



Artwork by Muchacha11

Lessons in Being a Man

by

Whatsername Lambert

Klaine || Future AU || M

Kurt is a beloved music teacher and, along with partner Dave Karofsky, proud father to 6-year-old Ellie. Blaine, his best friend, is a young Chicago lawyer who unwillingly becomes the leader of a statewide gay rights movement. When Kurt and Ellie's home life turns violent as a result of Dave's alcoholism, Blaine opens up his home to them. Brief Kurtofsky, Klaine later.

whatsernelambert.tumblr.com || fanfiction.net/s/6873489

eBook by klaineficspdfs.tumblr.com || klaineficspdfs.livejournal.com

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Prologue – The One That Got Away

High school, senior year

It all started innocently enough, when Blaine invited Kurt over one afternoon to study.

Sure, they went to different schools – Blaine was at Dalton Academy while Kurt was still toiling away at McKinley – but sometimes they liked to get together to work on homework and talk about their day. Blaine would never admit it out loud to anyone, but these little study dates with Kurt were his favorite part of the week. Even if he would never have the courage to admit his true feelings to his best friend, he still enjoyed Kurt's company tremendously.

But when Kurt made one seemingly nonchalant comment, Blaine had no idea that his entire life was about to be turned upside down. He had no idea that years later, he would regret not doing something to change Kurt's mind during that conversation. After all, it seemed like a perfectly normal afternoon. Kurt was sprawled out on Blaine's bed, lying on his stomach with his head resting in his hand as he worked. Blaine was kicked back in his desk chair across the room. The radio was playing quietly as background music, turned to the local Top 40 station which was currently playing that new Katy Perry song about matching tattoos and stealing liquor and lost loves.

"So the weirdest thing happened today," Kurt quipped as his pen flew across the page in his French notebook, mindlessly scribbling out conjugations he knew by heart.

Blaine looked up from the issue of *Rolling Stone* he'd been reading instead of writing his five-page paper for AP Government that was due in two days. "What's that?"

Kurt responded without looking up from his notes and spoke as if what had happened were the most normal thing in the world. "David Karofsky apologized to me."

Blaine immediately dropped his magazine, letting it fall carelessly into his lap. "What?"

"I know. It was completely out of the blue. I got called down to Principal Figgins's office, and Mr. Schue was there, too. Then I saw David. Figgins told me that he had talked with David and his parents, and that David had something he wanted to say to me." Blaine couldn't help but notice the way Kurt was referring to his perpetrator by his given first name. "David looked at me, straight in the eyes, and said, 'I'm sorry for

the way I treated you, Kurt. I'm so sorry. I guess I just did all that stuff to you because I was too afraid to accept myself."

Blaine narrowed his eyes. "What the hell did he mean by that?"

"Oh, you're never going to believe this." Kurt smirked; Blaine immediately knew that meant he had a dirty secret. "David's gay."

Blaine pursed his lips and tilted his head to the side as he considered this. "Actually, that's not so hard for me to believe."

"That's true," Kurt admitted, pursing his lips. "I guess I figured it out when he kissed me last year."

Blaine felt like his heart had shattered into pieces when Kurt brought that up. He didn't think he could ever forgive that asshole for stealing Kurt's first kiss with a boy, which was supposed to be so sweet and special for him. It still made Blaine unbelievably angry to think about it, but he forced himself to remain calm.

"Do you think he meant it?" he finally asked.

Kurt shrugged one shoulder. "I guess so. I mean, Figgins and Mr. Schue were there, too. For some reason I get the feeling he wouldn't have apologized like that unless he really meant it, especially because there were adults there." He paused and thought for a second. "Plus, now that I think about it, Figgins *did* mention that David had come to him personally and asked if he could have the chance to apologize to me like that. I think he really meant it."

Blaine couldn't help noticing that there was a slight hesitation in Kurt's tone, as if the other boy had something else to say but didn't want to say it.

"What?" Blaine asked in response.

Kurt smirked wryly. "What, what?"

"There's something you're not telling me," Blaine observed.

Kurt buried his face in his hands and shook his head. "No. I can't say it."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't want to admit it even to myself."

Blaine nodded understandingly when he heard the strained tension in Kurt's voice as he spoke. "All right."

He turned back to *Rolling Stone* and Kurt resumed writing conjugations in his notebook. A heavy silence filled the air for a moment before it was broken.

"What would you think of me if I said I wasn't completely repulsed when David kissed me?" Kurt blurted out of the blue.

Blaine blinked, unsure if he'd heard Kurt right. "What do you mean?"

"I don't know." Kurt was blushing furiously; his voice thick with embarrassment. "I guess what I'm trying to say is...I didn't hate that kiss as much as I'd like to think I did. In fact...I think I might have liked it."

Blaine marinated on this for a second, trying to guess why on earth Kurt would have gotten any enjoyment whatsoever out of that kiss. He took a shot in the dark.

"Because it was the first time you'd ever kissed a boy?" It was a lame guess, but Blaine couldn't think of any other reason.

Kurt shook his head. "Not just that," he said softly. "I think...I think I like him."

He may as well have plunged his hand into Blaine's chest, ripped out his heart, torn it into a million pieces and set those pieces on fire.

"D-Dave?" Blaine asked, trying to keep his voice even. He knew perfectly well who Kurt was talking about, but he was under the strange delusion that maybe saying it out loud would make it untrue.

Kurt nodded slowly. When he spoke, his voice was a whisper. "Yeah."

Now, Blaine knew he had two options. He could try to convince Kurt that Dave was totally wrong for him and try to convince him to set his sights elsewhere, or he could encourage his friend to follow his heart, no matter how much his own heart may break as a result of it.

Blaine knew that going with the first option would just be selfish. Before he knew it, he heard himself saying, "And you said you believed him when he apologized, right?"

Kurt didn't say a word, only nodded.

"Then I guess all you can do is see where your heart takes you," Blaine told him. "He obviously feels *something* for you. He wouldn't have kissed you if he didn't. Just see where your relationship with him goes from here and let what happens...happen."

He didn't know it at the time, but it was the worst advice he possibly could have given his friend.

But Kurt didn't know that, either, so he gave Blaine an appreciative smile that sent the other boy's heart into a complete flurry of palpitations.

"Thanks, Blaine," he told him sincerely. "I...I don't know what it is about him, but...I just can't help but feel drawn to him. I know you probably think I'm crazy after everything he put me through, but..."

"No, no, I don't think you're crazy," Blaine interrupted gently. "The heart wants what the heart wants, right? Like I said, as long as you're absolutely sure he was sincere in his apology."

Kurt nodded. "I'm positive."

"And you know that no matter what you decide to do...I've always got your back," Blaine reminded him.

"I know," Kurt said with that same beautiful smile. "I appreciate that, Blaine. Thank you."

He hesitated for a moment, then squinted at Blaine's magazine cover. "You're still reading that? Don't you have a paper to write?"

One of Blaine's favorite things about Kurt was the way he breezed from serious conversation to lighthearted banter so easily. But that didn't matter now, because the point Kurt had brought up was absolutely right.

"But reading about Adele is so much more interesting than typing up some dumb paper on whether strict constructionism is a better method of constitutional interpretation than judicial activism," Blaine complained, somehow managing to say all those words in one breath.

Kurt raised one eyebrow. "You lost me after 'Adele.'"

"We're on our judicial branch unit in AP Gov," Blaine said simply.

Kurt laughed. "I'm surprised at you, Blaine Anderson. You want to be a lawyer so much, I would think you'd be all over something like this."

Blaine shrugged one shoulder and flipped a page in his magazine without looking up.

"Yeah, well, people surprise you sometimes, I guess," he said softly.

They went back to comfortable silence, Kurt finishing up his French homework and completely unaware of the fact that Blaine was peering at him over the pages of his magazine. He definitely felt something for Kurt, that much was certain. Blaine tried to admire him as inconspicuously as possible, but it was hard not to just stop and stare all together. Kurt was so breathtakingly beautiful that simply looking at him did unimaginable things to Blaine's heart.

But he could never tell Kurt how he felt. No. That would just be downright stupid, because Blaine knew there was no way in hell someone as perfect as Kurt could possibly reciprocate his feelings. Plus, confessing his feelings could possibly ruin their friendship, and Blaine didn't want to risk that. He would rather have Kurt as just a friend than not at all.

The longer Blaine looked at him, though, the more it tore him apart to think that his chance to keep Kurt for himself was slipping right through his fingers. Blaine knew his best friend extremely well and there was no doubt in his mind that if Kurt wanted to be with Dave, then Kurt was going to *get* Dave. Blaine didn't have much longer to try to convince him to change his mind.

Kurt began chewing on his pen as he squinted at his notebook, deep in thought, and Blaine's fingers clenched tighter around the pages of his magazine. *That stupid pen is getting more action from Kurt's mouth than I ever will if I don't say something.*

He took a deep breath and closed his eyes for a second. This was it. Now or never. He had to tell Kurt how he really felt; otherwise he wouldn't even have a chance to be with him. If Blaine at least put his feelings out there, then Kurt would know his options. And maybe – just maybe – he'd pick Blaine.

"Kurt?"

His best friend's head whipped around at the sound of his name. Suddenly Blaine had fallen victim to those mesmerizing eyes, which seemed to cast a spell on him even as Kurt said something as simple as, "Yeah?"

Blaine's nerves got the best of him just as quickly as he'd worked up the confidence to tell Kurt the truth about how he felt. He sat there paralyzed with fear for a few seconds; it took every crumb of his willpower not to let his trepidation show on his face. *I can't do this. I can't tell him. It'll just make things weird between us and I can't stand the thought of losing him.*

"Can you toss me my flash drive? It's on the nightstand...I guess I should probably start my paper."

Kurt shifted on the bed and turned around to grab Blaine's flash drive off of the nightstand. He tossed it to Blaine, who caught it one-handed before turning to plug it into his computer. "Thanks."

Blaine began mindlessly typing his paper without paying attention to what the words materializing on the screen said. All he could focus on was the voice in the back of his head, telling him he'd made a huge mistake.

Should've told him...oh well, guess you didn't have the guts. I guess now you'll just have to regret this.

xxx

The text came unexpectedly, completely out of the blue. Kurt was in the cafeteria at his usual table with his friends from New Directions when his phone vibrated.

Meet me in the choir room. It was from Dave. Kurt's heart started racing just a little bit faster. It was nothing like the adrenaline rush he got when Blaine texted him, but Kurt had basically given up all hope of anything beyond friendship with Blaine by this point. At least he still had Dave. Things had changed dramatically between Kurt and his former bully over the past few months. After Dave's apology to Kurt in the principal's office, they'd slowly progressed from being bitter rivals into friendship. And that meant that Kurt was no longer as scared as he'd once been to acknowledge to himself the fact that he may have had a little crush on Dave.

Sure, Kurt had always thought the jock was kind of cute in his own way. He would never admit it to anyone, not even Blaine, but the worst part of the physical torment he'd suffered at the hands of Dave wasn't the fact that he was being bullied for who he was. It was because someone he legitimately found

himself attracted to was the one doing the bullying. Now that things had become better between the two of them, it felt like a huge weight had been lifted off his chest and he was free.

He excused himself and got up from the lunch table, making his way out of the cafeteria and down the hall with sweaty, clammy palms. He wiped them on his skinny jeans and took a few deep breaths, trying to remain calm. He had no idea what was in store for him when he reached the choir room, but something made him keep going towards that door.

The door was open when he arrived. Dave was standing near the piano, looking unsure of himself. Kurt warily stepped into the room.

"Hi," Dave said quietly when he saw Kurt. "Can you shut the door?"

Without thinking about what he was doing, Kurt turned around and closed the door behind him. He was completely alone, completely vulnerable.

"I don't mean to sound rude, but why are we here?" Kurt asked softly. "Couldn't you come and talk to me in the cafeteria? I have lunch this period, y'know."

"Because I want this to be just between you and me," Dave said. His voice sounded careful, almost hesitant. "And because I know you feel safe in here."

He took a step towards Kurt and held out a single red rose. Kurt hadn't even noticed he'd been holding the flower at his side.

"This is for you." Dave's voice was practically a whisper as he handed Kurt the rose.

"David, what's going on?" Kurt's voice broke when he finally managed to speak.

"I just wanted to say I'm sorry," Dave said, finally meeting Kurt's eyes. "I only hurt you because I was jealous. You had the balls to be out and proud, and I didn't. It killed me. I feel so horrible, Kurt. I'm so sorry, and I'll never hurt you again. I promise."

Kurt blinked, suddenly very confused as to why Dave was telling him this. "That's very sweet of you to say, David, but you've already apologized to me. You don't have to tell me again. I've forgiven you."

"Yeah, but...", Dave hesitated for a moment before he continued. "I feel like I need to say it again. I...I think I'm in love with you, Kurt."

Kurt was surprised his jaw didn't just hit the floor. This was the last thing he'd been expecting to hear.

"W-*what?*" he asked in disbelief, because he must have heard Dave wrong.

"Please don't freak out on me, okay?" Dave begged. "I said I *think*. All I know for sure is that I feel some pretty powerful stuff for you. I...I think you're *gorgeous*, for one thing, and you're so funny and talented and just all around amazing...and oh, god, this is weird because I've never let myself say any of this stuff out loud before...admitting that I'm attracted to another guy...I'm sorry, Kurt, I'm probably freaking you out. You can go if you want."

Kurt had never seen Dave like this before. He had to admit, the way Dave was completely baring his soul and putting himself in a very vulnerable position made Kurt feel good. Nobody had ever *wanted* him like this before. He stepped forward and placed a gentle hand on the side of Dave's face.

"Hey," Kurt said gently as Dave relaxed into his touch. "Don't beat yourself up, okay? I'm not going anywhere."

Neither boy said a word for a few moments. They stayed perfectly still, looking into each other's eyes as they tried to figure out what the other wanted.

Dave was the first to put his desires so explicitly into words.

"Kurt, I want to kiss you," he confessed after a while. "And I want to do it right this time. I still feel awful about how I pretty much forced myself on you last time. I...I want it to be special for you, because after the way I treated you...you don't deserve anything less."

Kurt should have stopped it right there. He should have stepped away and told Dave that he wanted to be friends, nothing more, but he didn't. He wouldn't know it until years later, but what he did next was the worst possible action he could have taken.

Instead, he let his eyes linger on Dave's for a few seconds longer before reaching up to put his other hand on the back of the other boy's neck and pulling him closer, finally kissing him softly and sweetly on the lips.

The kiss was simple and tender and only lasted for a few seconds before Kurt pulled away and gave Dave the tiniest of smiles.

Dave, on the other hand, had allowed a huge grin to spread across his whole face. Kurt had to admit, it was kind of adorable.

"*That* should have been our first kiss," he said breathlessly.

Kurt nodded. "I couldn't agree more."

"Do you...," Dave began carefully, then shook his head and started over. "Would you like to go out to dinner tonight? I want to take you on a real date."

Kurt let his face soften into a slightly bigger smile. "I'd love that."

"Cool," Dave said happily. His expression turned to one of hesitation after a few seconds. "C-can I kiss you again?"

Kurt had to laugh at that. "David, you don't have to ask."

They kissed again, both of them smiling as their lips met. For the first time in a while, Kurt was truly happy. He had a boyfriend – at least, he hoped Dave would be okay with using that word – who wanted to kiss him and take him out on dinner dates. Earlier this year, if anyone had told Kurt he'd be in this position, he would have unrepentantly laughed in their face.

But despite his utter happiness, Kurt was hiding something underneath it all. Every time he closed his eyes and moved in to kiss Dave, he was imagining that it was Blaine beneath his lips.

xxx

Blaine looked around at all the tables and chairs they'd just finished setting up, then turned to see what Kurt thought. "This good, or do you want to move anything?"

Kurt pursed his lips and nodded. "I think we're good," he said with a smile.

The back door opened and Burt Hummel appeared, carrying some packages of hamburgers and hot dogs which he placed by the grill. He chuckled a little bit as he looked at the setup in the backyard. "I ran to the grocery store for ten minutes to get some extra burgers and dogs, and you guys finished getting everything set up. I gotta admit, I'm impressed."

"And we didn't even have Finn with his extreme lifting abilities around to help," Kurt said proudly. His smile fell and he squinted in confusion. "Hey, where is Finn, anyway? This is his graduation party, too."

"He went to pick up Rachel," Burt explained. "Should be back any minute. Hey, speaking of boyfriends and girlfriends, when's Dave getting here? I thought you said he was gonna come a little early."

At that moment, as if on cue, the gate swung open and Dave Karofsky made his way into the backyard. *Speak of the devil...*

Blaine felt every single muscle in his body tensing up when he caught sight of Kurt's boyfriend. Seeing the two of them together always brought the same sinking feeling to his heart as when he'd first seen *Kurt Hummel is in a relationship with Dave Karofsky* on his Facebook newsfeed a week and a half ago. He tried so hard to be happy for Kurt, because Kurt was obviously so happy. But, Blaine thought, wasn't there anyone else in the world that Kurt could be happy with, *besides* his former bully?

Kurt's entire face lit up in a smile and he broke off running to meet his boyfriend in the middle of the yard. "David!"

It hurt to watch, but Blaine couldn't take his eyes off the couple as Kurt literally leapt onto Dave, wrapping his arms around his neck and his legs around his waist. Blaine blanked out for a second as he stared at those long legs and briefly wondered what they would feel like wrapped around him (hey, cut him some slack, he was a teenage boy with raging hormones and a massive unrequited crush on his best friend). The couple shared a brief kiss before Kurt jumped down to stand on his own feet again. He took Dave's hand and practically skipped back over to where Blaine and Burt were standing with his boyfriend in tow.

Dave's face immediately fell when he saw Blaine standing there. "I was kinda hoping I'd be the first non-relative here, but I guess Blaine already showed up," he said to Kurt as if Blaine weren't even there. "I thought I recognized his car in the driveway."

Blaine smiled politely, well aware of the fact that Dave was unhappy to see him. "I didn't have anything else going on, and I figured Burt and Carole would have their hands full since this is a double party for Kurt *and* Finn, so I just came to help set up."

"He invited himself over," Kurt clarified with Blaine's favorite smile. "I tried telling him we could handle it, but he didn't listen to me."

Suddenly it became glaringly obvious that Dave wanted to shift the focus of the conversation away from Blaine. He turned to Kurt with that stupid I'm-such-a-perfect-boyfriend smile that made Blaine want to throw up. "Happy graduation, baby."

"Mmmm, I'm so happy to see you," Kurt hummed in content. He wrapped his arms around Dave's neck and stood up on his tiptoes to give him a kiss.

Burt immediately excused himself to go back into the house and bring the rest of the food out. Blaine, with nothing to do, was left in the extremely awkward position of the third wheel. He watched Kurt giggle and blush as he kissed his boyfriend and tried not to think about how much he would have given to be in Dave's place. How much he would give to feel Kurt smiling beneath *his* lips, to feel the heat from that beautiful blush as Kurt kissed *him*. Blaine knew there was no way in hell that he'd ever get to experience that for himself, but that didn't make it any easier to watch.

After a few awkward and painful seconds, Blaine cleared his throat. "Hey, um, I'm gonna...go...help Burt and Carole with the food," he said, knowing full well that Kurt and Dave weren't paying attention to a word he was saying. They were too wrapped up in the kiss and in each other.

He turned away from the couple and forced himself to walk back towards the house. In the back of his mind, he knew that his decision to leave them alone was less about giving Kurt and Dave privacy and more about the fact that watching them hurt his heart too much.

xxx

Dalton Academy graduated its seniors two weeks after McKinley did, so the night of Blaine's graduation, Kurt found himself in his best friend's backyard at his party, making a valiant effort to enjoy himself.

It had taken a lot of convincing to get Dave to come with him to Blaine's graduation party, but eventually his boyfriend had caved – only after reminding Kurt that they weren't going to stay long. When they'd

arrived, Dave had been doing everything in his power to keep Kurt away from Blaine, always finding new people to talk to and dragging Kurt along with him. Kurt had nothing to do but let his eyes sweep the backyard for Blaine and watch longingly as his best friend talked with his relatives or goofed off with some of his Dalton buddies.

When the sun was finally starting to go down, Dave had apparently had enough.

"I'm bored," he announced to Kurt. "Let's get out of here."

Kurt raised one eyebrow. He'd been getting slightly annoyed that Dave had been keeping him away from Blaine all night, not even letting him talk to his friend for a brief second to congratulate him. He knew Dave and Blaine had never gotten along very well, but at least Blaine made an attempt to be civil whenever the two of them were around each other. Dave could be downright rude sometimes.

Well, two could play at that game. "I'm not leaving until I get to say hi to Blaine."

Dave scoffed and took a sip from the pop can he was holding. "You don't need to do that."

Kurt stared at him in disbelief. "Yes, I do. He's my *friend*, David, whether you like it or not. I'm not just going to come to his party and completely blow him off. You haven't even let me near him all night."

"I'm sorry for wanting to spend time with my boyfriend," Dave commented mockingly. "I didn't even want to *come* to this stupid party. I barely know anyone here. I knew I wouldn't have fun."

"I have been *trying* to have fun, and you're doing everything possible to ruin this for me," Kurt hissed. "I *just* want to say hi to Blaine. I'll be *right* back."

He turned on his heel and marched confidently across the Andersons' large backyard, towards where Blaine was tossing a football with some of his friends from the Warblers. Kurt called out to get his attention once he was close enough; Blaine tossed the football to Wes and jogged over to Kurt.

"Hey," he said, smiling that little smile that never ceased to take Kurt's breath away. "I've barely seen you all night, what's up?"

