t give it much consideration. Apparently, however, Burt had taught Kurt how to shoot, how to disassemble and reassemble various guns, and hunt. Eric couldn’t imagine Kurt ever hunting, and Kurt admitted he hated it with a passion, but confessed he enjoyed shooting. Kurt and John had gone to the range a few times and then compared strategies over lattés. It was utterly bizarre.

Kurt and Roman were having more difficulty finding their footing. Eric knew it was partly his own fault for never confiding his sexuality to his parents. He had been gone from Salem for so long and his calls from home had never been very personal. They had been truly blindsided by his admission and the looming wedding. His mother had easily accepted it because that was part of her training, but Eric knew it was harder for his father.

Roman wasn’t homophobic, but he was still trying to reconcile the fact that his son was gay. He had expected Eric to grow up, marry a woman, and have children to carry on the family name. That had always been important to the Bradys. Eric knew Roman wasn’t uncomfortable with Kurt so much as he was with the idea of Kurt. He also suspected Roman didn’t approve of the age difference, though he hadn’t said anything.

Kurt and Roman did like and respect one another; they just didn’t have a lot in common. Still, they tried – and tried hard – and that made all the difference to Eric.

Slowly but surely, they were becoming a family.

Santana, Quinn, and Brittany had begun summer classes, which were intense and consuming most of their time. Their demanding schedules had been taken into consideration, with the engagement
party and wedding being held on weekends, after midterms and finals. Despite the accelerated pace, all the girls were enjoying the challenge and had fallen in love with the campus.

Their parents had pooled their resources and leased them a condo for the summer. Santana and Brittany were planning to remain off-campus, while Quinn was debating her options. She was considering Greek life, but wanted to check out the sororities before making a decision. She had not forgotten how poorly she had treated other girls during her first two years at McKinley and vowed not to pledge any sorority that engaged in hazing.

They were thrilled they had all found unofficial mentors from amongst Kurt’s new family. Carrie and Justin hadn’t even bought furniture for their new firm, but were already attracting clients. They were using Santana as a part-time temporary legal secretary. When she wasn’t answering phones and responding to emails and faxes, they showed her how briefs were written and submitted. They promised she could attend depositions and court appearances when the firm got off the ground, as long as it fit into her schedule and she didn’t neglect her courses.

Brittany was taking Human Anatomy and Physiology, required even for pre-vet students, and spent most of her days on campus, two hours a day in lecture and four in lab. Thankfully she had any number of doctors on hand she could ask for help if she needed.

Quinn was taking introductory courses in her chosen disciplines and was not pleased to discover both classes required a number of group projects. Past experience had proven she was usually the one who was unofficially elected to carry the majority of the workload. She had already informed her classmates that wouldn’t be happening and that, if they didn’t pull their weight, she had no problem doing everything herself and leaving their names off it.

Victor had taken a shine to Quinn and saw in her a ruthless streak that would serve her well should she seriously pursue business. He offered his time should she have any questions or wanted to bounce ideas off him. He could do no less for godson’s sister. He even offered her an internship at Titan Industries should she find a field which particularly interested her.

Despite Judy’s encouragement, Quinn was having difficulty fitting in with her newly-discovered relatives. Shane attempted to dote on her, which she resented, even though she recognized they had no real relationship because of circumstances out of both their control.

Andrew was trying way too hard and she didn’t understand why, while his sister only wanted to gossip about everything and everyone, something in which Quinn had no interest. She frequently addressed them as uncle and aunt in gatherings just to put distance between them and reinforce that, though they might be related, that didn’t mean they were friends.

Kurt had elected not to take summer classes, as he was already far ahead in his studies and simply had no time. University Hospital had agreed to postpone Eric’s start date until after the honeymoon. They both suspected Marlena, Kayla, and Lexie might have exercised a little nepotism on Eric’s behalf and were more than happy to roll with it. Thus, they spent their days mostly together, getting to know and appreciate each other’s idiosyncrasies.
They often thought it odd that they never argued. Most everyone else thought it was because they were already in the honeymoon phase, but Kurt and Eric believed, and were very pleased, that this was just how their relationship would progress. They shared core values and many views on the same subjects, so there were few disagreements to be had.