Kurt didn't speak for a second because he was slightly preoccupied with admiring how amazing Blaine looked. His hair was ungelled, curly and natural and incredibly soft-looking; he was dressed as the

epitome of casualness in a Buckeyes t-shirt and athletic shorts. He looked nothing like he usually did, with his hair slicked back and dressed in all his Dalton-blazered, perfect-gentleman, future-attorney glory. It didn't matter. Kurt still thought he was breathtakingly handsome.

"Nothing," Kurt finally managed to say, unable to hold back a smile of his own. "I just...David and I were about to leave, and I knew I couldn't go without saying *something* to you."

"Don't worry about it," Blaine told him, laughing a little bit. He paused briefly before continuing.

"I'm really glad you could make it," he continued softly. Kurt couldn't help but notice the way his gorgeous hazel eyes sparkled in the glow of the sunset on this warm summer evening. Something about the way Blaine was looking at him seemed almost magical.

"I wouldn't have missed it for the world," Kurt told him honestly.

They shared a lingering gaze, tiny smiles gracing both of their faces. As Kurt looked into Blaine's eyes, he was suddenly overwhelmed with the urge to kiss his best friend sweetly and passionately in the hot summer night. He wanted to wrap his arms around Blaine's neck and pull him closer, until they were so close that Kurt could finally get a taste of those lips he'd been secretly craving for the longest time. Just one kiss. One taste. He just wanted to find out for himself what kissing Blaine was like.

If Dave hadn't been standing fifteen feet away, watching the two of them like a hawk, Kurt might have done just that.

But the fact of the matter was that Dave *was* watching them, and Kurt knew that keeping his boyfriend waiting much longer wasn't the best idea. He gave Blaine an apologetic smile. "I should get going."

"Okay," Blaine said quietly. "Bye, Kurt."

Kurt went over to where Dave was standing, only to have his boyfriend grab his hand and pull him out of the backyard with an almost angry fervor. Once he was in the passenger seat of Dave's truck, Kurt couldn't help but ask the question he already pretty much knew the answer to.

"What is your *problem*?" he practically shouted as Dave started the engine.

"I think you know exactly what my problem is," Dave growled as he practically floored the gas and sped off down Blaine's street. "Or I should say, *who* my problem is."

"Blaine?" Kurt asked, playing stupid.

"Yeah. Anderson," Dave clarified. "'Oh, I'm so smart, I went to Dalton and now I'm gonna go to OSU and study pre-law so I can be a lawyer and make a shit ton of money someday. Maybe Kurt will love me when I'm rich,'" he teased in a bad impersonation of Blaine's voice.

Kurt squinted at him in disbelief. "Are you *kidding* me? First of all, Blaine is not a pretentious douchebag. Second, what in the world makes you think he would *ever* want me?"

"I'm not stupid, Kurt. I've seen the way he looks at you." Dave was gripping the steering wheel with so much force that his knuckles practically turned white.

"That doesn't mean anything!" Kurt felt tears of frustration welling up in his eyes and forced himself to blink them away. "Whatever you see isn't really there. Blaine and I are *friends*, okay? Whether you like it or not, he and I are going to be *friends*."

Dave let out a sigh as he drove. "I guess there's nothing I can do about it. But I don't get why you want to spend so much time with him."

"So I'm not allowed to spend time with my friends now?" Kurt asked bitterly in response.

"I don't have a problem with any of your other friends," Dave said with a shrug. "Only Anderson."

Kurt couldn't believe this discussion was even necessary. Why shouldn't he be friends with Blaine? "And why? Because he's *gay*?"

"Exactly," Dave told him. "And I wouldn't even have a problem with that, except for the fact that he looks at you like you're something to eat. You can practically *see* him undressing you in his mind."

Kurt was well aware that he'd been doing nothing but asking incredulous questions for most of the car ride, but he didn't care. He felt tears welling up in his eyes and blinked rapidly in a herculean effort to hold them back. He'd be damned if he let Dave see him cry.

"What the hell are you even talking about?" he asked weakly.

Without warning, Dave pulled over and stopped the car. It was dark by now; Kurt couldn't tell where they were, but his eyes were wide with fear as his boyfriend slammed on the brakes. When Dave yanked the gear shift into Park and ripped the keys out of the ignition, Kurt knew they'd be here a while.

"I'm sorry!" Dave shouted. "I'm sorry that I have the most *gorgeous* boyfriend and I want to keep him all to myself. I'm sorry that I get jealous when I see other guys checking him out. I'm fucking *sorry*, Kurt, okay?"

He collapsed into sobs against the steering wheel. Kurt, who had finally managed to blink away his own tears, let his affectionate instincts take over. He leaned over to wrap his arms around Dave's broad shoulders and let his head rest on his boyfriend's back.

"David?" he whispered hesitantly.

"Yeah?" was Dave's muttered response.

Kurt bit his lip before he spoke again. "I'm not leaving you," he said. "I don't want to be with anyone else. I don't want to be with Blaine. I want to be with you."

It was a complete and utter lie, and Kurt knew it. In reality, he wanted to be with Blaine more than anything in the world and had merely settled for Dave, because the jock was the only attractive, decent guy who had ever taken anything close to a romantic interest in Kurt. He wondered if Dave knew it was a lie, too.

But his boyfriend simply relaxed and turned to take Kurt in his arms. "Thank you," he said gently. "That's what I needed to hear."

They stayed there for a long time, neither of them saying a word. Kurt tried to relax into Dave's embrace, but he still couldn't help feeling awful for making his boyfriend so upset. He wanted to make it up to him...and after thinking silently for a few minutes about how to do that, Kurt could only come up with one idea.

He slipped out of Dave's arms and climbed into the backseat of the truck.

Dave turned around, trying to figure out what was going on. "Wait, what are you doing?"

"Come back here with me," Kurt said, attempting to keep his voice steady.

Dave stared at him for a few seconds longer before shrugging and crawling over the front two seats to get to the back, where Kurt was. Kurt took a deep breath and closed his eyes when his boyfriend settled in beside him and kissed him deeply. He was trying not to think about how far this could possibly go, and also the fact that he would have essentially no idea what to do if it *did* get that far. He tried his best to relax into the kiss.

The kissing part was easy. All Kurt had to do was keep his eyes closed and kiss Dave back, imagining the whole time that he was kissing Blaine. He wasn't quite sure how that always managed to happen – yes, he was attracted to Dave and Dave was his boyfriend, but for some reason his mind always kept coming back to Blaine. And he didn't necessarily have a problem with that. As long as he didn't do something embarrassing like moan Blaine's name out loud, he figured, he should be fine.

But then things got a little more intense and hands began to roam freely. Before Kurt knew it, his clothes were being taken off.

Okay. Kurt tried to remind himself how to breathe. Maybe this was happening a little bit faster and going a little bit further than he anticipated, but he wasn't going to stop Dave. If there was anything Dave needed, it was reassurance that Kurt belonged to him and only him. He only hoped Dave had some idea of what he was doing, because other than the basic details, Kurt had no idea what to expect or how to do this.

He felt his face turning unbelievably warm as Dave yanked off his jeans and boxer briefs at the same time and tossed them to the floor of the truck. Suddenly he was alarmingly aware of the fact that he was naked in front of another person for the first time in his conscious life. It wouldn't have been so bad, except for the fact that Dave was still completely dressed. Kurt couldn't help but feel extremely overexposed.

Dave licked his lips and grinned hungrily down at Kurt. "Fucking *Christ*. You're *so* hot, baby."

Kurt felt his heart start to beat just a little faster than it already was. This was real; this was happening. Another boy *wanted* him. For the first time since leaving Blaine's graduation party, he smiled. "Really?"

"Oh, yeah," Dave practically purred. He leaned his head down and attached his mouth to one of Kurt's nipples. Kurt couldn't hold back a scream of pleasure as his boyfriend sucked the sensitive bud to hardness, then did the same on the other side.

"Mmmm, I'm gonna make you scream even louder and longer than you just did, trust me." As Dave spoke, suddenly it became clear to Kurt that he had no intention of taking off all his clothes. He unzipped his jeans and took himself out of his boxers before settling between Kurt's legs.

By this point, Kurt wasn't sure how to feel about anything anymore. He may not have known much about sex at all, but he was pretty sure you were supposed to stretch the other person out before just sticking it in. Dave apparently either didn't know that or he didn't care enough to make sure Kurt was feeling okay about all this. Kurt closed his eyes and bit his lip almost to the point of drawing blood as he felt his boyfriend begin to enter him.

The first thing he noticed – the *only* thing he noticed – was the pain. Kurt had thought this was supposed to be such an amazing experience, so why was he in so much pain? It seemed hard to believe that something that was supposedly so beautiful could hurt so much. He exhaled a shaky breath, not realizing that he'd been holding it in for quite some time.

He felt Dave begin to move. It seemed to Kurt that the pain would subside with each subsequent thrust, because he was getting used to it, but if anything it seemed to hurt even more. Kurt kept his eyes closed and tried to focus on his breathing. Anything but the pain.

For a moment, he tried utilizing his think-of-Blaine strategy that he usually put into play whenever he and Dave were kissing. It was simple enough for the first few seconds. Kurt kept the image in his mind of Blaine's face from earlier that evening, during their brief conversation at the part right before Kurt and Dave had left. He remembered the way Blaine had been looking at him, the way his warm hazel eyes had been glowing with such affection and genuine happiness at seeing Kurt. Kurt tried to keep that image in his mind and imagine that Blaine was making love to him instead of the undesirable reality.

But that didn't last very long, because the more Kurt thought about it, the more unrealistic it seemed. If he *did* have sex with Blaine, he figured (and Kurt knew full well that the chances of that happening were slim to none), Blaine wouldn't be going as rough as Dave currently was, especially not the very first time. Kurt pictured Blaine as being the type to be nothing but sweet and loving and gentle in bed, always making sure to check that his partner was doing okay. He wouldn't be doing it for his own pleasure, as Dave seemed to be doing in the present moment.

One particularly hard thrust jolted Kurt out of his little reverie and he screamed bloody murder. Dave seemed to like that, because he leaned down and licked Kurt's cheek before letting his lips hover above his boyfriend's.

"Do you know how hot you sound when you scream like that?" he murmured, not quite kissing Kurt just yet, then continued his painful rhythm of thrusting in and out of Kurt. "And you're so fucking tight, baby. I could do this all fucking day."

Kurt could have slapped him. How in the world could Dave have thought that he'd been screaming in pleasure? It didn't matter, because suddenly his boyfriend had started giving it to him harder and faster and causing him even more pain. Kurt felt warm tears spilling down his face and he wondered how long he'd been crying. As soon as he noticed, though, he decided he couldn't take it anymore.

"No! Stop it! This hurts!" he screamed without even thinking about what he was doing. "Please just *stop* it!"

Dave immediately stopped thrusting but didn't pull out just yet. "What?"

Kurt couldn't even believe he'd had the nerve to ask that. "Do I *need* to spell it out for you?" he growled through his tears. Dave stared at him blankly for a second, still not moving; Kurt continued with scathing sarcasm. "Apparently, I do. Get your dick out of my ass *right now*."

Dave gave him one of those wide-eyed looks that suggested he had no idea what he'd been doing wrong. He pulled out of Kurt, who instinctively let himself exhale a sigh of relief.

Kurt watched his boyfriend's eyes as Dave glanced down in between Kurt's legs. "You're bleeding all over the seat, baby."

Then, without saying another word or offering to help Kurt clean up or asking how he was feeling or even *apologizing*, for Christ's sakes, he moved off of Kurt's naked body and began pleasuring himself. Kurt stared at him in utter disbelief for a few seconds. Dave had apparently placed his own sexual pleasure over his boyfriend's sanity and well-being, and that pissed Kurt off to no end.

He craned his neck and looked down to see that he was in fact bleeding, but it wasn't nearly as bad as Dave had made it sound. Only a drop or two had gotten on the seat. He glared at his boyfriend, who was still stroking himself, feeling rage building up inside him.

"I hope I bleed all over your seat," he muttered angrily, not sure if Dave had heard him, but it didn't matter. He sat there for a few more seconds, wishing he had something – anything – with which to cover himself. He'd never felt more ashamed and humiliated and utterly disgusting in his life, and the fact that he was naked wasn't exactly helping.

He quickly glanced around for something he could use to cover himself. His clothes were lying on the ground, but he really didn't feel like going to the trouble of pulling all his layers back on. He checked behind the seat and found a ratty, dirty old stadium blanket that looked like it hadn't been washed in about a year. It would do. Kurt immediately grabbed the blanket and pulled it around himself while Dave finished getting himself off.

When Dave was finished, he reached up into the glove compartment and pulled out a napkin which he used to wipe off his messy hand. After tucking himself back into his pants, he finally looked at Kurt, who was trembling in his blanket.

"Baby?" he asked hesitantly, reaching out one hand to touch Kurt's soft cheek.

Kurt flinched away from Dave's touch almost instinctively. "Please take me home," he said weakly.

"But, Kurt-," Dave began, only to be cut off by Kurt's harsh grumble.

"Take me *home*, David."

Dave nodded. "Okay," he said softly.

He crawled up into the driver's seat and Kurt stayed right where he was. Even if he'd wanted to move, he wouldn't have been able to because he was in so much pain. He pulled the blanket closer around him and lay down across the entire backseat. Once Dave started to drive, Kurt found that the gentle hum of the engine was actually kind of soothing.

He stared up out the window at the nighttime sky. There were lots of stars out tonight, he noticed. Normally Kurt would have been fascinated by this, because there was something so beautiful and mysterious about the stars to him, but not tonight. Tonight, all he could think about was how much he hated himself.

Dave was going to leave him. There was no doubt in his mind about that. What kind of guy would want to stay with someone who couldn't even last through an entire fuck? And even though Dave would never know it, Kurt suddenly felt guilty about picturing Blaine through it all. Through *everything*. Every kiss, every touch, Kurt closed his eyes and imagined that it was Blaine, and he had to stop doing that. If by some miracle Dave didn't dump his ass, Kurt vowed that he would stop imagining he was with his best friend whenever the two of them did anything physical together.

The car ride seemed eternal. When Dave finally pulled into the Hudmel driveway, Kurt sat up slowly and began pulling his clothes back on in the most dignified manner possible. He didn't bother speaking until he was fully dressed.

"David?" he asked softly.

"Yeah?"

"Are you...do you want to break up with me?"

Dave laughed as if this were the most ridiculous thing he'd ever heard. "What? No way. You're way too hot to just dump like that." He reached into the backseat and grabbed the fabric at the front of Kurt's shirt so he could pull him in for a quick kiss, which Kurt broke almost immediately.

"Goodnight, David," he said quietly as he got out of the car, wincing with every move he made, and headed up to the house.

When he got inside, he found his father snoring on the couch in front of the baseball game on TV. Finn was probably still out grad-party-hopping. That left only one person for him to avoid, and that was Carole. As quietly as possible, Kurt made his way towards the stairs. All he wanted to do was take a shower and fall asleep.

But, like so many other things tonight, his plan for that fell short when Carole called out to him.

"Kurt, sweetie?" She stepped out of the kitchen just in time to see him heading up the stairs. "You're home early. I thought you'd stay out longer."

He shook his head. "I don't feel good." It wasn't even a total lie.

"Come out to the kitchen and sit down," she suggested gently. "I just finished making cookies."

Kurt sniffed the air and noticed for the first time that the whole house smelled of freshly-baked chocolate chip cookies. He turned around and descended the two stairs he'd managed to climb.

He was feeling dizzy and lightheaded for some reason that he couldn't put his finger on, and Carole must have noticed because she took his arm and helped guide him out to the kitchen. Kurt sat at his usual place and immediately reached out to grab a cookie from the plate that was in the middle of the table. Carole poured a glass of milk and set it in front of him; Kurt thanked her and dunked his cookie in the milk before chomping off half of it in one bite.

"I feel like I'm six years old again," he admitted with a tiny smile as Carole sat down next to him. "It's nice, though."

Carole returned his smile. "I know it's late, but I was just in the mood to bake," she said, giving his hand a gentle squeeze before she continued.

"Is everything all right?" she asked with the type of concern that only a mother could harbor. "You seem upset about something."

Kurt took a sip of his milk and thought about how he could answer that. It's not like he was about to tell his stepmother what had really happened. *I lost my virginity in the backseat of my boyfriend's truck about half an hour ago. It hurt and it was awful. I didn't even last the whole time. The worst part is, he didn't even seem to care how much I was hurting.*

Instead, he managed to stick with the bare minimum of details and only related the events of the party to her. He shook his head. "It just...wasn't as fun as I was hoping it would be. I barely got to see Blaine, because I think David was trying to keep me away from him."

Carole nodded understandingly. "He's jealous."

"I know he is, but why should he be?" Kurt asked in response. "Blaine and I are just friends, and he knows that. Why can't two gay guys be friends without everyone assuming we're secretly fooling around on the side, or something stupid like that? David doesn't *get* it."

Having finished off his first cookie, Kurt reached for another one and shoved the entire thing in his mouth.

"And he won't get it, unless you keep making it clear to him that you have a right to be friends with whoever you want," Carole told him. "You shouldn't have to choose between your friends and your boyfriend. Nobody wants to make that decision. It's perfectly okay to spend time with both, but he just needs to come to terms with that."

Kurt resisted the urge to smile, because it sounded exactly like something his father would say. He couldn't, though, because now that he was venting he couldn't seem to stop.

"I made the super-last-minute decision of turning down the opportunity to go to college in New York, just so I could stay here and go to Ohio State with David," he said flatly, suddenly unable to meet Carole's eyes. "And in retrospect, that's probably the stupidest decision I ever could have made. We haven't even been dating that long. But I made that stupid decision for *him*. He doesn't even give me credit for *that*."

Carole looked concerned. "What did he say to you about it?"

Kurt rolled his eyes. "'Are you sure it's not because *Blaine* is going there, too?'" he quoted in a near-perfect impersonation of his boyfriend's voice. "I told him no, absolutely not. Besides, David and I are rooming together so we'll see each other all the time. Blaine's going into the pre-law program, so he's going to be super busy and if David's lucky, I won't get to see him at all."

"You seem upset about that," Carole observed. "About the not-seeing-Blaine thing, I mean."

"Yeah, I am, but at least this time I'll have a valid reason why I won't be seeing him. He'll be busy a lot of the time," Kurt explained. "I can deal with that. I can't deal with my jealous boyfriend purposely keeping me away from him."

He picked up his glass and chugged back the rest of his milk, wiped his hand across his upper lip to get rid of the inevitable milk mustache, and sighed. "Oh, I guess it doesn't matter where I go to college, anyway. The more I think about it, the more I fall in love with the idea of being a music teacher. I don't need to go all the way up to New York just for that. OSU has a great education program."

Carole smiled at him. "Well, no matter what you eventually decide to do, always know that your father and I are here to support you no matter what." She stood up from the table and opened her arms. "Can I have a hug?"

As Kurt stood up and hugged her back, his mind started to wander a little bit. She had baked him cookies. She'd sat down with him and listened to him vent his romantic and platonic frustrations. She'd talked with him about college and his future. She'd done everything a *mom* was supposed to do.

And Kurt didn't have a problem with that at all, because he thought of Carole as a mother in many ways now. But he couldn't help thinking about his own mother. Although she'd passed away when Kurt was still a little boy, she'd always tried to teach him how to respect himself and not to let other people take advantage of him. All of a sudden he thought about what had just happened between himself and Dave in the backseat of the truck not too long ago and a harrowing thought entered his mind.

What would Mom think?

Kurt immediately bit his lip to hold back a sob when that thought came to mind. He didn't think it was possible for him to feel more ashamed of himself than he had when he'd been sitting there naked watching Dave finishing himself off, but this did it. He could practically *see* his mother rolling over in her grave.

He pulled back from Carole's hug and tried his best to smile.

"Thank you so much. For everything," he told her sincerely. "I'm gonna go upstairs, I kind of just want to lie down."

"You're welcome, sweetie," she told him with a motherly smile. "Go get some rest."

Getting upstairs was a slower process than usual due to the immense pain he was still in, but eventually Kurt made it to his room. He collapsed on his bed and pulled his phone out of his pocket, quickly thumbing in his passcode before staring at the menu screen.

Now that he was alone, he had more time to think. Specifically, more time to think about how much he still hated himself, especially since he'd had that thought about his mom. In everything he did, he tried to make her proud, and he couldn't help but feel that he'd failed miserably. He'd thrown himself away just for the sake of feeling wanted.

He had to talk to somebody. A very specific somebody. He might not have the courage to relate the graphic details of what had happened tonight, but he knew that hearing said specific somebody's voice would immediately make him feel better. Kurt pressed the Phone icon at the bottom of the screen and dialed the number he knew by heart.

xxx

It was late, and of course most of Blaine's relatives hadn't left his party yet. All of his friends had – there were tons of other parties to hit up tonight, of course – but since this was *his* party, Blaine felt obligated to stay.

He was sitting at the patio table with several of his cousins, playing euchre by porch light. His parents and some of his aunts and uncles were standing around talking and drinking. By this point, Blaine had already thrown back three Cokes and half of a Red Bull, but the caffeine just wasn't doing it because he was exhausted. He was having major difficulty keeping his eyes open.

Suddenly his phone vibrated, which woke him up a little bit. After extracting it from his pocket and glancing at the caller ID on the front screen, he immediately placed his hand of cards down on the table and stood up.

"Go ahead and keep playing without me," he told his cousins before pacing a considerable distance away from the patio so he could have some privacy. Once he was sure he was out of earshot of his relatives, he slid his thumb across the screen to answer the call.

"Hey, Kurt," he said with a smile that he hoped his best friend could hear through the phone.

To Blaine's delight, it sounded like Kurt was wearing the tiniest smile as he greeted Blaine. "Hi," he said, his tone almost shy. "Hey, um, I just wanted to say I'm sorry I didn't get to hang out with you much tonight. David was in a mood."

Blaine laughed. "Kurt, it's seriously okay. I'm glad we got to talk a little bit, however brief of a conversation it was." He paused for a second as he considered something Kurt had just said. "Wait, what do you mean he was 'in a mood'?"

He could just see Kurt rolling his eyes as he responded. "Oh, y'know, I'm not allowed to have other guy friends who are gay," he said cynically. "I kind of had to yell at him a little bit after we left, but it's okay."

Blaine couldn't help but be impressed by that. Kurt had yelled at his boyfriend because said boyfriend hadn't allowed him to talk to Blaine. *That* was how much it mattered to Kurt that they spend time with each other.

But then he realized he probably should be a little concerned. "Kurt, are you sure everything is okay with you two?"

"Oh, yeah, everything's fine," Kurt reassured him. "Just a little argument. David was just jealous."

"Are you sure?" Blaine asked warily. "You don't deserve to be treated like that, Kurt. He just needs to accept the fact that you and I are friends, plain and simple."

"I know, I know," Kurt sighed. "I'm still working on him. I have faith, though. I think I'll get through eventually."

"And you're absolutely positive that everything's okay?" Blaine had to ask again. "You sound upset. Is something bothering you?"

"Oh, no. Other than the stuff with David that I already told you about, no," Kurt said reassuringly. "I'm just exhausted. I got home a while ago, talked with Carole for a little bit, and now I'm just kind of lying on my bed, snuggling with my pillow." He giggled a little bit. "I don't think I can move."

Blaine had been picturing all of this in his mind while Kurt was speaking and he couldn't help but let a goofy smile take over his face as he thought about how cute Kurt probably looked right now. For a fraction of a nanosecond he considered inviting himself over so that Kurt could snuggle with *him*, but immediately decided against it, especially given the nature of their conversation thus far and Dave's feelings about Blaine.

"Then don't move," he told Kurt. "Just let yourself fall asleep."

"But I *have* to." Kurt was probably the only person on the planet who could sound so adorable even when he was whining. "I want to go take a shower, but my bed is so comfy."

He really shouldn't have said that, because Blaine's mind immediately took a trip into the gutter and stayed there for the next few seconds as he considered the implications of what Kurt had just said.

Kurt in the shower. Kurt *naked* in the shower. Kurt's hands sliding all over his wet, slippery, naked body as he washed himself.

Wow, okay, Blaine really didn't need to be having those thoughts right now because Kurt was his *friend* and he was around his *family* for crying out loud, and besides, Kurt had a *boyfriend* who got to keep that delicious body all to himself.

He pulled his mind out of the gutter to the best of his ability and finally managed to remember how to talk.

"Then go take a shower," he suggested, trying not to think about the fact that this was excellent spank material for when he was finally alone in his room later tonight. He'd gotten himself off to the thought of Kurt naked before, so there was no reason why he shouldn't do it again. Nobody had to know. "You'll feel a lot better and then you can go right to sleep."

"Mmmm, that sounds like a good idea, too," Kurt said, stifling a yawn. "It's just making myself get up that's the hard part."

Blaine forced himself to bite back a smile. He knew it was dumb and childish, but conversations like this made it so easy to think that Kurt was his boyfriend.

"You can do it. I believe in you," Blaine teased, probably just a little too flirtatiously but he didn't care. "Get up and take a nice, warm shower, then go to sleep."

"Fine." Blaine could hear the muffled sound of Kurt's mattress settling as he stood up from his bed. "I'm gonna listen to you and take a shower."

"All right. I should probably get back to my party, because some of my relatives are *still* here," Blaine said, rolling his eyes. "Hey, but Kurt?"

"Yeah?"

"Thanks so much for coming today," Blaine said softly. "It really means a lot that you could make it."

There was the most precious smile in Kurt's voice as he responded. "I told you I wouldn't miss it for the world."

"I'm glad," Blaine told him sincerely, then realized he should probably let him go. "Goodnight, Kurt."

"Goodnight, Blaine," Kurt said sweetly.

Blaine stayed on the line until he heard Kurt hang up, then snapped back into reality. The just-a-little-flirtatious conversation was over and now he had to get back into the Real World, in which Kurt wasn't his boyfriend and the two of them were nothing more than the best of friends.

xxx

College, sophomore year

Kurt was just heading back into the kitchen of the small but cozy apartment he shared with Dave when the knock came.

"Can you get that?" he called out to his boyfriend as he picked up two trays – one of cheese and crackers, the other of fresh fruit, one in each hand. "My hands are full."

"Got it," Dave called back. Kurt's heart started beating faster as he headed out into the living area and set the trays down on the coffee table. He and Dave had some pretty big news to break, so they were inviting all their closest family and friends over this afternoon. Kurt had absolutely no idea how they were going to take this. On one hand, he figured they'd all be thrilled for the two of them. But then he considered the alternative – what if they thought he and Dave were rushing into this too fast?

Well, it didn't matter what they thought, because he'd spent many a long night with Dave discussing this before they finally decided that they were going to go ahead with this decision. He only hoped his family and friends could respect that, even if they didn't personally agree.

Dave opened the door and Kurt heard him greeting their guests with boisterous cheerfulness. "Hey, come on in! I'm so glad you guys could make it!"

Kurt saw the three of them appear one by one. First was Brittany, who stepped into the apartment with a giddy smile after Dave greeted her with a hug. Next was Finn, and finally Kurt heard his boyfriend give one more unenthusiastic greeting to the last person in the group.

"Oh. Hey, Blaine. Didn't see you back there, Hudson's pretty tall." Dave took half a step aside so that Blaine had to practically squeeze past him through the doorway. He didn't shake Blaine's hand, unlike he did with Finn.

Kurt, always priding himself on being a perfect gentleman, greeted all three of the guests with equal enthusiasm. "Hi, guys! I'm so excited to see you all!" He gave each of them a hug – first Brittany, then his brother, then finally Blaine.

"Nice to see you guys, too," Blaine told him and Dave. "It sucks that we can't hang out as much anymore even though we go to the same school and we both live right here on campus. I feel like I've barely seen you guys since the beginning of freshman year."

"Yeah, well, law school will do that to you," Finn joked. He plopped himself down on the couch and immediately reached toward the trays of food Kurt had just placed on the coffee table.

"He's not actually *in* law school yet," Dave pointed out, perhaps a little too harshly. Finn looked taken aback.

Blaine smiled sheepishly. "Yeah, he's got a point. I'm not," he said. "I gotta get a regular four-year degree like everyone else, then three years of law school, then pass the bar."

"*Oh*, okay," Dave commented sarcastically. "Do all future lawyers provide people with excessive details that nobody cares about, or is it just you?"

Kurt immediately jumped in and saved the conversation from turning into a full-out argument. "Hey, while we're waiting on everyone else, does anybody want anything to drink?" he asked as cheerfully as possible.

"I'll have a Coke, please," Finn said.

"Make that two," Dave told him.

"Could I please have some iced tea?" Brittany asked.

"Yes, you may," Kurt told her. "Blaine? Anything?"

The other man shook his head. "No, thank you."

Finn made an effort to start a new conversation among the three men in the living room as Kurt headed out to the kitchen, gently grabbing Brittany's arm and pulling her along with him.

"Are you feeling all right?" he asked once they were out of earshot of the rest of the group.

She nodded. "I feel great. The morning sickness is pretty much gone, the doctors have been telling me that everything is going smoothly...and Santana is taking next week off to come home and stay with me, so that definitely helps."

Kurt didn't miss the way her face lit up when she talked about her girlfriend. Santana and Brittany had been doing a wonderful job of making their long-distance relationship work, even while the former was off studying fashion design in New York and the latter had remained back in Ohio, taking courses at Columbus State Community College so she could transfer to a four-year school the following year. He admired them for having formed such a deep connection to each other that they could pull such a difficult relationship off.

"That's so sweet," he told her sincerely as he poured the drinks. "And you told her already, yeah?"

Brittany nodded. "Yep. You and Dave are okay with her knowing before everyone else, right?"

"Oh, absolutely! I think she deserves to know, so that's totally fine," he reassured her. "I was just wondering because she texted me right before you guys got here...she's got class, so she can't Skype in like we originally planned, but she said to tell everyone hi and that she's so excited for us."

"Yay," Brittany said with an excited smile, clapping a little bit. "I'm so happy, Kurt."

He set the pitcher of iced tea down on the counter and turned to face her, returning her smile. "Me too, Britt," he said as he pulled her into a hug. "Me too."

The two of them headed back out to the living room and passed out the drinks to the rest of the group. Kurt noticed that Dave's father had arrived while they'd been out in the kitchen, so he greeted him and offered him something to drink, which the elder Karofsky politely refused. The only people left to come were Burt and Carole – actually, there was still someone else they'd invited, but she hadn't responded to their invitation and Kurt highly doubted she'd show up.

Still, he thought it would be polite to ask. "Have you heard from your mom? Is she coming?" he asked Dave quietly as he sat down next to him on the sofa, making sure his voice was soft enough that nobody else in the room would hear.

Dave simply shook his head and looked at the floor. "No."

Dave's parents had divorced when he was in middle school, and they'd shared custody of him up until his senior year of high school, when he came out as gay. His father had been shocked at first but ultimately responded with acceptance. It was a much better response than Dave had gotten from his mother, who reacted to the news by making an unsuccessful attempt to get professional help for her son, in the hopes that he would be cured of his "disease." From that point on, Dave had lived with his dad until he moved away to college.

Kurt knew that his boyfriend had sent a few emails to his mother over the past two weeks or so, letting her know that he and Kurt had some wonderful news and inviting her to their apartment so they could share it with her. When she didn't respond to any of his messages, he'd tried calling her, only to get no response. Eventually Dave had resigned to accept the fact that his mother was going to ignore any effort he made to reach out to her.

He didn't have much time to feel sorry for his boyfriend, though, because as he was considering all this, a knock came to the door. His parents had arrived. It was time to break the news.

Once Burt and Carole had greeted everyone and gotten settled, Kurt returned to his seat beside Dave and bit his lip to contain his excited smile. Now that the moment had finally arrived, he didn't know how much longer he could keep this hidden.

"Kid, you look like you're about to burst with excitement," Burt pointed out. "Just spit it out."

"I am!" Kurt told his father, immediately smiling as soon as he opened his mouth. "And are you sure? Just get it out there right now?"

"Yeah, dude, just say it," Finn told him. "Seriously, I've been trying to figure it out all day."

Kurt glanced around the room at all their faces. His brother. His parents. Brittany. Mr. Karofsky. Blaine.

He turned to Dave with a smile. "You want to tell them?"

Dave took one of Kurt's hands in both of his and turned to acknowledge the whole group.

"Brittany is three months pregnant," he announced.

Every single eye in the room immediately fixated on the blonde, who smiled despite the flush in her cheeks and nodded.

"David and I have chosen her to be our surrogate," Kurt announced happily. "We're having a baby."

At that moment, the room erupted into a spirit of blissful chaos as everyone leapt up and began showering the two of them with hugs and congratulations and squeals of joy (well, that last part was mostly Carole, but it didn't matter). The second the words had left his mouth, Kurt felt his heart beating with a thrill unlike anything he'd experienced in his life. He was going to be a father, and he had the people he loved more than anything in the world here to share this unbelievably joyful moment with him.

Everything was happening in such a blur and Kurt loved it. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Carole pulling Burt and Mr. Karofsky into an excited group hug while exclaiming something about being grandparents. But his attention was suddenly diverted and time seemed to stop when he suddenly felt himself being pulled into a hug by warm, strong arms. Arms that did not belong to his boyfriend, thank you very much.

"Oh!" He squealed a little bit with surprise before giggling and hugging Blaine back. He knew it was wrong, because everyone was here today to celebrate the amazing news that Kurt and *Dave* had to share, but he couldn't help noticing how safe he felt in Blaine's arms. It was different than when Dave hugged him, probably because in this case Kurt was the taller one, but definitely not in a bad way. Sharing this embrace with Blaine felt so natural, like the two of them had been made to fit perfectly in each other's arms.

Blaine pulled away from the hug so he could look Kurt in the eyes. "This is *amazing*," he said softly, but Kurt could tell he meant every single word. "You're going to be an incredible father, Kurt."

Kurt could only respond to that by pulling Blaine into another emotional hug. It brought such incredible joy to his heart to see his best friend so genuinely happy for him. But this hug didn't last as long because suddenly he felt Dave's hand on his shoulder from behind, a subtle sign that it was time to break away now.

He let Blaine go and the two shared a lingering smile before Kurt turned to take Dave's hand and they returned to where they'd been sitting previously. Just as he'd expected, the rest of the group began enthusiastically bombarding them with questions. Finn asked who the father was (and to be honest, Kurt told him, they weren't sure; they'd done essentially the same thing Rachel Berry's dads had done and both

had donated). Burt made sure to tell them how thrilled he was but, concerned father that he was, reminded them both how extremely young they were and asked if they were ready to handle the responsibility. Kurt reassured him that this had been a decision made after much discussion and that they felt ready. The baby was due at the end of August, right when junior year would be starting, so he and Dave planned to work their class schedules in such a way that one of them would always be at the apartment with the baby, neither of them having classes at the same time. This seemed to make Burt happy, so Kurt was relieved when his father didn't ask them any more questions of that sort.

As Dave answered something Finn had asked, Kurt couldn't help but sneak a glance at Blaine. He couldn't deny that there had been something more to that hug they'd shared a few minutes earlier. For a fleeting second, he wondered if Blaine had felt it, too.

Blaine turned his attention away from whatever Dave was saying and looked right at Kurt, who immediately blushed and glanced down when he realized he'd been caught staring. Maybe he'd been right about their hug. Maybe Blaine had felt what Kurt had felt after all.

xxx

College, junior year

The next six months seemed to drag for Kurt, who wanted nothing but to meet his new son or daughter and hold him or her in his arms. He and Dave went with Brittany to a few of her doctor's visits and saw the ultrasound images of their baby on the sonogram, but they had chosen not to find out the sex of the baby until he or she was born. For some reason, they both thought it seemed more special that way.

Brittany did amazingly throughout the entire pregnancy. There were no signs of complications or any other causes of concern, which gave Kurt so much hope. Maybe this was a sign that he and Dave had made the right choice, despite the fact that both of them were just twenty years old. Kurt knew they would never have done this if they didn't think they could handle the responsibility, but the fact that everything seemed to be going smoothly for Brittany just gave him that much more hope.

Even though the months seemed to pass with unbearable slowness, the wait was completely worth it on August 25, 2014, when Kurt became a father.

He'd been standing up by the head of the bed, where Brittany was holding his hands in a shaky vice grip that was probably cutting off his circulation. Dave's arms were around his waist, holding him close. The second he saw the baby emerging and heard the midwife's cheerful scream of "It's a girl!" over the screeching cries only a newborn can emit, Kurt completely lost it and broke down in tears.

"Oh my god, Kurt," Dave whispered, holding him closer as the midwife lifted the screaming infant up and into Brittany's arms. "We have a daughter."

Kurt nodded, unable to take his eyes off the little girl. Despite the tears that were streaming down his face, he couldn't stop smiling. "Elizabeth Anne Hummel-Karofsky. You still okay with calling her Ellie for short?"

It had actually been Dave's idea to name the baby, if it was a girl, after Kurt's late mother. Kurt had eagerly agreed, but had suggested they think of another nickname for her. Everyone had known his mother as Liz Hummel, and Kurt thought that their daughter should have a different nickname that set her apart and let her have her own identity. After he and Dave had thrown out all possible variations of Liz and Lizzie, they'd talked about it some more and eventually eliminated Betsy (too old-fashioned sounding for their tastes) and Beth (eerily reminiscent of Quinn's pregnancy sophomore year and the drama that had accompanied it). In the end, they'd decided on Ellie. Short, sweet, and it went well with their last names.

"Yeah. I like that," Dave agreed. "Ellie Hummel-Karofsky."

The nurses gently wiped the squirming baby off and eventually clipped the umbilical cord. When she was clean enough to be wrapped in a little pink blanket, one of the nurses bundled her up and walked over to Kurt and Dave with a huge smile on her face.

"Which one of you would like to hold your daughter first?" she asked.

"Kurt," Dave said almost immediately. Kurt glanced up at him just to make sure; Dave gave him a sweet smile and nodded. "Go ahead."

The nurse placed the squirming little bundle in Kurt's arms with an even bigger smile lighting up her face. "Congratulations."

Kurt had finally managed to control his tears, but they sprang to life once again in his eyes when his daughter was placed into his arms for the first time. His heart was immediately filled with a whole new

kind of love as he looked at Ellie's tiny little face. She'd managed to stop screaming and was looking up into his eyes with a wide newborn gaze of her own, trying to figure out the world. She had a full head of incredibly soft, jet black hair. Kurt had never seen anyone or anything quite so beautiful in his twenty years.

"I love you," he whispered to Ellie. He knew full well that she couldn't understand, but he liked knowing they were the first words he would ever say to her. "I love you so much, Elizabeth. I want you to always remember that, okay?"

Very gently, he lifted her up just slightly and placed the softest of kisses to her tender forehead. "So perfect," he whispered, not sure if he was talking to Dave or Ellie or himself.

"Wait. Hold still, stay like that," Dave told him, fishing his phone out of his pocket. "I want to get a picture of this. Your first father-daughter picture with her."

He held his phone up to snap the picture and Kurt turned towards it, angling Ellie up just slightly so that her face would be visible in the picture. He tried to look at the camera – he really did, but after a few seconds he gave up and looked back down at his daughter in his arms, unable to stop staring at her. Dave captured the picture as Kurt smiled down at Ellie, his face absolutely glowing. When the image had been saved to his phone, he held it up so Kurt could see.

"Oh my god, please send that to me," he begged his boyfriend. "I love it."

Dave thumbed across the keypad a few times before shoving his phone back into his pocket with a satisfied smile. "Done. It's sending."

Kurt returned his smile and held their daughter out to him. "Would you like to hold her?"

Dave didn't even bother answering. He let Kurt transfer Ellie into his arms and immediately cradled her close to his heart.

"I love you," he said softly, both to her and to Kurt. Carefully holding Ellie against him with one arm, he gently tilted Kurt's chin up with his free hand and placed a soft kiss on his lips.

Kurt broke away after a few seconds. By this point he didn't think he'd be able to stop smiling even if he'd tried. He also thought he should probably check to see how Brittany was doing, because she *had* just delivered their child and was still recovering. He turned around and stepped towards the bed.

It looked like she was asleep, but Kurt couldn't tell for sure. "Hey, Britt?" he asked softly, taking her hand.

Her eyes fluttered open and her voice was small when she spoke. "Yeah, Kurtie?"

She'd never called him that before, but Kurt figured she was just experiencing some side effects from the drugs the doctors had given her to ease the pain of the birthing process. There were a few locks of blonde hair clinging to her sweaty forehead; Kurt gently brushed them aside. "Thank you so much for doing this for us," he told her sincerely. "David and I appreciate it more than we can tell you. You helped give us the most amazing gift we ever could have asked for."

Brittany gave him a drowsy smile. "Was I a good surrogate mommy, Kurtie?"

"You were a *wonderful* surrogate mommy." He pressed a gentle kiss to her forehead. "Get some sleep, okay? I can't even imagine how tired you must be."

"Tired," she repeated, letting her eyes fall closed. "Good night, Kurtie."

In reality, it was around six in the morning, but she had no way of knowing that so Kurt decided to play along. "Night, Britt. Sweet dreams."

He turned back to Dave, who was smiling at Ellie and whispering sweet little nothings to her, and suddenly it hit him. This was his own little family.

xxx

It was seven a.m. and Blaine had yet to go to sleep. Classes had only started a week and a half ago and he already had a ten page paper due and the first big exam of junior year to study for. He knew he should probably be exhausted, but he really wasn't. The mess of empty cans – Red Bull, Monster, Rockstar, Starbucks DoubleShot – that littered the area around his desk spoke for itself.

He turned back to the thick legal textbook on his desk and tried to focus. The last thing he wanted to do was spend five minutes rereading the same paragraph without taking in what it said, which had already

happened quite a few times thus far. He figured he would force himself to stay awake just a few more hours until his Constitutional Law class at ten this morning. That was an hour and a half long, so once that was over he had a couple hours to sleep until his next class, Argumentation Theory at three in the afternoon. After that, it was Law and Ethics at five, then he would stop and get something quick to eat, then come back and sleep the rest of the night. Blaine was immediately thankful that today was a Monday, his most lenient day of the week schedule-wise. He wouldn't have been able to get away with this any other day.

His phone vibrated on the desk and immediately jolted him out of his reverie. Blaine immediately snapped to attention and grabbed the phone to look at the text message he'd just gotten.

It was from Kurt. That should have been Blaine's first clue that he should probably mentally prepare himself for what he was about to see, but he didn't take that into account. He noticed that it had also been sent to Finn, Santana, and a few of Kurt's other friends. There was only one thing this could possibly be.

When Blaine opened the message, his heart absolutely melted when a picture of Kurt holding a little pink bundle of perfection. Kurt's face was lit up by the most beautiful smile Blaine had ever seen him wear; his eyes were fixed on his daughter in his arms. The little girl herself was absolutely gorgeous. She had a full head of hair and wide, curious eyes that, for some reason, reminded Blaine of Kurt's own.

Underneath the picture, Kurt had typed an enthusiastic message.

I'm a daddy! :)

Introducing our little princess: Elizabeth Anne Hummel-Karofsky

Born August 25, 2014 at 5:43 a.m., 7 lbs 11 oz.

(Santana: Brittany did amazing during the labor/delivery process. She's feeling fine but was exhausted after all was said and done so she's getting some much-needed sleep. I'll have her call you as soon as she wakes up.)

Blaine immediately dialed Kurt's cell number. There was no way he could send Blaine something so incredible like that and *not* expect a congratulatory phone call. His hand was shaking with excitement as he held the phone to his ear and listened to it ring on the other end, so he put it on speaker and set it on his desk.