After Eric had accepted and dealt with his insecurities regarding Kurt’s money, all he could focus on was how lucky he was to have Kurt in his life. Once Kurt had realized that his age wasn’t really a factor, that Eric considered and treated him as a contemporary and equal, he was happy just to bask. Their complete lack of drama nauseated everyone else, as did the way they completed each other’s sentences and held entire conversations with only their eyes.

They had also become more physical in their relationship. Eric had moved out of Marlena’s townhouse and into Kurt’s hotel room. Burt wanted to object but found he had no grounds. They were still waiting to have sex until after the wedding, but they enjoyed being in each other’s presence and sharing a bed. They like completing their morning routines together, learning how to navigate around each other and sharing such a close space. They didn’t find it cloying, but comforting.

Their make-outs had become hot and heavy, with the accompanying petting and dry-humping, which was often done in the nude. They had found that just their skin touching was more than enough to get them off, something in which they indulged several times a day.

Eric was so relieved that, despite Kurt’s experience with David, he was sexually adventurous and eager for their lovemaking to commence. Their favorite indulgence was sitting across from each other and watching the other masturbate. Kurt in particular was extremely foul-mouthed during this activity, which pinged extremely high on Eric’s kink meter. The things Kurt said while his hungry eyes roamed over Eric’s body ensured Eric never lasted long, which was fine with Kurt, who looked forward to their next session.

Kurt’s recovery time was a bit quicker, but he spent himself just as quickly as Eric. Two days ago, Eric had invited himself to sit on the floor before Kurt’s chair and, when Kurt was about to climax, opened his mouth and encouraged Kurt to shoot a load directly between his parted lips. Kurt was too aroused to resist and, once he was finished, tackled Eric to the floor and plunged his mouth into Eric’s own while they wrestled.

This morning, Eric suggested procuring some sex toys they could use to get each other ready for the wedding night. Kurt was on the internet five minutes later, selecting whatever caught his fancy and ordering next day delivery.

As wanton and raunchy as they were in their room, they kept it polite and appropriate when around others. Neither gave a thought about making anyone else uncomfortable, but they were both introverted people who preferred to be gentlemen in public and freaks in private.

Or, as Kurt was fond of saying, Dorothy in the streets and Blanche in the sheets.

Golden Girls for the win.
Somehow, Kurt and Eric had been elected the minders of various children of the Brady-Horton clan. When they weren’t babysitting Sami’s youngest children, they were letting Ciara drag them all over Salem to attend her whims. They often brought Stevie and Stacy with them.

Stacy was naturally shy with everyone who wasn’t family, and while she accepted Eric as her cousin, she preferred to stick close to Kurt. Stevie had unabashedly joined Team Eric because, to him, it was obvious how happy his cousin made Kurt. Stevie wanted Kurt to be happy and ever since coming to Salem and being with Eric, Kurt smiled a lot more.

Today, Hope was joining them as it was her day off. It was Ciara’s turn to choose their activity, and she had decided upon ice skating. Eric had played hockey in high school, but quickly discovered hockey skates and figure skates were not the same. He loudly cursed toe picks whenever he fell on his face or ass, which was often. Stevie laughed hysterically at him, though he wasn’t much better, and thus stuck close to Eric so they could hug the wall together.

Ciara and Stacy had more experience but hadn’t advanced much past skating backwards, which nevertheless filled them with pride whenever they did it. Unbeknownst to Kurt, Hope had been a figure skater and rising star when she was a teenager, until she was sidelined with a knee injury. She was still beautiful on the ice, her form and lines textbook. He watched her skate around with grace and envied the ease with which she guided the children.

Kurt was a little bored and frustrated. They were the only patrons in the rink, as the more serious skaters had come and gone and the morning classes had finished. He longed to get out on the ice and see if he was still competent. He hadn’t been in skates for months and, after his diagnosis, had given up his practices. No longer a serious competitor, skating still lit a fire within him, much like performing once had.

Hope looked askance at him and saw in his eyes the gleam of a predator waiting to pounce. She was surprised she hadn’t realized before that he was a skater. The legs and ass should have been a clue. She took the girls’ hands in her and skated them over to the side. Eric and Stevie had already grabbed sodas and were drinking them happily.

“Are you warmed up?” she asked Kurt, who arched a brow. She smiled. “You look ready to go on the attack.”

“It’s been a while,” he admitted. “I don’t know how well I’d do.”