Kurt answered after the second ring. "Hello?"

"Kurt, oh my god, she is *perfect*," Blaine gushed before Kurt had even finished saying the two-syllable word. "I...don't even have words right now. I am *so* happy for you both. I mean that."

"Thank you so much," Kurt told him sincerely. Blaine could hear his elated smile in his voice. "I don't have words, either. I don't know what to make of this, but it's *so* amazing. I...I never thought I could ever love a human being as much as I love Ellie. I can't even explain how happy I feel right now."

"Ellie," Blaine repeated. "That's cute, I love it. And I'm guessing her full name is after your mom, correct?"

"That's correct!" Kurt told him happily. "My dad's ecstatic about it, of course. He and Carole just got here about half an hour ago and David's dad is on his way. My dad told me he thinks Ellie is mine."

"Really?" No wonder that look in her eyes had reminded Blaine so much of Kurt. "He can tell already?"

"Apparently she looks exactly like I did when I was born, with all the hair and everything," Kurt told him. "David and I are going to have a paternity test done when she's a few months old to see whose she is, but for now I'm just going to enjoy being a new daddy."

"Good idea. And no matter who ends up being her father, she's beautiful." Blaine hoped Kurt could hear the sincerity in his voice. He thought back to the picture Kurt had sent him and recalled the gorgeous smile that had been lighting up his face. Something told him he should acknowledge this. "And you look beyond happy. You wear fatherhood well."

"Do I really?" Kurt giggled. "I drove Brittany to the hospital at midnight. She was in labor for a little less than six hours. I'm running on absolutely zero sleep right now, but this is the best kind of exhaustion."

"Yeah, well, join the club. I've been up studying all night. I haven't been to bed yet, either," Blaine told him. "No, but seriously. You look amazing, Kurt. It's like...just from looking at that one picture, I can see how much you love her."

"More than I've ever loved anyone." Kurt's voice was barely above a whisper.

Blaine couldn't help but smile. Hearing Kurt so happy made *him* happy. "Well, I'll let you go spend time with your daughter. Please tell Dave I said congratulations. I...I know he doesn't like me, but please tell him anyway."

"Will do," Kurt told him. "Bye, Blaine."

For whatever reason, Blaine had to bite back the urge to say *I love you, Kurt*. He had no idea why – saying it would be completely inappropriate and out of line, but his heart was telling him it was the truth. He loved Kurt. Thinking those words was so natural and easy to believe, but it broke his heart to think he would never get to say them out loud.

"Bye, Kurt," he told his best friend, and hung up the phone trying not to think about the implications of what this meant.

Kurt had a family now. Kurt had a family with somebody else. Blaine couldn't help but wonder about what would have happened if he'd confessed his true feelings to Kurt back in high school. Maybe Kurt would have started a family with *him*, instead of with the man who had made his life a living hell.

But there was no time for regrets. Kurt had already slipped through his fingers and gotten away.

xxx

July 2018

Kurt had never really understood the whole "they-grow-up-so-fast" card that parents always seemed to play, until he became a parent himself. He'd gone from watching Ellie take her first breath, to faithfully rocking her back to sleep when she woke up screaming at three in the morning, to teaching her how to walk and talk. The years flew by as if he'd blinked. Before he knew it, she was almost four years old and he and Dave were dropping her off at preschool for the first time.

Well, it wasn't really "preschool," seeing as it was still July, but the school they'd chosen for her was having a little summer daycare program. Kurt and Dave figured it would be fun for her to go and meet some of the kids that would be in her class. Plus, Dave had to work that afternoon and Kurt had somewhere to be as well. They figured this was as good a time as any to get their daughter ready for the real thing.

She was clinging to him, her tiny arms wrapped around his waist as Kurt attempted to make his way towards the door of the pint-sized classroom. "Daddy, Papa, I don't want you to go."

Kurt gently pried himself free and gave her a reassuring smile. "Sweetie, we have to go. We can't stay any longer." He lowered himself to one knee so he was at her level and looked straight into her eyes, which were carbon-copies of Kurt's own. The paternity test they'd had when she was three months old had proven that she was, in fact, Kurt's biological daughter.

"I'll come pick you up in a couple hours, okay?" he told her gently. "It's gonna be lots of fun. They have all different kinds of toys for you to play with...and maybe when Papa gets home from work tonight, we'll all go out to dinner to celebrate your big day. Sound fun?"

Ellie didn't get to answer, because suddenly another little girl ran up to her with an energetic smile. "Hi! Are you coming to preschool here, too?" she asked, bouncing up and down a little bit.

Ellie nodded shyly.

"Want to come play dolls with me?" the other girl suggested happily.

Ellie looked up at Kurt and Dave, both of whom gave her encouraging smiles. "Go ahead, honey," Dave told her.

Kurt kept smiling as he watched his daughter run off with the other little girl toward the large pink dollhouse in the corner of the room. He turned to Dave with a satisfied grin. "I knew she'd cave. There's too many toys here for her *not* to have fun."

"It could be worse," Dave mumbled as the two of them made their way towards the door. Kurt followed his eyes to an exhausted-looking mother who was struggling to break free from a red-faced, sobbing little boy who was screaming for her not to go.

"Oh, I am *so* glad that's not us," he whispered to Dave, before shooting the mother in question a wry, apologetic smile. She responded with a disapproving glare that was no doubt directed to the two of them.

"Okay, then," he mumbled. "Let's just hope the kids here are somewhat more tolerant than their parents."

"I think Ellie will be fine," Dave reassured him. "We talked with her last night. She knows that if any of the kids are mean to her about having two daddies, she's supposed to go tell Mrs. Gilbert right away."

Kurt nodded. "Good point. I'm just happy we got an open-minded teacher."

They made their way down the hallway and out into the parking lot towards their respective cars (they'd driven separately since Dave had to go to work). Kurt gave him a kiss goodbye and they made plans to meet up for dinner later that night after Dave left work. They got in their cars and Kurt waited until Dave drove away, pretending to stall by fiddling with the radio and the air conditioner dial. Once Dave's car was out of the parking lot, Kurt backed out of his own parking space and drove off towards the little neighborhood coffee shop where he was meeting Blaine.

Kurt didn't think there was anything wrong with what he was doing. He'd made it clear to Dave on multiple occasions that he had the right to be friends with whoever he wanted. Since he'd managed to stay friends with Blaine all through high school, he saw no reason why the handsome Dalton alumnus should be an exception to this. Besides, tomorrow was going to be a pretty big day for both of them. Kurt was going to a training class to get ready for the job teaching music he'd be starting next month at a local school called Lincoln Elementary. Blaine, who had graduated from law school two months earlier, would be taking the bar exam. Even though they hadn't had as much time to hang out in person lately, they'd been staying in touch and had decided that this was a great opportunity to meet up and talk face to face and just *be* with each other.

Okay, so Kurt had made that last part up. Blaine hadn't specifically told Kurt that he just wanted to "*be* with him for a little bit." But Kurt had to admit, he was excited. He loved the way he felt whenever he was with Blaine. He loved how hanging out with Blaine just made him *happy*. And the fact that this little reunion (Kurt would not let himself call it a "date") had been Blaine's idea made him even happier, because it meant Blaine wanted to see him just as much.

His heart started beating just a little bit faster when he pulled into the parking lot of the coffee shop and noticed that Blaine's car was already there, as close to the small building as possible without being in a handicap spot. Kurt maneuvered into the spot right next to Blaine's Civic, shifted into park, and pulled the keys out of the ignition but didn't get out of the car yet. He had to stop and collect his thoughts for a bit, first.

This was not a date. He was just here to get coffee and make casual conversation with his best friend, who had no romantic interest in Kurt whatsoever and in whom Kurt really shouldn't have been taking a romantic interest, either. That was all. Kurt took a deep breath and tried to force himself to think platonic thoughts as he got out of the car.

xxx

Blaine had just sat down at an out-of-the-way table with the two drinks he'd just ordered when the door opened and Kurt stepped into the coffee shop.

"Kurt!" he called out the second he saw his friend, waving him over to the table. "I already ordered for you."

He loved the way Kurt's face brightened into a smile as he made his way over to the table where Blaine was sitting. "You remember my coffee order," he commented, taking a seat and accepting the paper coffee cup Blaine slid across the table toward him.

Blaine shrugged, blushing a little bit. "Not that hard to remember."

Kurt dug his wallet out of his pocket and opened it. "How much do I owe you?" he asked Blaine.

"Put that away," Blaine told him. "My treat. I haven't seen you in forever, or at least that's what it seems like. I can afford to spoil you."

The second the words were out of his mouth, Blaine tensed up as he realized how flirtatious that could possibly sound. Oh god. He tried to scramble and think of something he could say that would reassure Kurt that Blaine wasn't trying to come onto him. Nothing like that. He-

"Oh. Well, that's very sweet of you. Thank you," Kurt said with a polite smile, tucking his wallet back into his pocket. "So how have you been? Are you nervous for tomorrow?"

"Yes," Blaine admitted. He would never tell anyone else. "This is it, y'know? I've known I wanted to be a lawyer since middle school. Tomorrow is when I find out if I'm good enough to actually *get* there."

"I'm sure you have nothing to worry about. You're the smartest person I know," Kurt reassured him with a smile. "Besides, look at how many attorneys we have here in America. *Tons*. That means tons of people have passed the bar, so how tough can it be?"

"Half the people who take the test fail the first time," Blaine said flatly, suddenly very interested in the recycling information typed in fine print along the bottom of his paper cup.

"Half," Kurt repeated quietly, then suddenly his voice was encouraging again. "Half! That means half of the people pass!"

"Hillary Clinton, JFK's son, Michelle Obama and the former dean of Stanford's law school all failed it," Blaine pointed out dryly. He knew Kurt was trying to reassure him, but over the last few days his trepidation was at an all-time high.

What Kurt did next completely shocked him in the most pleasant way. He reached across the table and took Blaine's hand, holding it firmly while he looked into his eyes.

"Blaine, look at me," he instructed gently. Blaine obeyed, because there was no possible way he couldn't. "You are not Hillary Clinton, or JFK Jr., or Michelle Obama, or the former dean of Stanford's law school. You're Blaine Anderson. Just because those people failed doesn't mean you will. You just gotta look at the glass as being half full instead of half empty." He gave Blaine's hand a reassuring squeeze and kept holding it. "You're *amazing*, Blaine. I'm not going to let you think otherwise."

Blaine let a relieved smile spread across his face and, as he had the unfortunate habit of doing in situations like this, put his foot in his mouth.

"God, Kurt, I could kiss you. That's exactly what I needed to hear."

For the second time in less than five minutes, Blaine wished he could shove the words he'd just said back into his mouth. He wondered if it would be too unsophisticated of him to crawl under the table and remain there for the rest of his life.

Kurt pulled his hand away, looking extremely taken aback, and Blaine made a desperate attempt to recover. "I...I didn't mean..."

But Kurt just giggled and gave him the sweetest smile. "Blaine, I would be more than happy to let you kiss me if it would make you feel better, but somehow I don't think my boyfriend would be too happy with me if I did that. We don't need any more unnecessary drama coming from him."

Actually, it would make me feel better, Blaine wanted to say. He doesn't have to know. Please let me have one kiss. Just one. You have no idea how much I want to.

But he knew Kurt, and he knew Kurt's sense of humor. There was no doubt in his mind that his best friend was joking. He resigned himself to accept the fact that he would never get to taste those perfect, pink lips – and oh, god, they were probably unbelievably soft and supple, too. But they were all for Dave, that lucky sonofabitch.

Just one kiss...

"Blaine," those lips said.

Oh, well, that was embarrassing. Blaine had been spacing out, staring at Kurt's lips for God only knows how long. He still hadn't responded to what Kurt had said before.

He blinked back into reality and shook his head. "Sorry," he told Kurt. "I was spacing out. Been doing that a lot lately. Can't focus on anything. I think it's nerves. I'm nervous for tomorrow."

Kurt nodded and, to Blaine's immense relief, said nothing more about the whole kissing thing. "I can sympathize." He took a long sip from his coffee.

Blaine gave him an appreciative smile. "Okay, enough about me," he said, feeling his face return to a normal temperature as the blush faded from his cheeks. "How have *you* been?"

xxx

November 2018

The first few months of Kurt's brand new career as a music teacher went well, better than he had expected. He'd been nervous the first few days but soon he'd gained some much-needed confidence and the students of Lincoln Elementary School had fallen in love with their music teacher, Mr. Hummel.

If Kurt had to choose his favorite thing about being a teacher, it would be the fact that he got to teach and share his passion with the kids and instill in them a love for music at such a young age. Sometimes in class, when the kids were singing and Kurt was playing the piano to accompany them, he would look at the smiling faces of his students over the sheet music as he continued playing. It gave him so much joy to see that his students truly enjoyed coming to his class every day. He knew his students loved him but at the same time it was hard for him to believe. It seemed impossible that he had the ability to bring them so much happiness and pure love for music.

He struck the final note of the song on the piano and smiled at his students. "That was great, you guys," he told them, and noticed for the first time that his classroom door had been opened. The students' second grade teacher was waiting for Kurt's class to be over so she could take them back to their classroom. He hadn't even realized that the period was close to ending. "Oh! Looks like it's time for you guys to go, I lost track of time."

There was a resounding chorus of "Aww, no!" and "I don't want to go!" from various students and Kurt tried not to smile. He had to admit that this made him happy. The fact that the kids never wanted to leave his class meant that he must have been doing something right.

"I know. If I were you guys, I would want to stay down here and sing all day, too," he told them. "We'll sing some more tomorrow and maybe even play a game, I promise."

A few of the kids called out, "Bye, Mr. Hummel!" as they sorted themselves into a single-file line and followed their teacher back to their regular classroom. Kurt crossed the room back over to his desk and took his keys out of the drawer where he usually kept them. The second graders had been his last class of the morning and now he was off to lunch.

He'd just pulled the classroom door shut behind him and was turning to lock it when he felt his phone vibrate in his pocket. Upon extracting it and glancing at the caller ID on the front screen, his heart started beating a little faster when he read Blaine's name.

Kurt immediately turned back around and went into his classroom, making sure to shut and lock the door behind him before he slid his thumb across the screen to answer the call. He really had no idea why he felt the need to be secluded when he talked to his best friend, but for some reason it made him feel more secure. Like nobody could eavesdrop, even when nobody was around to do so anyway.

He pressed the phone to his ear. "Hel—"

"Hi, you're speaking to Blaine Anderson, Esquire, juris doctor, attorney-at-law!" was Blaine's excited response. "I'm a lawyer, Kurt! I'll probably never use all those titles at the same time again, but I'm a lawyer!"

"Wait, *what?*" Kurt was smiling; he'd basically already figured out what Blaine meant. "So it's official now?"

"Yes! I got my bar results and I passed!" For some reason, Kurt's mind conjured up images of his best friend running around his tiny apartment with uncontrollable glee, jumping up on furniture and waving his results sheet proudly. "I can't believe it! I'm a *lawyer*. Me. Blaine Anderson. A lawyer. A member of the American Bar Association. An *attorney*. I literally screamed when I saw the results, Kurt. I'm not kidding. I *screamed*."

Suddenly there was a shift in his tone and he sounded concerned. "Wait, you don't have a class right now or anything, do you? I would feel bad if I called you freaking out like this while you're in the middle of trying to teach."

Kurt giggled, finally able to get a word in. "No, I don't. You just missed my last class of the morning by about two minutes," he said. "But seriously, Blaine? This is amazing, but I can't say I'm surprised. I knew you'd ace it."

"I know you knew I would," Blaine said, laughing a little bit, "which is why you're the first person I called."

Color Kurt intrigued. "Really? *Me?*"

"You bet," Blaine told him. "I literally just saw the results five minutes ago, but I had to keep double checking for a few minutes to make sure I wasn't misreading it or something. Y'know, making sure there wasn't some other Blaine Anderson who took the test the same day and they didn't get my scores mixed up with his."

"And your first thought after double-checking what I knew all along was 'I'm going to call Kurt and scream the news'?" Kurt teased.

"Maybe," Blaine admitted with a nervous smile in his voice.

Kurt was having too much fun with this. "Are you blushing?" he asked, maybe just a little too flirtatiously but he didn't care.

"Maybe," Blaine said again.

Kurt feigned a gasp. "You mean I made the handsome, dapper attorney Blaine Anderson blush?"

"I don't know about 'handsome' and 'dapper,' but yes," Blaine said, giggling a little bit. "I'm definitely blushing. And happy. Really, really happy."

"Good," Kurt told him sincerely. "And I'm happy *for* you. I know you're going to have an amazing career and do things nobody else has done before."

"Let's cross that bridge when and if we ever come to it," Blaine suggested humbly.

"Seriously, Blaine! Give yourself more credit," Kurt told him. "Okay, repeat after me. 'I, Blaine Anderson, am going to be one of the greatest attorneys the United States has ever seen.'"

"Kurt, really, that's a lot to live up to—"

"Just say it," Kurt insisted.

Blaine sighed. "Okay, okay. 'I, Blaine Anderson, am going to be one of the greatest attorneys the United States has ever seen.' Why do I feel like I'm taking the bar oath already?"

"I'm just messing with you," Kurt giggled. "But you know I'm right. I see nothing but amazing things ahead for you, Blaine."

Neither of them knew just how right Kurt would be, exactly. In the same way, neither of them knew what the future had in store for the two of them personally as well.

xxx

Summer 2020

It didn't take Blaine very long at all to figure out how much he loved being a lawyer. Every day for the first three years of his career he walked into Jensen & Clark, the small firm where he worked as an associate, with a smile on his face. Well, that was a lie. He wasn't literally *smiling* every time he got to work, but it still made him happy. He enjoyed arguing cases for people and helping them know their rights, and he would have been content to have a career like this for the rest of his life.

But all that changed one morning when Blaine's boss and one of the co-partners of the firm, a man by the name of Jason Clark, called him into his office to discuss "something important."

Blaine wiped his clammy palms on his dress slacks before opening the door and stepping into his boss's office. Jason Clark was only about ten years older than Blaine was, but something about him was highly intimidating. As Blaine stepped into Clark's office, he could do nothing but expect the worst.

Clark was sitting at his desk when Blaine came in and greeted him warmly. "Hey there, Blaine, go ahead and have a seat."

Blaine walked across the room and sank down into the chair his boss had indicated with shaky knees. "Am I in trouble?" he asked warily.

Clark let out a hearty laugh. "Oh, no, nothing like that. I just wanted to present a new opportunity to you, one I think you would enjoy very much."

He cleared his throat before continuing. "Blaine, there's no doubt that you're an extremely gifted attorney, but with the amount of success you've had lately I'm starting to think you're almost *too* good."

Blaine practically swallowed his own Adam's apple. *So they're going to fire me because I'm too good at what I do? Is that even allowed? I thought this was supposed to be about something good.*

"O-okay," he stammered, not sure of what else to say.

"What I'm saying, Blaine, is that a young attorney of your caliber doesn't belong at a small town firm like Jensen & Clark. You should be somewhere...I don't know. Somewhere much *bigger*. A powerful firm in a big city. Do you understand what I mean?"

"I...I guess so. Yes," Blaine said, trying his hardest to figure out where this was going.

"My brother-in-law, Andrew Carter, has a very powerful firm out in Chicago," Clark said, sliding a business card across the desk. Blaine picked it up and scanned the information. *Carter & Perry, Attorneys at Law*. "They're looking to hire some new associates and he asked me if I had anyone working here that I thought would be up for it. I recommended you."

Blaine had to blink a few times in disbelief to make sure he was actually here and this was really happening. "You...want me to go for it? I mean, I'm honored that you think I'm qualified for this, but are you sure? *Me?*"

"I'm positive. And Carter & Perry seem to think so, too. Andrew just called me yesterday afternoon and told me they've looked at your credentials and want to interview you."

Blaine sat there in stunned silence for a few seconds, trying to let all of this soak in.

"If I were you, I'd call the number on that card and let them know who you are, so you can try and get a phone interview set up or something. I think you'd be great for this, Blaine. You've got too much talent for a place like this."

Blaine thought back to the phone conversation he'd had with Kurt three years earlier, when he'd first gotten his bar exam results. He distinctly recalled how Kurt had insisted on what a great career Blaine was going to have and thought that this might be his chance to prove his friend right.

"Will do." He stood up and shook his boss's hand with an appreciative smile. "Thank you *so* much, Mr. Clark. I'm definitely looking forward to this."

He stepped out into the hallway and immediately pulled his cell phone out of his pocket. As he walked back toward his own office, he began dialing Kurt's number so he could get his take on it, but as his thumb was hovering over the Call button, a sudden epiphany struck him like lightning. He forced himself to stop and think.

What was he *doing*? Why couldn't he just go work at this big firm in Chicago because *he* wanted to? Why did he have to see what *Kurt* thought about it, like they were some married couple? Kurt had always been the very first person Blaine had sought out when he needed advice, but maybe he needed to stop doing that. Kurt had his own life and his own family and the last thing he needed a ball and chain attached to his ankle in the form of his lovesick high school best friend.

In that moment, there was no longer any shadow of a doubt in Blaine's mind. He *had* to get that job and move to Chicago if it meant letting go of Kurt. Sure, they could still be friends – they'd formed too strong a friendship over the years to just simply let it go. But Blaine needed to stop being so dependent on Kurt and this was the only way to make that happen. He had to accept the fact that Kurt wasn't his – *would never* be his. Kurt had Dave and Ellie and a fun job teaching music over at Lincoln Elementary. What did Blaine have? A shitty romantic track record and a job at a quaint little law firm, and that was about it.

And maybe this move would be a chance for Blaine to *finally* find someone of his own. His sad excuse of a love life had seen three or four boyfriends come along, only to have the romance fizzle out after a few weeks when Blaine found that his heart was no longer in it. He hated admitting it even to himself, but the reason he no longer felt a romantic connection to any of those guys was because they weren't *Kurt*. Maybe being four hundred miles away from Kurt would finally force Blaine to stop comparing every single potential boyfriend to him. Otherwise, he figured, he was on track to die alone with seventeen cats.

Blaine closed his eyes and took a deep breath as he shoved his phone back into his pocket, then opened his eyes again slowly. He knew what he had to do.

xxx

August 25, 2020 should have been a good day for Kurt. Not only was it Ellie's sixth birthday, but it was also her first day of kindergarten, which every parent knows is a huge milestone in the life of their child. And the day started off well, that much was certain. For breakfast that morning he made Ellie her favorite chocolate chip pancakes, and he and Dave even let her open her presents before school. But when all was said and done and Dave was helping Ellie get all her last-minute things ready before they started taking the obligatory first-day-of-school pictures, Kurt thought this would be a good time to inform the world just how proud of a father he was.

He opened the Facebook app on his phone and typed a quick status – *My little girl turns 6 AND starts kindergarten today! I would complain about how old I suddenly feel, but I love Ellie too much to be anything but happy for her.* After posting it, he thumbed through the rest of his newsfeed, not particularly caring about anything until one specific status update caught his eye.

It's official! Got the job at Carter & Perry. Chicago, here I come!

It had been posted by Blaine the previous evening. Kurt knew his stomach shouldn't have been sinking at the thought of Blaine moving so far away, but it did. Suddenly he wished he wouldn't have seen that.

"Daddy!" His daughter's cheerful voice suddenly interrupted all thoughts of Blaine he shouldn't have been having in the first place. "Can we please take the pictures now?"

"I'm coming, sweetie," he murmured absentmindedly, tucking his phone away and grabbing his camera off the kitchen counter. Ellie was waiting by the front door of the cozy apartment where the family lived, giggling as she twirled around in the brand new dress she'd picked out for her first day of school.

"All right, say 'cheese!'" he told her, lifting the camera to snap the first shot.

Ellie stopped twirling and gave the camera a big smile. She had Kurt's smile, and Kurt had inherited his from his mother. "Cheeeeeese!"

Dave placed an affectionate hand on Kurt's shoulder as the shorter man proceeded to snap picture after picture of their little girl smiling that gorgeous Hummel smile. "Kinda funny how people and things just change so fast, isn't it?"

Kurt let his mind wander back to the status update he'd just seen a few minutes earlier. "Yeah," he said. "It is."

xxx

That weekend, Kurt and Dave had a birthday party for Ellie at a new park that had just opened up a few blocks away from their apartment building. Blaine had been invited, even if he didn't have a kid of his own that could come to the party, because Kurt thought it would be a good chance for them to say goodbye.

Yes, those had been the exact words from the voicemail Kurt had left him earlier in the week. *I know you're going to be really busy getting ready to move, but I thought this would be a nice chance to see each other one last time and say goodbye.* Blaine's heart had clenched when he heard those words being spoken in Kurt's soft voice through the phone. Kurt almost sounded *sad* that Blaine was leaving.

He got out of his car and headed over toward the little picnic shelter where it looked like the party was in full swing. Luckily Kurt saw Blaine before anyone else did and immediately came over to greet him halfway between the parking lot and the shelter.

"You came," he said softly, a hint of a smile playing his lips.

Blaine shrugged and tried to keep his tone as nonchalant as possible, even though he could see in Kurt's eyes just how happy he was. "Yeah, why wouldn't I?"

"I don't know, I guess I thought you would feel left out since you don't have a kid and I don't think you would know any of the other parents that are here, but I wanted to invite you because I know you're going to be busy with packing this week and getting things ready for Chicago and—"

Kurt was absolutely adorable when he was rambling nervously, so of course Blaine acted without thinking. He quickly silenced Kurt with the press of a finger to his lips.

"Kurt," he said.

They were looking into each other's eyes and Blaine still had his index finger pressed against Kurt's lips – which, as he realized, were even softer than he'd dreamed. *Oh my god*. What would that feel like pressed up against Blaine's own lips?

But he didn't have time to think about things that would never happen. Not even when Kurt's lips parted just slightly and he gasped the tiniest bit and he *trembled*.

Blaine was having sudden flashbacks to that Enrique Iglesias song as he took his hand away from Kurt's mouth and instead placed it reassuringly on his shoulder. *Would you tremble if I touched your lips?* If you were Kurt, Blaine thought, apparently you did.

"This doesn't have to be 'goodbye,'" Blaine told him gently. "We can still be friends, just as we always have. The only difference is that I'll be in a different time zone and four hundred miles away."

"I know," Kurt said quietly. "I guess...I'm just going to miss you."

"I'll miss you too, Kurt. Come here." Blaine pulled him into a hug, wanting nothing more than to feel Kurt close to him one more time. This was all there had ever been between them – just sweet, friendly hugs. There would never be anything more. Blaine decided to take advantage of this moment and tightened his arms around Kurt, pulling him closer. He wished he could hold Kurt like this forever.

They pulled back from the hug and locked eyes for a moment. For a fraction of a nanosecond, Blaine considered letting go of all his inhibitions and leaning in to kiss him. It would have been so simple and nobody would have noticed. Dave was over at the picnic shelter, keeping the party under control. He wouldn't have been able to see them very well. And from the look in Kurt's eyes, it seemed very possible that he wanted to kiss Blaine, too.

But Blaine couldn't do it, because even though Dave was far away he was *still here* and they were at *Kurt's daughter's birthday party* for crying out loud. He forced himself to break the hug and gave Kurt a rueful smile.

"I...um, I brought my guitar. It's in my car," he told Kurt, hitching a thumb back toward his car in the parking lot. "That rhymed. Anyway. You think Ellie would mind if I did a special rendition of Happy Birthday, just for her?"

To his delight, Kurt smiled. "I think she would love that."

xxx

January 2021

Dave Karofsky had gone five entire months without seeing neither hide nor hair of one Blaine Anderson, which honestly made him really fucking happy. The guy had been practically following Kurt around like a lost puppy for the last decade or so and it was nice to *finally* have him out of their lives. Blaine was up in Chicago doing God knows what at some big important law firm, and Dave was finally content to live his own life with his own family in Ohio.

So imagine his surprise one frigid day near the end of January when he got a call on his cell just as he was about to leave the office. He didn't recognize the number, but for whatever reason he sank back into his desk chair and answered it anyway. "Hello?"

"Hi, Dave? This is Blaine Anderson."

Fuck. What the hell did he want? "Hello, Blaine," he said unenthusiastically.

"Hey, listen, are you busy right now?" Blaine asked.

Dave rolled his eyes. *What's it to you?* "I'm just about to leave work, I got nothing going on the rest of the night. How come?"

"You wanna come meet me for a drink over at the bar on East 12th? I...I kinda need to talk to you and get some things off my chest."

Okay, now Dave was just really fucking confused. "You live in Chicago, Anderson. I am in Ohio. What, did you just magically Apparate here or whatever the hell they do in Harry Potter?"

Blaine laughed. "No, actually, I'm in town because Carter & Perry sent me to represent the firm at a legal seminar in Columbus this week. So what do you say, can you come?"

Dave really didn't want to, but it had been forever since he'd had a good drink. Besides, Blaine inviting him out implied that Blaine was buying, and Dave was a bit of a cheapskate. "Let me just call Kurt and tell him. Actually, can he come? I'm sure he'll want to see you and it'll probably be less awkward, y'know, because you and him know each other better than you and I do."

"Oh, no, please don't tell him," Blaine begged. "I don't want him to know I'm in town. Please."

Dave considered this. Part of him wanted to punch the living daylight out of Anderson – how dare he tell Dave what he could and couldn't tell his boyfriend – but at the same time, Blaine had a point. If Kurt knew Blaine was in town, then he'd be spending all his time with him.

"Fine," Dave grumbled. "I'm on my way."

He hung up before Blaine could even finish saying goodbye.

xxx

Half an hour later, Dave was sitting at a dingy bar next to the biggest douchebag he'd ever met, who had at least had the courtesy to buy him a beer.

He took a swig to finish off his beer and set the empty bottle down on the bar. "So I still don't get why we're here."

Blaine looked like an even bigger douchebag than usual today. His hair was gelled back all perfectly and he was wearing a suit that looked straight out of the pages of Calvin Klein's catalog. Or Ralph Lauren's. Kurt would know.

"I just wanted to apologize to you, Dave," Blaine said. His voice was quiet but polite. "I...I think it's quite obvious that I have feelings for Kurt and I don't think I've handled myself appropriately over the past several years. I should have left the two of you alone to live your own life instead of always clinging desperately to Kurt, trying to get him to keep me around, and that's not fair to you. I'm sorry."

Dave stared at him – well, tried to stare at him, his vision was already the tiniest bit blurry around the edges. "Excuse me?"

"Hey, um, two more, please," Blaine told the bartender, who immediately produced two new bottles of beer and slid them to Blaine and Dave.

"Yeah, um. I'm in love with Kurt. I love him," Blaine admitted, biting his lip nervously. It was the first time Dave had ever seen him so afraid of anything. Blaine finally forced himself to meet Dave's eyes. "I have been since high school. I thought you deserved to know that. Please don't think I have any intentions of trying to steal him away from you, or anything like that. I would never do that. He's obviously happy with you, and all I want is for him to be happy. Trying to get him for myself and taking away his happiness like that would be the most selfish thing I could possibly do."

Dave picked up his new beer and took a long sip. He must have downed half the bottle before he finally set it down and spoke again.

"You'd better not, do you understand me?" he growled, leaning in closer to Blaine.

Blaine leaned away from Dave on his stool and held both hands up as a sign of surrender and innocence. "Hey, I told you I'm not going to do that. I didn't have the balls to tell him how I felt back in high school. You got him, fair and square. I just thought I would kind of clear the air so you know exactly what my feelings for him are."

He turned towards the bar and absently ran his fingers over the grains in the wood. "Besides, he'd never go for me, anyway."

Dave couldn't take it anymore. He grabbed the fabric at the front of Blaine's fancy dress shirt and forced the smaller man to face him. A wild flash of fear suddenly appeared in Blaine's eyes. Good. He *should* be scared.

"Don't you *dare* say that," he spat. "I have been turning the other way since the end of senior year in high school, pretending not to notice the way you two look at each other. The way Kurt's entire fucking *face* just starts to fucking *glow* whenever he sees you. You think I like that? You think I *enjoy* seeing my boyfriend look at another guy like that? How do you think that makes *me* feel? Huh?"

Blaine opened his mouth but no words came out, so Dave continued.

"You can't tell me that Kurt doesn't have feelings for you," he sneered. "He always has. And I'm sick of pretending not to give a fuck about it."

Blaine quickly pulled himself free from Dave's grasp in one swift motion and adjusted his clothes, which had become wrinkled when Dave grabbed his shirt. "I...I have to go. I'm going to call a cab, I don't know if I should drive," he said hastily, pulling his phone out of his pocket. "I never should have come here tonight."

He made to turn away and was about to press the phone to his ear, but suddenly he turned back to face Dave at the bar. "Oh, and whatever you do, *please* don't take this out on Kurt. He's *never* admitted to having feelings for me. I still don't think he does. He hasn't done anything wrong. Just don't take it out on him. *Please*."

Blaine quickly paced away and left the bar. There was nobody else in the bar, save for the bartender. Dave was alone.

He stayed at the bar for a long time that night, ordering drink after drink to drown away his misery. He couldn't make sense of his thoughts; his brain was a jumble of how much he hated Blaine Anderson and how much he suddenly hated Kurt.

Dave didn't know if he really hated Kurt or if that was just the alcohol talking. Either way, there was no way in hell he was going to listen to a word Anderson said. Especially not the last few words he'd said before leaving the bar.

Kurt was going to *pay* when he got home.

Chapter One

It was warm, almost unseasonably so for Ohio in the beginning of February. Kurt Hummel smiled to himself as he stepped out the front doors of Lincoln Elementary into the bright sunshine, which had already started to turn the blanket of snow into mounds of gray mush that were accumulated at the ends of the little tree islands in the parking lot. As disgusting as they looked, they were a beautiful sight to Kurt, who couldn't stand snow. Granted, it was Ohio, so it would probably end up snowing again before winter was officially over, but he didn't care about that right now. The weather was beautiful, and he'd had an excellent day at his job teaching music to the sweetest kids on the planet.

Yes, Kurt was feeling on top of the world. He smiled to himself as he made his way to the playground to pick up his daughter, who was six years old and in kindergarten here at Lincoln. After school every day, Ellie (whose given name was Elizabeth, after Kurt's late mother) would come out and play with the kids in the after-school daycare group while Kurt finished things up in his classroom and got everything ready for the next day.

He could see her now. Ellie was on the swings with her best friends, two little girls named Lauren and Claire who Kurt had in one of his music classes. The three of them were giggling with delight as they swung back in forth in unison, and Ellie looked so happy that the last thing Kurt wanted to do was interrupt her. But he had to get home and start dinner before his partner of eight years, one Dave Karofsky, arrived from work. Kurt, being the more culinarily inclined of the two, had always done all the cooking, and Dave took it upon himself to take care of cleaning house. The unlikely pair led a peaceful home life with their daughter, which surprised even Kurt when he thought about everything that had happened between them in high school.

He shook the less-than-pleasant memories of his first few encounters with Dave out of his head. "Ellie!" he called towards the swings, and his daughter immediately glanced up at the sound of her name. "C'mon, it's time to go."

"Mr. Hummel!" As was the custom whenever Kurt came to pick up Ellie from the playground, he was attacked by a swarm of adoring students who attacked him with hugs and tugged on every reachable inch of his clothes, each individual child trying to direct Kurt's attention towards them. It was no secret that the students of Lincoln Elementary *loved* their music teacher, and Kurt loved those kids just as much.

"Hey, guys!" Kurt tried to pay attention to all of them at once, which was hard to do considering the fact that the entire group of kids was crowding around him and babbling different, excited things all at the same time. And of course, Ellie was still on the swings, but at least she'd started making an effort to slow down by dragging her feet on the ground.

In the next few seconds, she was running across the playground with the elated smile that always spread across her face when she saw Kurt.

"Daddy!"

Another daily playground ritual. Even though Kurt came to pick her up like this every day, Ellie never ceased to look anything less than happy when she saw her father. And today, just like every other day, she made her way through the throng of kids gathered around him so she could give him a big hug.

Kurt called goodbye to the kids on the playground as he took his daughter's hand and the two began making their way to the shiny red Corvette he'd just bought a few months ago - the first and only time Kurt had ever splurged on a brand-new car for himself. Ellie climbed into the backseat and clicked her seatbelt into place as Kurt twisted the key in the ignition and stepped on the brake to shift into drive. Through the rearview mirror, he stole a glance at his daughter, who was babbling excitedly about some game her class had played today.

It was moments like this when Kurt, although he'd never admit it to Dave, was proud that Ellie had ended up being *his*. When they'd decided to have a child together via surrogate, both had donated, so for a while it was undetermined which one of them was Elizabeth Anne Hummel-Karofsky's real father. But when she was a few months old and they'd finally decided to have a paternity test done, it was revealed that she was, in fact, Kurt's. Now, as Kurt looked at her sitting in the backseat, her eyes the same exact shade as his and her smile a missing-toothed version of Kurt's own, he couldn't help but smile to himself as well. His daughter was beautiful. He wouldn't have wanted her any other way.

"What's for dinner tonight?" Ellie asked she and Kurt stepped into the lobby of their apartment building about five minutes later.

Good question. Kurt wasn't really too sure about that yet. "What would you like?"

Ellie's face brightened as they reached the door to their first-floor apartment. "Spaghetti?"

"Sure." Kurt returned her smile, but Ellie was no longer paying attention, having run into the apartment probably wanting to catch whatever was on Disney Channel at the moment.

He was in a good mood, so he decided to go all out with dinner tonight. Homemade sauce, salad, breadsticks, the whole shebang. It was earlier than he'd thought, and he still had about two more hours before Dave came home from the office where he worked as an accountant - a career choice that had surprised Kurt, who had always pictured Dave more as the blue-collar type. Then again, a lot of things about Dave had surprised Kurt.

As he lazily stirred the sauce, Kurt let his mind wander back to the halls of McKinley High, to the days when his partner had been his tormentor. He remembered how, on multiple occasions, he'd been *thiiiiisclose* to transferring to Dalton Academy. But before he could do that, Dave came out and confessed his love to Kurt, along with pouring out numerous heartfelt apologies. *I only hurt you because I was jealous*, he'd said. *You had the balls to be out and proud, and I didn't. It killed me. I feel so horrible, Kurt. I'm so sorry, and I'll never hurt you again. I promise.*

Naturally, it had taken Kurt a long time to forgive Dave. But after he did so, he'd come to realize that deep down inside, the seemingly ignorant jock was really just a sensitive boy trying to figure out who he was. And that was actually kind of sweet. That, more than anything else, was what attracted Kurt to Dave. Kurt himself had been down that road before. He hadn't taken the same approach to figuring himself out as Dave - shoving people against lockers and whatnot - but he could still empathize. Their relationship had only grown positively stronger from there.

They had made it official by the end of senior year and had been together ever since. And Kurt was honestly happy. So maybe he never would have imagined himself ending up with Dave. In fact, he'd always pictured himself spending his life with someone like Blaine Anderson, his best friend who had graduated from Dalton, with whom things had never moved beyond platonic friendship.

Still stirring the spaghetti sauce, Kurt let out a wistful sigh as he thought of Blaine. The two still kept in touch, even though Blaine had just moved out to Chicago a few months ago after getting a job at some huge law firm there. And according to Facebook, he was in a relationship with some guy named Derek. Not that Kurt checked Blaine's profile page very often or anything.

So maybe he still had some leftover teenage feelings for Blaine. After all, the short, dark-haired boy *had* been Kurt's first crush who was actually gay. No matter. Blaine was with Derek (Kurt tried to ignore the

sinking feeling in his stomach when he thought about that), and Kurt was with Dave. Kurt was *happy* with Dave. Really. They both cared about each other a lot, and they had a *child*, for crying out loud. And in all honesty, their little family was more perfect than Kurt, as a teenager, could have ever imagined his future family to be.

"Hello there."

Kurt's train of thought was interrupted by the sudden voice and the strong arms that accompanied it wrapping around his waist. He squealed a little bit and set the wooden spoon into the pot as Dave pulled him back from the stove a little bit and kissed his cheek.

"You're home early," Kurt noticed with a giggle.

"No, this is the same time I normally get home, isn't it?" Dave pulled back slightly to glance at the clock. "Yup. It's six."

"Oh." Kurt squinted in confusion as he gently slipped away from his partner's embrace and stepped closer to the stove to add a pinch of oregano to the sauce. "Dinner's not ready yet, I'm sorry...I forgot how long it takes to make this sauce."

"Oh, I'm not having dinner here tonight."

Kurt, taken aback, slowly turned to look at Dave over his shoulder. "You love my spaghetti. Why not?"

"Some of the guys from the office and I are gonna go out."

Kurt raised one perfectly shaped eyebrow. "Who 'goes out' on Thursday nights?"

Dave sighed. "It's just a couple of us guys going out for a few drinks. No big deal."

Kurt couldn't help but cringe as his mind wandered back to a memory he'd been trying to forget.

"*No big deal?*" He let the spoon fall into the pot with a quiet *bang* against the metal edge as he turned around. "No, Dave. Absolutely not. I do *not* want a repeat of what happened last time you had 'a few drinks with the guys.'"

"Kurt." Dave stepped forward to take the smaller man in his arms. Kurt let Dave wrap his arms around his lithe frame, but kept his own arms pinned to his sides.

"It won't happen again," Dave murmured reassuringly. "I had just a *little* too much last time. I'll be more careful."

"Promise me," Kurt whispered, his voice broken as the memory kept pounding into his brain and refusing to leave.

"I *promise*." Dave pulled back slightly so he could press a tender kiss to Kurt's forehead. "I love you."

"Love you too," Kurt mumbled as Dave let him go and went out to the living room to say hi to Ellie.

Since Dave obviously wasn't staying for the lovely dinner Kurt had prepared, he only had to get out two plates, two forks, two salad bowls. He scooped some noodles onto each plate and covered it with the finished sauce, but the task kept only his hands busy. Now that Dave had brought up the fact that he would be out drinking again, Kurt's mind was racing with a million different fearful thoughts at once.

He must have called out to Ellie that it was time for dinner, even though he had no conscious memory of doing so, because a few seconds later, she came skipping out into the kitchen and took her usual seat at the table. Kurt, not in the mood to go all out with dinner tonight anymore, forewent the silverware wrapped in cloth napkins he'd been planning on using and placed a few forks and paper napkins on the table instead.

Dave came out into the kitchen after Kurt and Ellie were seated at the table, now dressed in a more casual polo and jeans instead of the button-down and dress slacks he usually wore to work.

"I'll be back by midnight," he promised, pressing a quick kiss to the top of Kurt's head and doing the same to Ellie.

"*Midnight*," Kurt repeated for emphasis, looking Dave straight in the eyes so he knew he was serious. "No later. I mean it, David Paul Karofsky."

Ellie giggled. "Daddy said Papa's full name!"

"Only when he's bad." Kurt slapped Dave's hand away as it was in the process of playfully messing up his perfectly coiffed hair. "Don't touch my hair, I worked hard on it this morning."

"Sorry." Dave's eyes widened as he withdrew his hand. "I'll see you guys later."

"Midnight!" Kurt called after Dave as he was on his way out, but the slam of the door interrupted him before he could get the entire word out of his mouth.