She shrugged. “There’s no one here but us.”

“No music.”

She pointed past them to the jukebox. “You can choose your own.”

“You’re not going to let me get out of this, are you?”

She tilted her head. “You don’t really want me to, do you?”

He sighed. “I learned under the old ISU rules. I’m no longer competitively viable.”

“This isn’t a competition.”

“I can’t do a triple axel.”

She rolled her eyes. “Most people can’t. Kurt, just get out there and have fun. There’s no judgment here.”
His eyes lighted as a small smile overtook his face, and then he dashed over to the sound machine.

“What’s going on?” Eric asked.

Hope grinned. “I think we’re about to get a show.”

They got one.

Hope watched avidly as Kurt warmed up, surprised by the speed with which he zoomed across the ice. His lines and edges were clean, his blades nothing but whispers. He oozed confidence but, as a former skater, she could tell he was a bundle of nerves. His smile was forced and the skin around his eyes tight. Once he had completed his dry run, he stood in the middle of the rink with his head bowed, waiting for the music to begin.

As soon as it did, she was in awe. Once the music started, whatever anxiety he had simply disappeared. Kurt was perhaps one of the most natural skaters she had seen outside the elite echelon known by name to the general public. He reminded her strongly of Janet Lynn and Yuka Sato, both of whom possessed a joy that especially emerged when on the ice. His smile was genuine and relaxed. He looked … free.

Every movement was timed perfectly with the music. It was theatrical but not melodramatic, and each jump, spin, and even hand movements were perfectly coordinate to punctuate the instrumental.

His jumps were rough, which made sense given the time he had been off the ice, but Hope also got the sense Kurt was scared of jumping. The height he achieved was huge and he crossed huge expanses of ice. He looked incredibly uneasy whenever he took off, taking more time than what would be allowed in a competition, and always truly shocked when he landed. The jumps, however, were textbook perfect. His toes were pointed and his landings clean. The extension of his free leg on landing was far superior to most professionals she had seen.

She could tell when he cut jumps from his program, or doubled the triples he obviously had planned. Indeed, he stuck mostly to double jumps but, again, the height he achieved was incredible. His double axel was enormous.

His footwork was easily at a champion level, which she owed to his extensive dance training. He used both serpentine and circular footwork. Most impressive was the speed he used to propel himself down the rink. If anything, he was consciously slowing himself down to keep in time with the music, as though his feet were demanding he ignore the instrumental and cut loose entirely.

Where Kurt really shined were his spins. The speed was phenomenal, which made sense, but there was no traveling across the ice and his flexibility was amazing. He performed all the standard spins, often in combination, but the ones which required more flexibility left her gaping, particularly the I and Y spins, where he used hold, and his haircutter and pancake spins.

As the program drew to a close, Kurt circled the rink in a spiral, which most male skaters didn’t employ, for it was far more difficult than it looked. He held his free leg perpendicular to the ice
while his hands were outstretched in front of him, a gorgeous visual which lasted halfway around the rink.

He then skated out toward the center for what Hope figured would be his final spin sequence, only for her mouth to fall open when he instead threw in a triple flip. He then segued into a death drop, into a camel spin, and then a back sit spin with his free leg extended out before him. He then rose into a layback, again a move not often see in men's skating, and fell into an incredible illusion spin.

When he righted himself, Hope noticed Kurt had a small smirk on his face and wondered what he had planned.

She got her answer when his arm reached behind him and grabbed his skate, pulling his leg over his head and into a sublime Beillmann spin. He then brought the end of his skate down to his nose, released his leg, and fell into a back scratch spin.

Check that. A headless back scratch spin.

He ended in time with the music, his arms thrown up in the air.

She was on her feet immediately and screaming her head off, as were Stevie and Ciara. Stacy and Eric, however, were too stunned to do anything but stare.

Kurt lazily skated off the rink and offered a tentative smile. "That was the last program Brittany choreographed for me. Was I too terrible?"

"That was awesome!" Ciara screeched.

Stevie nodded.

"Wow," Stacy whispered.

"The honeymoon can’t come soon enough," Eric muttered.

"Where did you learn to skate like that?" Eric quietly asked Kurt.

"Mom, mostly," Kurt acknowledged. "She could skate, but she never did jumps. Spins were her forte, so she brought in a coach to help me with the jumps. As you saw, I’m not that good."