As soon as Dave was out the door, Ellie looked at Kurt with a mixture of emotions in her young eyes. "Daddy, is Papa going to come home scary like he did last time he went to the bar?"

Hearing those words come from his daughter's naive mouth made every muscle in Kurt's body tense up. He sucked in a breath through his teeth. "I don't know. I told him not to drink so much this time, and he promised me he wouldn't. We'll just have to see if he keeps his promise."

Ellie twirled a strand of spaghetti around her fork. "He scared me last time." Her voice was small.

"I know," Kurt told her quietly, poking at the salad that no longer looked appetizing. "He scared me, too."

The elephant regarding what they would do if Dave acted that way again was still in the room, but neither father nor daughter felt comfortable bringing it up. They ate in silence - Ellie quickly, Kurt slowly - both of them trying to think about anything else except the possibility of Dave returning home drunk again.

After a few minutes of marinating on this, Kurt pushed the thought from his mind. It was silly, he decided. Dave hadn't had that much to drink in years. Maybe he'd forgotten his own alcohol tolerance. That was it. Kurt was sure Dave hadn't *meant* to push him with so much force. He was sure Dave hadn't *meant* to shout slurred insults at him. All that had just been the booze talking.

"I'm done!" Ellie announced, snapping Kurt out of his unpleasant reverie as she jumped up from the table.

"Put your dishes in the sink, I'll rinse them off in just a second," Kurt heard himself say. Ellie did so and within seconds, was twirling back out into the living room. Kurt heard the muffled sounds of the latest Disney tween show's theme song drifting from the television.

He got up to rinse off her dishes and put them in the dishwasher before sitting back down to eat the rest of his own meal. Now that his single dining companion was gone, Kurt decided there was no need for his

usual table manners. In need of a distraction, he pulled his iPhone out of his pocket and logged into the Facebook app.

His newsfeed contained nothing but the usual boring pieces of his friends' Thursday-night lives. He noticed a few new pictures of Finn and Quinn's two-month-old son - Kurt smiled as he thumbed through those. He was so happy his brother had been able to work things out with his then-girlfriend, now-wife. They really were adorable together, and Kurt had to admit, they sure made one heck of a pretty baby.

He scrolled back to the top of his newsfeed after looking at the pictures Finn had posted. Lots of posts from Wes, of course - he was one of those annoying Facebook game junkies. Kurt had received many an invitation to join Wes's mafia or take care of Wes's farm, all of which he denied. But there was one post from his friend that stood out to Kurt.

Wesley Patterson and David Evans wrote on Blaine D. Anderson's wall for his birthday.

Kurt froze for a second before checking the calendar display. Yup, today was February 5. It was Blaine's birthday.

Oh god. Kurt couldn't believe himself. He'd forgotten. He was suddenly extremely thankful that even though he'd stayed at McKinley for the duration of his high school career, he'd still remained good friends with Wes and David despite the fact that they'd been at Dalton. If he hadn't seen their posts, Kurt probably never would have remembered. He was horrible with remembering dates.

He quickly ate the rest of his dinner and set his dishes by the sink to be rinsed off later. He had some birthday wishes to send.

...

"Blaaaaaaine!"

Blaine Anderson quickly slammed his laptop shut the second he heard his boyfriend's voice echo through the apartment. He'd only been dating Derek for about three months, but last week Blaine had given him a spare key to his apartment, just in case. It was by the use of this key that Derek had let himself in and was currently waiting out in the small front hallway for Blaine.

"Coming!" Blaine called in response, warily opening the laptop again and quickly closing out of Kurt Hummel's Facebook profile page. So maybe his friend occasionally crossed his mind and Blaine visited his page to see what he'd been up to. That was all.

Plus, the fact that Kurt had yet to write a birthday message on Blaine's wall bothered him, for some reason. Had Kurt forgotten? Because it sure seemed like it. Blaine really, really hoped Kurt hadn't forgotten.

"I need to be at the airport by six!" Derek's booming voice reminded Blaine.

Blaine rolled his eyes. "I'm *coming*!" he called again.

He shut down his computer and quickly slipped his feet into his oldest, crappiest pair of tennis shoes as he rushed out towards the main door of his apartment. Sure enough, Derek was there waiting for him, tall and blond and handsome and smiling as he stepped forward to give Blaine a hug.

"Happy birthday," he murmured into Blaine's curly hair before tilting the smaller man's face up to his own for a kiss.

"Thank you." Blaine smiled as he broke his lips away from his boyfriend's.

"Twenty-seven, huh?" Derek teased as they stepped out of the apartment and began making their way down the hall towards the elevator. "You don't look a day over twenty." He pulled Blaine close to him and gave him a quick kiss on the forehead. Blaine couldn't help but smile - it was moments like this when he remembered why he liked Derek so much.

"I'm really sorry about this. I wish I could have stayed here to celebrate with you," Derek was saying as he pressed the button for the elevator.

"It's okay." Blaine managed a smile as the doors slid open and they stepped on board. He was used to it, really - Derek was in international business and his job often required him to fly all over the globe. Tonight he was catching a red-eye to London, so as usual it was Blaine's job to drive him to O'Hare.

But still. It was Blaine's *birthday*. He had been looking forward to celebrating with Derek, before his boyfriend had sprung the news of this trip on him just two weeks ago. Instead, it looked like Blaine would

be celebrating in his apartment by himself, accompanied by his full collection of Harry Potter DVDs (his guilty pleasure) and a glass of wine.

At least this weekend would be fun. Since Derek would be gone, Blaine was going to take advantage of his alone time and drive down to Columbus to visit his parents. And maybe he could stop by and visit Kurt, too. Because Kurt totally hadn't been Blaine's reason for wanting to come home for the weekend. Not at all. Blaine just wanted to visit his folks, okay? Seeing Kurt was just an added bonus.

Derek *would* have to get the seven o'clock flight, Blaine thought with annoyance when they finally got on the road. He had hit Chicago rush-hour traffic at its finest. Blaine sighed and turned on the car stereo to blast the new Katy Perry: Greatest Hits CD that one of his coworkers had given him earlier today.

"I can't believe you still like her," Derek mumbled under his breath as the opening beat of I Kissed a Girl filled the car.

"Her music's catchy," Blaine countered weakly, not wanting to get into another debate with Derek over their different-as-night-and-day musical tastes. Blaine had an extremely diverse music collection and would gladly listen to anything, save for country - which just happened to be the only genre Derek listened to. Blaine never thought he would date a guy who was into country music, but there was just something about Derek...

"So is Lady Antebellum," Derek muttered defensively.

Blaine shuddered. "God, no." He glanced at the back of the CD case and flipped through the tracks on the disc, skipping everything until he found the song he wanted. A few seconds later, he was tapping the steering wheel along with the beat of Teenage Dream.

Derek smiled. "Y'know, you're cute when you get all defensive about music." He leaned over to give Blaine a quick kiss on the cheek, knowing he could do so safely since Blaine had been parked in this traffic for almost ten minutes now.

"I don't know if country even qualifies as music." Blaine was surprised he was even able to get the words out, because his mind was ten years away, back in the past. Derek said something in response, but Blaine was no longer paying attention.

This was the song he'd sung with the Warblers on that lovely day Kurt had come to visit from McKinley, where he ultimately stayed. Blaine knew he should have done more to try and convince Kurt to transfer to Dalton. But he hadn't, and Kurt had stayed with the New Directions and had eventually ended up with that, as Kurt himself had described him to Blaine on the day they'd met, that Neanderthal, Dave Karofsky. Blaine had never been too fond of Dave Karofsky.

Blaine was happy for Kurt. He really was. He knew he'd had his chance to win Kurt's heart but had been too afraid to take advantage of it, for fear of rejection. Consequently, Kurt had remained just a friend. And when, six years ago, Kurt had broken the news to Blaine that he and Dave were moving in together, Blaine had nodded stupidly with a smile on his face and congratulated his friend, trying to hide his unmistakable jealousy.

Seriously, though. Blaine was totally happy for Kurt. He had let Kurt get away, and Kurt had gone and started a loving family with his former tormentor. Blaine had mixed feelings about this. He thought the fact that Kurt had a kid was absolutely endearing. The fact that Kurt had a kid with someone else made his heart hurt a little bit. Okay, a lot.

The pain of unrequited love had eased up a bit six months ago, when Blaine had gotten a job at the most powerful law firm in Chicago and thus had to move four hundred miles away from home. He knew it would be hard, leaving his family - and Kurt - but in a way, it was completely worth it. Blaine was the youngest lawyer at this new firm, but he made good money and he loved his job. *This* was the reason he'd spent so much time toiling away in law school and studying his ass off for the damn bar exam. Things had finally started to look up.

Then, three months ago, he'd met Derek, and the two had hit it off right away. And Derek was such an amazing guy, he really was, but he was no Kurt.

Traffic had started to move, slowly but surely, in the time during which Blaine was pondering all these things. Teenage Dream had just finished and Firework was now playing. Blaine snapped completely out of his trip down memory lane when he realized that Derek was singing along.

"I kind of like this song," Derek admitted when he felt Blaine's scrutinizing gaze.

Blaine just smiled and shook his head as finally, finally, *finally* the traffic let up enough for him to move his car a considerable distance forward.

...

During his drive back from the airport, Blaine had Katy Perry's catchy tunes to accompany him. When he got back into his silent apartment, however, that's when the feeling of loneliness really started to kick in.

He tried humming the Happy Birthday song to himself as he went into the kitchen to pour himself a glass of red wine, and even started singing it under his breath as he popped the first Harry Potter disc into the DVD player. Still, it wasn't the same. He'd never actually been *alone* on his birthday.

It wasn't Derek's fault, and Blaine knew that. Derek hadn't *asked* to be flown out to London on this particular day, because Derek didn't really ever have much say in deciding where he went and when. Blaine knew he would have stayed here if he could.

But it still would have been nice to celebrate your birthday with the guy you really like, the little voice in the back of Blaine's head reminded him. Blaine was in the process of attempting to silence said little voice when his phone buzzed in his pocket.

He pulled out his vibrating phone and glanced at the screen. He couldn't believe it.

Kurt was calling him.

Blaine slid his thumb across the screen to answer the call and answered with a breathless, "Hello?" that sounded just a little too eager.

"Happy birthday to you...", Kurt sang.

Blaine giggled. "Oh my god, Kurt."

"Happy birthday to you. Happy birthday dear Blaine, happy birthday to you!" Kurt's smooth countertenor voice sounded as perfect as ever.

Blaine knew Kurt would be able to hear the smile in his voice even from four hundred miles away. "Thank you, Kurt. That was beautiful."

"I try," Kurt cracked. "I'm a music teacher, after all, I kind of have to be a good singer." He laughed. "Anyway. I feel so bad because I almost forgot, but then Facebook kind of reminded me."

A flood of relief rushed through Blaine. Kurt hadn't completely forgotten, after all. "That's completely fine, don't worry about it." He took a swig from his glass of wine.

"If you say so," Kurt giggled. "So how are you celebrating the first day of your twenty-seventh year?"

"Um...," Blaine grabbed the remote and paused the movie that he hadn't even realized was still playing. Should he lie and say he was out having a grand ol' time? No. No, he should not. He could never lie to Kurt.

"Actually, the most exciting part of my day was driving Derek to O'Hare, since he has to catch a flight out to London tonight." Kurt knew all about Blaine's boyfriend and his frequent business travels. "Right now I'm just kinda in my apartment by myself, drinking wine and watching Harry Potter. Fun birthday, I know."

"Awww." Kurt legitimately sounded sad for him. "That's too bad. I wish I could drive up there and celebrate with you, but by the time I got there, it would be around two in the morning and I have to go to work tomorrow."

Blaine's train of thought crashed and burned while he considered a few of the ways he would have liked to "celebrate" with Kurt, then forced himself to snap back into reality. "Nah, that's okay. Thanks, though. I'm actually going to be in town this weekend, I wanted to spend some time with my parents. Maybe you and I could meet up for coffee or something?"

He wasn't sure how Kurt would react to this proposition, but thankfully it was with enthusiasm.

"Oh my god, we should go to the Lima Bean." Kurt was referring to the little coffee joint where the two frequently had met for coffee during their high school days, to eat biscotti and swap stories about their different glee clubs.

Blaine smiled. "That's exactly what I was thinking, actually. I miss you."

The words came out naturally, before Blaine even realized he was saying them.

"I miss you, too," Kurt said, and Blaine tried not to make his relieved sigh audible through the phone. "So does Ellie, actually. She's been wanting to see you again. I'll get Dave to stay home with her that afternoon while we get coffee, then maybe you could come back to the apartment or something." Blaine had met Kurt's daughter quite a few times before he'd moved away. She was beautiful, just like her father.

"Sure." Blaine attempted to bring his smile back after it had faded upon hearing Kurt mention Dave. "I'd like that."

"Okay!" Kurt sounded excited. That was a good sign. "Hey, speaking of my little monster-," he used the term affectionately, and Blaine suspected it had come from Lady Gaga's nickname for her fans, "I need to get her ready for bed. Just wanted to call and say hi, and happy birthday."

"Thanks for calling." Blaine was smiling a genuine smile again. "It was great to hear from you...I'll text you when I get into town on Saturday and we can make some plans to meet up. See you then?"

Through the other end of the line, it sounded like Kurt was smiling as well. "It's a date."

The two said goodbye and Blaine reluctantly hung up. Had Kurt - Unavailable Daddy Kurt - really just used the word "date" to describe their little reunion? Blaine thought about this for a second before deciding that yes, Kurt had indeed described it as a date. Unavailable Lawyer Blaine had a date with his best friend, Unavailable Daddy Kurt, for this weekend.

The thought of that made Blaine's head spin, but in a good way. He stood up off the couch and went back out to the kitchen to pour himself another glass of wine.

Chapter Two

Kurt had forgotten all about his apprehensions ever since he'd hung up the phone with Blaine. In fact, he barely even remembered that Dave was gone as he tucked Ellie in and gave her a kiss good night. He was distracted, to say the least - he hadn't seen Blaine in six months, and he missed him.

It was such an easy thought to allow to flow through his mind. *I miss him*. It just seemed so natural. Kurt didn't feel guilty at all.

But should he have reason to feel guilty? He *was* thinking about Blaine quite a lot.

After changing into a white undershirt and a pair of flannel pajama pants, Kurt brushed his teeth before settling down on the couch to channel surf until he got tired enough to go to bed. There really wasn't anything on right now, so he wouldn't be surprised if he just crashed right here on the sofa...he couldn't do that, though. His alarm clock was set in the bedroom, and he probably wouldn't be able to hear it from out here. Kurt yawned and absentmindedly made a mental note to drag his tired ass to the bedroom at some point.

He ended up watching a couple ancient reruns of the Amanda Show on Nick At Nite, purely for nostalgia's sake, before flipping to ESPN to catch a couple minutes of SportsCenter. Just in case one of his frequent phone conversations with his father turned to a lull, it was always helpful to have at least some back story on the latest Major League Baseball steroid scandal to launch a discussion that would keep Burt Hummel rambling for hours.

Kurt gave up on SportsCenter after about ten minutes. He could only handle so much information about the pitchers and catchers reporting to Spring Training.

After a few more minutes of flipping around, he eventually landed on the Tonight Show, which meant that it was probably late enough to be acceptable for bedtime now. He flicked off the television and padded down the hall to his and Dave's bedroom, not even bothering to turn on the lights. He could barely keep his eyes open as it was.

And it wasn't until he had crawled into bed under the covers that his eyes shot open with the sudden realization that he was alone.

According to the glowing red numbers of the clock on the nightstand, it was 11:47. Dave should be home by now. Yes, Kurt knew he'd said midnight, but he also hadn't thought that Dave was going to cut it down to the last second, either.

There wasn't really anything he could do, though. He could try calling Dave, but what were the chances of him hearing his phone ring in the middle of some loud, crowded bar? Kurt tried not to think too much and pulled the covers up around himself.

He wouldn't be able to sleep now. He was too afraid of what would happen when Dave got home. Hopefully Dave would remember what he'd promised him in the kitchen earlier this evening. Kurt didn't want to get hurt at the hands of the man who supposedly loved him again. More importantly, he didn't want Ellie to be afraid again. Dave hadn't laid a hand on her last time, but who was Kurt to say that that wouldn't be the case tonight if Dave came home drunk one more time?

While pondering all this, he must have fallen into some light phase of sleep, because all of a sudden there was a pair of lips at his ear and strong, familiar arms wrapping around him. Suddenly his eyes flew open again and he turned to face his boyfriend, who was spooning up behind him.

"Dave?"

"Sorry I'm late," Dave murmured, kissing the nape of Kurt's neck.

Kurt's gaze immediately flew to the clock, which now read 12:23. "You *should* be," he mumbled. "I was so worried, and Ellie was scared at dinner."

"I figured. I'm sorry. Didn't I tell you that wouldn't happen again?"

"And I expect you to stand by that," Kurt said softly but firmly. "How much did you have to drink tonight?"

"None." He sounded proud, and Kurt couldn't see his face but he heard the smile in his voice. "I was the designated driver tonight. I had to drive the rest of the guys home, that's why I was late."

Kurt rolled his eyes. "You could have *called* me, at least. I would have understood."

"I'm sorry, okay?" Dave gently pulled Kurt around so he was facing him. "Next time, I'll call."

"Thank you." Kurt smiled and leaned up just a little bit to give him a quick kiss on the lips. "Now can I go to sleep now, please? I'm exhausted."

"You're adorable when you're tired." Dave laughed quietly and pulled Kurt closer to him. "Good night."

It was easy to fall asleep now. Kurt didn't know why, but for the first time all night, he felt safe. Dave hadn't broken his promise after all. Maybe the events of that first night he'd gone out drinking had just been a one-time thing and would never happen again.

Kurt only hoped that that was the case.

...

And of course, Kurt's temporary happiness was too good to be true, because he woke up to a stressful morning.

"You're gonna have to pick up something for dinner, because I won't be here to cook," he told Dave as he bustled around the kitchen, trying to get to the toaster in time before the bread burned. "I have a staff meeting right after school, *that's* gonna take forever and a day, and then I need to run out and buy some sheet music. I won't be home until after six, probably. Ellie, sweetie, I already called Claire's mother and she agreed to let you hang out over at their house for a little while, okay? Just leave with Mrs. Johnson when she comes to pick up Claire after school. Papa can come pick you up on his way home from work. You can do that, right, Dave? I'll write down the address in case you don't *knoooh, shoot.*"

Kurt immediately retracted his possibly-burned hand from the toaster and shook it wildly in a sad attempt to cool it off.

"Daddy, are you okay?" Ellie pushed her bowl of Lucky Charms away and ran towards Kurt to give him a hug.

"Yeah, Daddy's fine, toaster's just a bi-...a nothing," Kurt mumbled. He tried to never curse in front of his daughter, but had come close to breaking his own rule twice in the past thirty seconds.

"Do you need some ice for that?" Dave stood up and started for the fridge.

Kurt shook his head. "No, thank you. I think if I just run some cold water on it, it'll be fine...oh!" He smiled down at his daughter, who had grabbed his hand and pressed a comforting kiss to his fingers. "Thank you, Ellie. Go finish eating. I'll be fine."

"I'm done!" she announced. She picked up her bowl, which Kurt now realized was empty, and carried it over to the sink where Kurt was rinsing off his hand. "Can we leave now?" As the daughter of a teacher, it was almost in Ellie's blood to be excited about going to school.

Kurt glanced at the clock and began to utter a quiet curse, but stopped himself. It was already 7:20, the school day started at eight, and Kurt liked to get there around 7:30. He hadn't even eaten yet.

"Yeah, I guess we have to," he sighed. On his way out the door, he paused to give Dave a quick kiss and grabbed a granola bar out of the pantry. "I'll see you later. Oh...*dang* it," he muttered, turning back around as somebody special crossed his mind.

"I completely forgot to tell you. Blaine Anderson is coming into town tomorrow, he and I are meeting up for coffee. Would you mind staying here and watching Ellie tomorrow afternoon? We probably won't be long, and we might come back here so he can say hi to you guys."

Dave rolled his eyes. "*Blaine Anderson*," he said mockingly. "That's all I ever heard about in high school, and I still can't get away from it now, even though he lives all the way in freakin' Chicago. Blaine, Blaine, *Blaaaaaaine*."

Kurt turned on his heel and put his hands on his hips as he confronted Dave. "Look, could you show a little respect? He's one of the best friends I've ever had, and I haven't seen him in six months. We're *just* going out for coffee."

"You had a crush on him back in high school," Dave said pointedly. "And from what I could tell, the last couple times we hung out with him, he seemed to have no problem with flirting with you right in front of me."

"First of all, listen to what you just said: *high school* is the operative phrase there," Kurt countered. "Second, that's just how Blaine has always been with me. I don't think it's because he has a crush on me. If he did, he would have asked me out a *long* time ago. That's just him being friendly. Third, he *has* a boyfriend now. Some guy up there in Chicago."

"Sure hasn't ever been that friendly to *me*," Dave mumbled as he shoved a forkful of scrambled eggs into his mouth.

Kurt cocked his head to the side and pursed his lips. "Are you *jealous*?"

"Maybe," Dave said with a shrug. "I just don't like the way he undresses you with his eyes, is all."

"Oh, for *crying* out loud." Kurt, exasperated, turned back around. "We're already running late, I don't have time to argue about this now."

He grabbed his keys off of their usual hook and slammed the door shut behind him with a little bit more force than necessary.

Ellie had been waiting for him in the hall just outside the door. "Why is Papa mad?"

Kurt racked his brain for a good way to explain this as he paced quickly down the hall towards the elevator. Ellie had to practically run to keep up.

"No big deal," he finally said, tearing the wrapper of the granola bar off with his teeth. "My friend Blaine - you remember him, right? He's come over a couple times - anyway, I just found out he's coming into town this weekend, and Papa didn't know. It took him by surprise. That's all."

Ellie's eyes lit up as the two of them reached the elevator. "The guy with the guitar?"

Kurt nodded, remembering the last time Blaine had seen his daughter - Ellie's sixth birthday party. He'd brought his guitar and serenaded her with a solo rendition of the birthday song, which had delighted her, enamored Kurt and annoyed Dave.

"Yeah," he told her as the two of them stepped onto the elevator. "That's him."

"Yay!" Ellie jumped up and down a little bit. "He was so cool! Can he sing to me again?"

Kurt smiled. "I don't know. You'll have to ask him."

At least he wasn't the only one looking forward to seeing Blaine.

...

Blaine held his head high as he walked through the regal glass doors of Carter & Perry, Attorneys at Law the next morning. He couldn't help but feel an immense rush of pride every time he entered the firm. In a strange way, being a lawyer felt like being on top of the world. He had the power to influence some of the biggest legal decisions in the state, and it was hard not to let that go to his head.

He smiled and greeted his fellow attorneys as he made his way back to his office, with its dark wooden door and shiny golden knob and translucent, frosted glass window with lettering that read *Blaine D. Anderson, Attorney-at-Law*. Okay, so it was *really* hard not to let *that* go to his head.

Just twenty-seven, Blaine found himself quickly climbing to prestige in the highly competitive world of the law. He'd already argued (and won) his share of big cases in his short time at Carter & Perry, and it was no secret within the firm that someday, after one of the two retired, *Anderson* would replace one of those names. There was no doubt in anybody's mind that he would be a partner at the firm someday.

Today, though, would be relatively lenient. He only had one appointment with a potential client who was supposed to be getting here at around ten thirty. Until then, he had some time to review the facts of the case that he already knew, so he booted up his computer and logged into the email program.

The woman he'd be talking to had already emailed him a brief summary of her case. Her name was Emily Jade, and she'd recently been denied a job as a public relations specialist at a local radio station - a position she believed she was qualified for. She was handicapped and used a wheelchair to get around, and was the single mother of a three-year-old son. However, the job had gone to someone else: an able-bodied white male. Emily believed - and so did Blaine, when he took into account all the information she'd given him thus far - that her rights as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act had been violated and was interested in taking her case to the Illinois State Supreme Court. She'd never had occasion to hire a lawyer in a situation like this before, but she'd heard nothing but good things about Blaine Anderson and the firm of Carter & Perry in general. Would he be interested in possibly arguing her case?

The second he'd finished reading Emily's email after she sent it last week, Blaine immediately responded and told her he'd love to. Discrimination-related cases, such as this, were his favorites to argue because it was something he felt passionately about, having been discriminated himself all his life.

A knock on his office door snapped him out of this small reverie and he immediately glanced at the clock display in the bottom right-hand corner of his computer. Ten twenty-seven. That had to be her.

"Come in!" he called loudly enough that he would be heard on the other side of the door.

The knob turned and a dark-haired woman in a wheelchair rolled herself into the room.

"Hi!" Her voice was light and airy. "I am *so* sorry if I'm late, the clock in my car is messed up. Whenever I try to re-set it to the right time, it somehow skips ahead again."

"Actually, you're about three minutes early, so you have nothing to worry about." Blaine laughed warmheartedly and stood up from behind his desk so he could shake the woman's hand. "Blaine Anderson."

"Emily Jade." She returned his smile and wheeled herself to a position in front of his desk as he returned to his seat. "It's very nice to meet you."

"Same to you. I love your name, by the way. Very pretty."

Emily laughed. "Oh, thank you. Jade is actually my middle name. I got it legally changed when I was eighteen...my family's last name is Gross and I was never really a huge fan of that."

Blaine pressed his lips together into a wry smile and nodded. "I can understand that," he told her with a chuckle. Then, returning to a more businesslike mode, "So what can I help you with today?"

"Well, I'd like to file a lawsuit and take this case to court," Emily explained. "I was just hoping to talk to you for a little bit and see if you'd be interested in arguing it."

Blaine nodded. "I can do that," he affirmed. "Why don't you go over the facts with me one more time, but with more detail. You already gave me the gist of it...start from the beginning."

"Okay...well, first, there's something I think you should know about me," Emily said warily.

"And what is that?"

"I'm a lesbian." Emily sucked in a breath through her teeth. "I usually...don't officially 'come out' like this to people I've just met, but in this situation I think it's important that you know because it's pretty relevant in regards to this case." She bit her lip and looked at Blaine anxiously, expectantly. "You're not...uncomfortable with that, are you?"

Blaine shook his head and gave her a tiny, understanding smile, "No, absolutely not. Not at all. I'm openly gay myself, so I completely understand."

"Oh," Emily said with a smile, slipping more into that comfortable at-ease feeling. "Okay. That's good to know. I would be a little uneasy having a homophobic lawyer arguing this case, not gonna lie."

Blaine returned her smile. "I am at the complete opposite end of the spectrum from being homophobic," he reassured her. "You have nothing to worry about."

"I'm twenty-six now, and I'd been in the same relationship ever since my senior year of high school," Emily continued. "My partner's name is...*was*...Renée. We have a son together...Parker, he'll be four in April."

From Emily's use of *was*, Blaine had a pretty good idea where this would be going from here.

Before she continued, Emily drew in a shaky breath and Blaine could tell that she was trying hard not to cry. "About four months ago," she explained, blinking quickly a few times in a row, "Renée and I were driving to pick up Parker from preschool, then we were all going to go out to lunch together. But...that...didn't happen."

She was crying now, there was no doubt about that. Suddenly Blaine felt like his businesslike-lawyer-behind-the-desk pose was too imposing when this woman was clearly upset. He stood up and walked around to sit beside her wheelchair in one of the cushioned chairs that faced his desk.

"There was an accident," Emily said through her tears. "One of those chain-reaction things where a bunch of cars are involved...it was pretty bad. I got lucky. I was paralyzed, I've been in this ever since," she said, tapping one of the large wheels on her chair, "but Renée didn't make it at all."

Instinctively, Blaine reached over to give her hand a reassuring squeeze. "I'm so sorry," he whispered. "Really, I am."

"Thank you," Emily said softly. "I-I'm just so thankful that Parker wasn't in the car with us. I don't know what I would have done with myself if anything would have happened to him. Anyway..." she reached up to smear some tears off her face and looked Blaine in the eyes as she got down to the cold, hard facts of her case.

"I was the stay-at-home mom. I have a degree in public relations, but Renée was a nurse, which made enough money to support all of us. With her gone, obviously, we had no source of income. So last month, I read about an opening in a public relations position down at 97.5 FM. You listen to them?"

"Chicago's number-one source for all the hits!" Blaine quoted the station's self-advertisement that was played whenever the station returned from a commercial break.

"Yeah, that's it," Emily confirmed with a nod. "Anyway. I applied for the job and went to the interview, and I'm not going to lie, I kicked *butt*." She giggled. "I did an *amazing* job, if I say so myself. I had to. I needed to get this job to support myself and Parker.

"I was almost *positive* I was going to get it. There was no doubt in my mind. The Americans with Disabilities Act practically guarantees it, and they knew I had a child to support." Her expression fell noticeably before she continued. "But they turned me down and gave the job to someone else, and I think I know why. During the interview, the subject of the accident somehow came up, and I mentioned Renée by name. I didn't think anything of it. I think the interviewers were a little turned off by the fact that I had been in a relationship with another woman - in fact, I *know* they were. I could see it on their faces as soon as I said it. And...I honestly believe that the only reason I didn't get the job is because of my sexual orientation. I want to file a lawsuit against the station, I already have a court summons. I need that job. I have a *child*. And in my opinion, there is absolutely no reason why I shouldn't have gotten it."

She gave Blaine a tiny smile. "Okay, I'm done. What are your thoughts on that?"

"You know what I think?" Blaine asked in a low voice. "I think that there's no reason for you to even be here right now, because that job, by all means, should be rightfully yours. This is absolutely unconstitutional."

Emily rolled her eyes. "It is, but the folks at 97.5 didn't seem to think so. Who am I kidding? People like us can't even get *married*, let alone find a job."

"That might not be entirely true anymore if Proposition 21 passes in the May primaries," Blaine countered with a smile, referring to the proposed amendment to the state constitution that would legalize same-sex marriage throughout Illinois.

"Good point," Emily murmured. "I...I just...I *want* this job. No - I *need* this job. I need to provide for my son. Is that too much to ask?"

Blaine had just met this woman, but had already thrown his entire heart into this case now that he knew the full story. He, too, had been a victim of homophobia many times before. This was the first time in his career that he'd gotten the chance to defend this particular injustice, and he would have loved nothing more than the chance to do so.

"It's not too much to ask," he told Emily. "And if you'll let me, I would be honored to defend you in fighting against this intolerance."

"Thank you," she whispered with an appreciative smile. "I...I have my court summons with me, I just need you to sign it and confirm that I've given you power of attorney..."

"Okay, great!" Blaine reached over onto his desk to grab a pen while Emily fished around in her purse and eventually came up with a neatly-folded stack of papers, which she handed to him.

"I think it's on one of the last couple pages," she said. "I can't remember for sure, though."

Blaine flipped through the stack - he'd done this before, so he had a pretty good idea of where the form should be. Sure enough, it was the second to last page.

"And you swear that you consent to giving me full power of attorney in this case?" It was standard procedure; he had to ask, even though nobody ever said no.

Emily nodded. "Yes."

Blaine dashed off his signature on the appropriate line and handed the packet back to her. "All right, you're all set...just return this to the clerk at the courthouse. They'll submit it to the radio station and set you up with a trial date. When you get that figured out, let me know and I'll clear my schedule so we can take this thing to court." He smiled. "It's about time we take homophobia down."

Emily giggled. "Thank you *so* much," she told him sincerely. "I'll call you as soon as I get the trial date set up."

"Take care," he called after her as she wheeled herself out of his office.

Blaine stood up and walked back around to take his normal seat behind his desk.

He had no idea that by signing that paper, he'd involuntarily signed himself away as the leader of a movement that would take Illinois by storm over the next few months.

...

Mrs. Johnson never talked much. Ellie Hummel-Karofsky had picked up on this pretty quickly in the short time she'd been friends with her daughter, Claire. It was almost strange, Ellie decided as the three of them sat at the long table in the Johnsons' spacious dining room, eating a dinner of rotisserie chicken and mashed potatoes. Even at only six years old, Ellie thought that there was something weird about the way Claire's mother never seemed to speak unless she had to. Maybe it was just a mommy thing. Ellie wouldn't know, because she had two daddies. But she loved them both with all her precious little heart, and she wouldn't have had it any other way.

"So, Ellie," Mrs. Johnson said after about ten minutes of eating in silence, causing Ellie's attention to immediately shoot up towards her. "I know you already told me, but what time is your father coming to pick you up? Not that I want to be rude and send you home, but Claire has ballet tonight and my husband is working late..."

Not only did she never talk, Ellie realized, but when she *did* talk, she seemed absentminded. She also kind of rambled a lot.

"Papa's coming to get me when he's done with work," Ellie told her. "He usually gets out of the office at six, I think."

Mrs. Johnson squinted in confusion. "The office...? I thought your father was the music teacher at Lincoln Elementary."

"He is!" Ellie said with a proud smile. "That's *Daddy*. I meant *Papa*."

"Oh." Mrs. Johnson, still obviously confused, dabbed daintily at the corners of her mouth with her napkin. "So 'Papa' is...your grandfather?"

Ellie shook her head. "I have two daddies," she announced.

Mrs. Johnson choked a little bit on the water she'd just taken a sip of, then turned to her daughter. "Claire, did you know Ellie has two daddies?"

Claire, who hadn't said a word for the entire meal, nodded. "Yep! Her daddy is Mr. Hummel. He's the music teacher at my school. But she has another daddy, too. Mr. Hummel has a picture of himself and Ellie and Ellie's Papa on his desk at school. They're a family."

The second her daughter finished speaking, Mrs. Johnson pushed her chair back from the table. "Claire, I need to speak to you in private, please."

Claire ate a forkful of mashed potatoes. "But Mommy, I'm *hungry*."

"Claire Olivia Johnson...," her mother warned.

"Okay! I'm coming!" Claire whined, and followed her mother out to the living room.

Ellie, left alone, had nothing to do but listen to them. She got up and crept over to the wall that divided the two rooms, pressing her ear up against it to listen.

"Why didn't you tell me about this?" Mrs. Johnson hissed in a low whisper.

"I didn't think it mattered," Claire said in a tiny voice. "I just found out about it when I saw the picture on Mr. Hummel's desk. I asked Ellie about it and she told me about her daddies. She says she loves them very much, and they love her, too. And they love each other."

"Claire, I want you to listen to me." Mrs. Johnson's voice was low; Ellie had to strain her ears to hear it. "What those two men have...that is not *love*. That is a mental disease."

"Ellie's daddies are sick?" Claire asked innocently.

"Very sick, in the head," Mrs. Johnson clarified. Ellie felt her heart sink. She didn't think her daddies were sick. They seemed perfectly healthy to her.

"They've tricked themselves into thinking they're attracted to other men," Mrs. Johnson was saying. "That's not right, sweetie. Like I said, it's a mental disease, and it's also a sin."

"But...but...", it sounded like Claire was trying unsuccessfully to think of an argument. "But if they love each other and they love Ellie, why's that bad?"

"I *told* you, Claire. It's *not* love," Mrs. Johnson said exasperatedly.

Ellie blinked a little bit. She didn't want to cry, but it was hard not to. Did Daddy and Papa really not love her?

As she tuned back into the conversation, she heard the words that absolutely tore her apart on the inside.

"I think it would be best if you and Ellie don't play together anymore," Claire's mother told her quietly. "You don't need to be around that. Also, I'm going to call the principal and ask for you to be switched into a different music class."

"Mr. Hummel is the only music teacher at school," Claire countered quietly.

"Then I'll ask that you be excused from taking music altogether. I don't want you in a class taught by a queer."

Ellie got a horrible sinking feeling in her stomach. She'd heard people use that word - and worse - before, but it didn't make her feel any less terrible.

"But...I don't...", Claire protested.

"No 'but's. After Ellie's daddy or papa or whatever he is comes to pick her up tonight, she's not coming over anymore. That's final. Now come on, let's go finish eating."

And with that, she dismissed it as if it were the most unimportant issue in the world.

Ellie tiptoed quickly back to the table to make it look like she'd been there the whole time. She tried eating a little bit more of her food, but it was hard. After what she'd just overheard, she wasn't sure if her stomach would calm down enough to ever let her eat again.

...

Ellie was usually a lively little chatterbox, but she hadn't said a word for the entire ride home. This was Dave's first clue that something was up.

"I was just gonna order a pizza for dinner tonight since Daddy won't be home until later on." He glanced up at his daughter in the backseat while he was stopped at a red light. "Did you already eat over at Claire's, or...?"

"I ate there," Ellie said quietly. "I didn't really like the chicken she made, though. I want some pizza."

"Okay," Dave told her gently. "We'll get pizza."

The light blinked green and he proceeded through the intersection. A few more silent minutes passed before Ellie spoke up again.

"Papa, do you and Daddy love me?"

"Of course we do," Dave told her, confused. "You mean the world to both of us. Why would you ask that?"

"Mrs. Johnson says you don't love me." Her voice was small.

Dave was even more confused. "Why would she say something like that?"

"Because you and Daddy are sick in the head. You don't love me or each other, you have a mental disease. And she doesn't want me to play with Claire anymore."

Oh.

Dave resisted the urge to slam on the brakes as he approached a stop sign. "Elizabeth," he told her firmly, turning around to look her in the eyes. "Do you remember the talk Daddy and I had with you before your first day of kindergarten?"

She nodded. "Daddy said that other people might try to be mean to me because I don't have a mommy, but that I shouldn't let that bother me. He said people are just stupid and mean, and that he and you love me very much."

"Never forget that," he told her as he turned back around and moved his foot from the brake to the gas. "So she doesn't want you to play with Claire because she thinks there's something wrong with having two daddies, huh?"

It was more of a rhetorical question, but Ellie answered anyway. "Yep. She thinks it's bad and a sin. She doesn't want Claire to be around that. And she doesn't want her to be in Daddy's music class anymore."

Dave stared straight ahead at the road, half tempted to U-turn his Ford F-150 right in the middle of the damn road and drive back to the Johnsons' to give that bitch a piece of his mind. He decided against it. He would just wait until Kurt got home and see what *he* had to say about this. Kurt could tear homophobes down like no other.

"Papa, are you mad?" Ellie asked from the backseat.

Dave clenched the steering wheel with so much force that his knuckles turned white.

"I'm not mad," he told her.

He was furious.

...

Kurt came home to an apartment that was completely silent, save for the muffled sounds of the television in the living room. He was dead tired. It had been a long day, and all he wanted to do was fall asleep and wake up to a text from Blaine tomorrow morning, telling Kurt he'd arrived in Columbus and when would he like to meet up for coffee?

"Hello?" he called as he hung up his keys on their usual hook by the door. "Dave? Ellie?"

"In here!" Dave's voice called.

Kurt set the stack of brand-new sheet music books he'd been carrying onto the kitchen table and headed out to the living room. Dave and Ellie were sitting on a blanket on the floor with a pizza box between them, watching *Tangled*.

"Oh my god, I'm exhausted," Kurt sighed as he lowered himself down onto the blanket beside his daughter. "Mind if I have a piece?" He reached for a slice of pepperoni.

"Go ahead," Ellie murmured as she nibbled on her crust. Her voice sounded sad.

Kurt pulled a piece of pizza out of the box and dabbed the grease off of the top with a napkin. "Is everything all right?" he asked her.

Ellie didn't say anything.

"Why don't you tell Daddy what Mrs. Johnson said?" Dave coaxed.

"She says I can't play with Claire anymore. You and Papa are very bad people because I don't have a mommy." Ellie's voice was a quiet monotone. "And she says you're sick in the head. And she doesn't think it's a good idea for Claire to be in your class anymore, either."

Forgetting all about his exhaustion of just a few minutes ago, Kurt dropped his uneaten slice of pizza back in the box and stood up. A rush of angry adrenaline surged through his veins as he paced back out into the kitchen and grabbed his keys.

"Daddy, where are you going?" Ellie called out to him.

"I need to talk to Mrs. Johnson," he told her. "A little...parent-teacher conference, if you will."

Chapter Three

The Johnson family lived in a cute little brick ranch-style home. Kurt had been here once or twice when he'd picked up Ellie after previous play dates. This time, however, would be different. He would be exchanging more words with Mrs. Johnson than simply their usual hi-hello-how-are-you.

He parked his Corvette in the driveway and strode up to the front porch with his head held high. Once on the steps, he pressed the doorbell with his index finger and waited patiently for Claire's mother - Kurt, for the life of him, could not recall her first name - to come and answer.

She never did, but that was only because Claire beat her to the door. The little girl didn't even open it all the way and hung back, an expression of sadness clouding her face.

"Hi, Mr. Hummel." Even her voice sounded sad.

Kurt offered her a smile. It wasn't her fault that her mother was such a terrible person.

"Hi, Claire. Is your mom home?"

"Hold on," Claire told him. Then, "You can come in if you want."

"Oh, thank you." Kurt smiled appreciatively and stepped into the small but cozy foyer as Claire went off to find her mother.

A few seconds later, he heard the sound of footsteps approaching the hallway from the kitchen, accompanied by a frustrated-sounding voice. "Claire, I told you not to answer it. I have to get you to ballet in a few minutes, I don't have time to..."

Claire, mother in tow, appeared in the hallway before Mrs. Johnson could finish her sentence. Her expression changed noticeably when she saw Kurt standing there; Kurt couldn't read her face to tell what she was thinking, but she didn't appear very pleased.

"Hello," Kurt began with impeccable politeness, just in case she didn't remember him from the few occasions they'd met before. "My name is Kurt Hummel, I teach music at Lincoln Elementary. I'm also Ellie's father."

Mrs. Johnson obviously was trying to hide her disgust. "Oh," she said, loosening her hand from Claire's grasp in order to give Kurt an unenthusiastic wet-noodle handshake. "We've met before. Lorraine Johnson."

Kurt nodded and smiled politely. "I actually came over because there's something Ellie told me tonight that really bothered me. I'd just like to have a word with you for a few minutes, if you don't mind."

Lorraine shot a glance towards the clock that hung on the wall in the next room, then sighed. "Mr. Hummel, if you must, please make this quick. I need to get Claire to dance by seven thirty."

"Oh, please," Kurt insisted flatly, "call me Kurt." He actually hated being called Mr. Hummel, unless it was by his students. They had a way of making the stuffy courtesy title sound endearing.

"Kurt," Lorraine repeated with an edge of exasperation in her voice. It was clear just from her mannerisms that she had no interest in speaking to him. "Please come in."

He followed her into the kitchen and took the liberty of seating himself at the table, where he assumed they would hold their discussion. Lorraine seemed taken aback by this, but all the same asked if he would like something to drink. Kurt politely refused; Lorraine poured a glass of iced tea for herself before sitting across from him at the table.

"So...," she began hesitantly, "what, exactly, did you want to talk about?"

Kurt could have slapped her. As if she didn't know.

"Earlier tonight when Ellie was over here, she overheard you saying some things that made her very uncomfortable," he explained. "I wanted to know if you have any justification for the things you said. Ellie's very upset that you won't let her and Claire play together anymore, and quite frankly, so am I."

"Why would you be upset?" Lorraine asked, sipping her iced tea with a shrug. "They're little girls. How many friendships that you make in *kindergarten*, for crying out loud, last much longer than elementary school?"

Her excuse was so transparent. Kurt could see right through it. It was obvious that she was terrible at circumlocution.