Eric opened his mouth but closed it when Kurt gave him a look.

"I’m not," he insisted. "Even under the old rules, I wouldn’t be good enough to skate in the junior league, let alone the senior. I don’t have the jumps or consistency. The number of triples I can actually pull off is extremely limited and most male skaters are expected to put at least seven in a long problem, two of them axels, and a quad.

"I can’t do that, and I don’t want to."
Eric chewed on that for a moment. “You’re still young, Kurt. With the right training …”

Kurt shook his head and speared the salad before him. “No, thank you. I was never interested in being an Olympic champion, Eric, and I have zero designs on an athletic career. I started skating because it was something Mom and I could share together, and I kept skating because, after she died, it was a way to remain close to her. I love it, I do, but not enough to dedicate my entire life to it.”

He frowned. “Like singing?”

Kurt bit his lip in thought. “It’s similar, but not the same. I still enjoy skating because I know I’m good at it. I could be better if I wanted, but I don’t. I sing because I love it, because I can’t imagine not singing. I know I’m good, better than a lot of others, but I also know what would happen if I were to consider it professionally.”

He sighed. “Let’s be honest. As good as my voice is, and I’m still twenty years away from my vocal maturity, I’m never going to be the next pop sensation. My voice is … well, let’s say unique, and that’s not always a good thing in popular music. Not to mention I’m out. Look at Adam Lambert. His voice is probably one of the best of his generation, but he’s never had the success he deserves because he refuses to deny who he is.”

Eric said nothing, realizing the points were valid.

“There’s a lot that goes with a singing career that I would never do,” Kurt continued. “It’s more than just lessons and emoting. It’s a business, sometimes a seedy one. The endless marketing, the contrived reputations, the intense media scrutiny?”

He shook his head. “No, thank you. Not to mention, there are really only a few around who are actually good at it. There’s no mystique anymore. Everything’s on Twitter or Instagram. I’ve seen what Taylor’s gone through, and I want no part of it.”

“Taylor?” Eric asked.

Kurt blinked. “Taylor Swift, Brittany’s cousin.”

Eric stared.

“Sorry. I forgot I never told you. Brittany’s actually very protective of Taylor, so the rest of us have come to be, as well, even if we hardly know her.”

“But you do know her?”

“Not really. I’ve met her a few times, when her tours came through Ohio, but it’s not like we’re actual friends.” Kurt paused. “She is a very nice person, though, and she adores Brittany.”

“Brittany is very easy to adore,” Eric said, smiling.

Kurt smiled in reply and took Eric’s hand is his own. “Just know that me wanting to become a doctor is my decision. It’s not because of my cancer, or what happened to Mom, or because you saved my life. Aunt Cam is a part of it, sure, because she’s so amazing and I’ve followed her career for years, but I’m not trying to emulate anyone.”

He turned and looked at Eric. “It’s important work. It’s worthwhile. It’s something I can see myself doing for the rest of my life, which isn’t the case with singing or skating. Those are passions, but not ones which drive me.”
“What about writing?”

Kurt sniffed and gave him a side-eye. “I’m still not letting you read the book. If I ever reach the point where I consider it publishable, then we’ll talk. But, yes, writing is also a passion.”

His brow furrowed. “I’m intelligent and have the vocabulary of a doctoral student in English, but I don’t verbalize my thoughts and feelings very well. Maybe that’s because of how often I was attacked for opening my mouth, or maybe not. After Mom died, I was selectively mute for the next year.”

Eric swallowed heavily.

“But I can express myself through song or skating or writing. Like, I said, those things are passions, but not professional goals.”

“It’s like me and photography,” Eric said. “I’m a good photographer, but I could never make a go at it as a career. I tried for years but, though I was passionate about it, it didn’t fulfil me professionally. I always wanted to be a doctor, but I never thought I was smart enough to do it.”

Kurt laid his head on Eric’s shoulder. “I’m sorry you felt that way, but I’m glad you eventually realized how wrong you were. You’re an incredible doctor, baby. Not only because of the science, but because of your compassion.”

Eric closed his eyes and sighed, wrapping an arm around Kurt’s shoulders. “I’m so lucky I found you.”

“Luck had nothing to do with it, baby. We deserve this.”

Eric smiled.

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