"Lorraine, if I may be blunt?" Kurt asked, leaning towards her from across the table. "You and I both know that's a lie. Look, Ellie told me what you said. You don't want her and Claire to spend any time together because she has two fathers, no mother. I guess I just want to know why you have such a problem with gay people."

She winced noticeably when Kurt used the word *gay*. He resisted the urge to roll his eyes. Even the *word* made her uncomfortable? People these days.

"I told you I was going to be blunt," he added coolly while secretly harboring his satisfaction. Kurt Hummel, Head Bitch In Charge, had arrived, and he was (verbally) strutting his stuff with full force.

Lorraine sighed. "Kurt, with all due respect, I don't know if your...choice of lifestyle is appropriate for children to be exposed to."

"My *choice*?" Kurt couldn't help but scoff. "You think I *chose* this? You think I *want* to be teased and mocked every single day of my life because of who I'm attracted to?" Trying to stay relatively calm and not explode into anger, he folded his hands on the table and looked at her straight on. *Commence Full Bitch mode.*

"I've known I liked boys since I was five years old," he told her. "None of us choose this for ourselves. We're all born this way, every single member of the gay community. I didn't choose this any more than Barack Obama chose to be black."

"He's *half* black," Lorraine responded condescendingly, as if that made a difference in the point Kurt was trying to make.

"You know what I mean. I'm not going to sit around discussing our former President's skin tone, that's not what I came here for," Kurt snapped. "Point being, this is something I was born with. I can't change it."

"But the Bible clearly says...," Lorraine protested.

Kurt interrupted her. "I'm going to stop you right there," he said calmly. Now would have been the perfect time to interject that he was agnostic and didn't believe the Bible, but he found it wise to keep his mouth shut on that particular issue so as not to discredit himself. In fact, he'd even done some biblical research of his own.

"God is supposedly loving and merciful," he continued. "Why would He create us this way and then allow His followers to condemn us for it? It seems like a double standard, if you ask me."

Lorraine wasn't going to give up the whole Bible thing. "But in Leviticus, chapter eighteen, verse twenty-two, it is explicitly stated that..."

"'Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it *is* abomination,'" Kurt quoted monotonously. "I've looked up that passage myself, and I won't deny that it says that. There's another passage in there that I came across. Leviticus nineteen nineteen," he had memorized this piece of information specifically for situations like this, when he needed to combat homophobia, "'You shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor wear a garment upon you of two kinds of material mixed together.'"

He scrutinized her for a second and wrinkled his nose, then shook his head in mock disappointment. "That vest you're wearing is polyester, isn't it? I'm shocked, Lorraine. So shocked. You seemed like such a pious woman."

By this time, she had pretty much been struck speechless. Kurt was proud of himself. *All right, Kurt, you got this. Keep up the bitchiness, maybe shock her with a little more of your brilliance, and you're golden.*

"You have to take into account the time at which the Bible was written," he told her. "The book is millenia old. There are passages in there that condemn playing football, getting bowl haircuts, wearing gold jewelry. People saw things very differently back then."

Kurt had to bite his lip to hide a smile as Lorraine scrambled for an argument. He only wished Blaine could have seen him going at this. Kurt couldn't lie, he would have made one hell of a lawyer himself. Too bad Blaine couldn't have come into town a day earlier.

"Personally, I just don't see it as right," she said finally. "I don't think my daughter needs to be exposed to it."

"And why not?" Kurt asked in response. "Children are exposed to heterosexual mother-father relationships from *birth*. What's wrong with letting them see that healthy relationships with two same-sex partners are perfectly okay, too? If anything, it teaches them to be tolerant and accepting from an early age, which is obviously something *you* never learned."

He said that last part without even thinking, but just brushed it off even after he realized what he'd said. Lorraine, however, seemed quite offended.

"Mr. Hummel, I'm going to have to ask you to leave," she said through gritted teeth. "I'm not allowing Claire to spend time with your daughter any more, and that's final."

Kurt rose from the table with perfect poise. "Think about what you're doing," he told her. "You are putting your own outdated beliefs before your own daughter's happiness."

He felt Lorraine's eyes staring after him in stunned silence as he strode out of the kitchen and out the front door with his head held just as high as when he'd first arrived. She hadn't won, despite what she may have thought. And unless she made some serious changes to her attitude, Kurt wasn't so sure he wanted Ellie being influenced by someone so rude and intolerant, anyway. He was perfectly fine with the decision, now that he thought about it. Lorraine had gotten her way, but she hadn't won. Not by a long shot.

It would take a hell of a lot more than homophobia to break Kurt Hummel.

...

Blaine liked his apartment. The seventy-five-year-old building sat on the very fringes of downtown Chicago and was the perfect balance between traditional glamour and modern elegance. Blaine lived on the twentieth floor, in one of the building's larger three-bedroom apartments. He lived alone, so he really had no use for the remaining two bedrooms, but he'd chosen this one specifically for its long balcony with French doors that led out from the master bedroom, overlooking peaceful Lake Michigan.

It was on this balcony where he now stood, staring out over the calm water and the dark nighttime sky. He could never see any stars from where he lived. The glaring lights of the city drowned them all out. Still, that didn't detract from the fact that this balcony was Blaine's favorite place in the world. On the other three sides of the apartment building, the noises of the city bustled in full force, but on this side, there was nothing but the calm tranquility of the lake. He could barely even hear the sounds of the city.

He was thinking about anything and everything that happened to cross his mind. The Emily Jade case. Gay rights in general. Proposition 21. The fact that if it passed, he would be legally able to marry another man. Who would he marry, anyway? Blaine really liked Derek - he was a great guy, and Blaine cared about him a lot - but try as he might, he had difficulty imagining their wedding.

Then, from there, he somehow started thinking about Kurt. He was seeing Kurt tomorrow for the first time in six months, and he was elated. Blaine could hardly wait to get to the Lima Bean and meet up with Kurt and get coffee and see his smile and just *talk* to him. He knew their conversation would probably drag on and last for hours - after all, they had a lot of catching up to do - but Blaine didn't mind that at all. For those hours, he would have Kurt all to himself.

And that last thought sounded a little more sexual than Blaine had intended, which was probably a sign that he should get some sleep. He stepped back into his bedroom and closed the French doors behind him. After checking to make sure that his alarm clock was set for five thirty a.m. - he wanted to get out on the road early to beat traffic - he flicked off the lamp on his bedside table and crawled into bed. Since it had been a long day and he was exhausted, he fell asleep in no time.

In his dream, Blaine was in a church. Some warily conscious part of his brain told him that there was only one possible situation this could depict, but he still couldn't wake up. In the pews ahead of him, hundreds of familiar faces smiled back at him as he began to walk down the center aisle.

He glanced down at himself and noticed that he was decked out in a tuxedo. He could feel his own hands sweating, even though he knew it was just a dream.

Okay, so he was getting married. No big deal. He'd just been thinking about this and the whole Prop 21 thing before going to sleep, that was all. The other groom, the person Blaine presumed he was going to marry, was standing at the end of the aisle with his back to Blaine. He couldn't see his face, obviously, but from the back, he looked like Derek.

But the closer Blaine got to him, the more he realized that the other man was too slender to be Derek. Also, his hair was brown instead of blonde. And Derek could never coif his hair that perfectly.

Once at the end of the aisle, Blaine reached out and grabbed the other man's hand. The skin was unbelievably soft from years of adhering to a strict moisturizing routine. Blaine choked on a breath.

Finally, the other man turned to face him as Blaine stepped into place at his side. The beautiful smile and excited sparkle in his gorgeous eyes were unmistakable, and Blaine stopped cold.

"This is unbelievable, Blaine," Kurt breathed. "I'm finally going to be your husband."

And that's when he woke up.

Blaine sat up with a start and immediately pressed both hands against his face in shame. This was so wrong. He had to *stop* thinking about Kurt like that. Kurt was his best friend, and that was all he was ever going to be. Yes, he was beautiful, but Blaine needed to accept the fact that Kurt was in love with someone else and move on.

Plus, there was also that little fact of the matter named Derek. Blaine couldn't just *leave* him. How cruel would that be?

He sighed and glanced at the clock. 4:57 a.m. So there was really no point in going back to sleep, he decided. He thought for a sleepy moment about calling Kurt to tell him he was getting on the road earlier than he'd planned, but immediately decided against it. Even though Ohio time was an hour ahead, Kurt was still probably asleep. In his bed. With Dave. Down the hall, his daughter was peacefully sleeping as well. Kurt had a family. Blaine had to consider that, as well.

It was tough, but he managed to push all more-than-platonic thoughts of Kurt from his mind as he took a quick shower and got dressed and ready for the day. It would be a fun trip, he decided. Coffee with Kurt, quality time with Kurt and his family, and dinner with his parents. Blaine hadn't seen them in six months, either.

He must have been in some kind of trance, because once he was ready, he couldn't even remember how he'd gotten to that point. He must have showered and gotten dressed and brushed his teeth, but he couldn't recall any of it. No matter. At five thirty on the dot, he grabbed his keys and the small suitcase he was taking with him and headed out the door.

...

Kurt smiled to himself as his eyes drifted open the next morning. It was Saturday. He was going to see Blaine. He would have been lying to himself if he'd said that he hadn't been anticipating this day ever since Blaine had first moved to Chicago...because Blaine was his best friend. Kurt loved that he could think that unabashedly, because it was true. He trusted Blaine more than anybody else in the world...maybe even more than Dave.

That was one thing he would never admit out loud.

Plus, Kurt realized happily as he glanced at the clock and stretched his arms lazily over his head, it was ten thirty. He couldn't remember the last time he'd slept in so late, but he felt amazingly well rested.

He got up out of bed and made his way out to the kitchen, where Dave and Ellie were unloading the contents of several plastic grocery bags onto the counter.

"Good morning," Dave said with a smile, greeting Kurt with a kiss on the cheek. "Ellie and I just ran to the grocery store, we thought we'd pick up a few things before your friend came over this afternoon."

"Oh, thank you." Kurt returned his smile and reached for a bag so he could help unload. "And thanks for letting me sleep in, too. That was nice."

"You work hard. You deserve it," Dave told him as he pulled a six pack of Budweiser out of one of the bags and set it on the kitchen table.

Kurt's jaw dropped when he saw the beer, and his good mood was instantly gone. "No, Dave." He glanced around to see where Ellie was and noticed that she had left the kitchen now that all the bags were empty. That was good. She didn't need to see or hear this inevitable conflict.

"What?" Dave didn't seem to find anything wrong with what he'd bought. "There's six in there. Two for me, two for Blaine, two for you."

Kurt narrowed his eyes. "You know I don't drink."

"Just trying to be courteous in case you decided you wanted some," Dave said with a shrug. "I thought I'd splurge on some booze since we're having company."

Kurt blinked quickly a few times. He couldn't believe Dave was doing this to him.

"You know how I feel about you drinking," he whispered, looking straight into Dave's eyes so he knew he was serious. "Especially after what happened last time."

"I didn't drink last time. I was the designated driver, remember?"

"You know what I mean."

"Kurt, I said I was sorry..."

Kurt didn't let his stare waver as he tugged down the collar of the nondescript white undershirt he'd slept in to reveal his left shoulder. On his back, right above the shoulder blade, a yellowing bruise marred his otherwise perfect pale skin.

"I still have a bruise from last time," he whispered, but his voice was strong.

Dave blinked as he stared at Kurt's shoulder and stepped forward to reach for the smaller man and pull him into an embrace. "Kurt, I'm so sorry," he pleaded. "I-I'll never hurt you again. I swear, Kurt. *Never*."

"I have to go get dressed," was all Kurt said as he readjusted his shirt to hide the bruise. He turned and walked out of the kitchen, with Dave staring remorsefully after him.

...

Blaine had just arrived at the Lima Bean, taken a seat, and was about to text Kurt and tell him, but he didn't even have time to do so. As he was reaching into his pocket to pull out his phone, the door swung open and in he stepped.

Kurt was dressed in a knee-length black coat and jeans that hugged his long legs in all the right places. A simple yet stylish cream-colored scarf was draped around his neck. But Blaine immediately stopped paying attention to his clothes when he really got a good look at *him*. Kurt's cheeks were flushed and red from the cold February air, his hair looked perfect - no surprise there - and his entire face lit up when he caught sight of Blaine.

Blaine didn't even say anything as he stood up from his table and paced quickly over towards Kurt. As soon as he was close enough, he reached out and pulled Kurt into a bone-crushing hug that elicited an eruption of giggles from the smaller man. Upon hearing him laugh, Blaine only held him tighter. He'd missed that sound so much.

"Hi," Kurt said breathlessly once they pulled away from the hug. His smile seemed even bigger, if that were possible. He was absolutely glowing.

"Hi," Blaine said, feeling an equally large smile taking over his own face. Then, because he'd decided there was nothing wrong with a little shameless gushing, "You look *amazing*."

"Thank you," Kurt giggled, and he may have been blushing, but it was hard to tell when his cheeks were already pink. "So do you." He sighed happily and his hands somehow found their way to Blaine's. "It's so nice to see you again."

All Kurt did was give Blaine's hands a gentle squeeze, and he was wearing gloves so there was no direct skin-to-skin contact, but Blaine still felt a chill rush down his spine.

"You too," he told Kurt as the two of them stepped into place at the back of the line. "I have so much to tell you. We've got a *lot* of catching up to do."

They got their coffee, found a table, and immediately began catching up on every single aspect of each other's lives over the past six months. Blaine gave Kurt a brief rundown of some of the cases he'd argued, including the new Emily Jade case. Kurt seemed especially interested in that one and even offered some insight of his own.

"I had a friend in high school," he told Blaine after hearing about the facts of the case, thoughtfully reminiscing. "Artie Abrams. You remember him?"

Blaine had to think for a moment, but he nodded. "I think so. Glasses, wheelchair, had a thing for sweater vests?"

"Yeah, exactly," Kurt said. "Anyway. He was on the football team for a while. He was pretty good, too. Seeing him play, that was the moment when I realized that being handicapped doesn't mean you can't do the same things as everyone else." He smiled. "If they try to play the handicapped card and say that *that's* the reason they didn't give her the job, feel free to use that as an example."

"Thanks," Blaine told him, "but I think it might be a combination of that *and* the lesbian thing. I honestly don't know. I won't find out their motives until I cross-examine them in court."

"Whatever you find out, I know you're going to win," Kurt said. "Their entire side of the case seems illogical. If she's qualified, she should have gotten the job, fair and square. And she *will* get it eventually, I'm sure of it. I'm sure the other guy they hired doesn't need it as badly as she does, anyway."

"Yeah, but here's the thing. Now that he has the job, they can't just fire him and give it to her. That would be just as unconstitutional, and then *he* would be able to file a counterclaim and everything would just get

ugly," Blaine explained, rolling his eyes. "You're right, though. They really have no logical argument. I'm feeling pretty confident about this case."

Kurt smiled and sipped his macchiato. "Oh, I *know* you're going to win. You're an *amazing* lawyer, Blaine. You are the Peter Keating of the legal business."

Blaine blinked. "The *who*?"

Kurt made a face. "Really? I can't believe *you* of all people haven't read the *Fountainhead*. You need to read it. It's a fantastic book."

"I don't get to read as much as I'd like to anymore," Blaine admitted with a sigh. "And now that I'm hired for this case, I'm gonna be at court most days now, and that's always pretty time consuming."

Kurt gave him a wry smile. "Look at it this way," he told him. "With this case, you'll be sacrificing your own time to fight against homophobia. This is going to be a *huge* case for you, I can feel it. Plus, isn't there that amendment that people are going to be voting on in a few months? The one that would legalize gay marriage?"

Blaine nodded. "Proposition 21," he said, trying not to think of the dream he'd had last night. "Yeah, you're right. With that coming up in a few months, and this case...I feel like we're looking at a real revolution within the gay community."

"I think you're right," Kurt agreed with that gorgeous smile that Blaine loved. "It's going to be one of those landmark cases that defines the American legal system. Some day, high school history students will be forced to describe the significance of it and memorize your name."

Blaine rolled his eyes. "I don't know about that," he confessed. "Let's just see where I can take it."

He wouldn't know it for months, or maybe even years, to come, but they were both right. The revolution Blaine had spoken of was beginning already, having taken root in the midst of a coffee shop discussion between two friends.

...

Kurt was amazed that he'd been able to keep his cool throughout their entire coffee outing. Blaine was even more handsome, dapper and charming than he'd remembered. He hadn't missed the fact that his heart had begun pounding uncontrollably when Blaine hugged him. Kurt wasn't quite sure what that meant; all he knew was that it felt amazing to finally be spending time with him again.

After a long discussion, they'd finally decided to head back to Kurt's apartment so Blaine could say hello to Dave and Ellie before meeting up with his parents for dinner. Since the Lima Bean was in Lima (obviously) and Kurt lived in suburban Columbus, they'd decided that it would be easier if Blaine just followed Kurt there, so Kurt wouldn't have to drive him all the way back to pick up his car.

Driving alone gave him some time to think, and of course most of his thoughts were of Blaine. Try as he might, Kurt simply couldn't stop thinking about him. And whenever he *did* manage to drive Blaine from his mind for a little while, he would eventually have to glance in the rearview mirror, and there he was, keeping his car right behind Kurt's the entire time.

At long last, they reached the apartment. As soon as they entered, Ellie came running to greet them. She gave Kurt a hug first, then Blaine. Dave hung back a little bit and greeted Blaine with a casual handshake once Ellie let go of him.

"Would you like something to drink?" Dave offered, playing the perfect host. "We've got pop, lemonade, tea...I even went out and got some beer, if you want." He laughed. Kurt gave him his trademark death stare.

Thankfully Blaine said, "Oh, no thank you."

Kurt kept his eyes on Dave, telling him wordlessly that there was no reason he needed to take a beer for himself. Dave seemed to understand, but that didn't stop him from grabbing onto Kurt's arm as they were making their way out into the living room and growling, "I need to talk to you."

Blaine hadn't heard, so Kurt called out to his daughter to help create a diversion. "Ellie, why don't you go show Blaine your new Barbie playhouse? Papa and I will be right with you guys."

Ellie didn't seem to have a problem with this. As she grabbed his hand and started to pull him away, Blaine flashed Kurt a tiny smile.

Just give us a moment, Kurt mouthed back.

As soon as they were out of earshot, Dave turned to Kurt with dark, angry eyes. "You know I don't like him being here," he said in a low voice.

"He's not staying long," Kurt countered. "It's only three thirty. He's meeting up with his parents for dinner at five."

"I *said*," Dave repeated, "I *don't* like him being here. He's already coming onto you, and quite frankly, I think you're doing the same to him."

Kurt's heart picked up pace. "How so?"

"I'm not *stupid*," Dave sneered. "I can see the way you're smiling at each other. The way you look at each other and flirt with your eyes. I can see it. How do you think that makes *me* feel?"

He moved in closer to Kurt, backing him up against the refrigerator.

"Dave, you're scaring me," Kurt whispered. "How much did you have to drink?"

"That's not the point," Dave spat.

"How *much*," Kurt insisted, "did you have to drink?"

Dave's face was growing red with rage. "One beer," he grunted.

"Dave, you can't do that. You and I both know you don't have a very good alcohol tolerance," Kurt managed to squeak out.

This was not what Dave wanted to hear. He reached out, grabbed the fabric at the front of Kurt's sweater and held him up against the cool metal refrigerator door.

"Listen to me," he growled. "I drink *what* I want, *when* I want, and you don't get any say in that. Do you understand me?"

Kurt didn't want to fight anymore. It didn't seem appropriate when they had company over.

"Yes," he whispered.

"Good." Dave dropped him back down to his feet. "Now I suppose we should go entertain our guest."

...

For the duration of Blaine's visit, Kurt tried his best to put on a happy face. In reality, though, the happiest moment of the afternoon didn't come until he'd left the apartment with Blaine to walk him out to his car. It was quarter til five, but being winter still, the sun was already starting to set and turn the sky the faintest hint of orange. When Kurt stepped outside into the parking lot with Blaine, he felt the cold air on his face bringing with it a sense of relief.

When they reached Blaine's car, Kurt stopped and smiled at him. "Thank you so much for spending the day with me. It really was a pleasure to see you again."

"I can say the same to you," Blaine responded humbly, and took Kurt into his arms for one more hug.

Kurt latched his arms around Blaine's neck and melted into the embrace. He felt so safe in Blaine's arms, especially after the confrontation with Dave in the kitchen earlier this afternoon. There was nowhere else he would have rather been in that moment. It almost seemed too perfect to be true.

Which of course meant that it was.

"Kurt Hummel, what the hell do you think you're doing?"

The sound of Dave's booming voice shook Kurt to the core. He immediately extracted himself from Blaine's hug and turned around to see Dave standing a few cars away, keys poised to unlock his F-150.

"I'm giving my friend a hug goodbye," Kurt countered evenly. "What the hell do you think *you're* doing?"

"Going out to the bar," Dave grumbled loudly enough for both Kurt and Blaine to hear. "If you're allowed to go out and have fun with your friends, so am I."

"Dave, *stop* it." Kurt stormed over towards Dave's truck. Blaine took a few awkward steps after him, not sure if he should say anything.

"Stop what?" Dave asked in response.

"You are embarrassing me," Kurt hissed. "Where's Ellie?"

"She's in the apartment. I didn't think you'd be long."

"Dave are you an *idiot*? You can't just leave our six-year-old daughter up there by *herself*." Kurt turned to Blaine. "I am so, so, *so* sorry. I...I can't even explain how embarrassed I am."

"It's not your fault," Blaine told him reassuringly.

Kurt sighed. "No, it's just that he was incredibly rude to you and I feel terrible." As he spoke, Dave backed out of his parking space and zoomed out of the lot, nearly sideswiping the two of them and causing them to jump to the side. Once he was gone, Kurt turned back to Blaine with a look of pure agony on his face.

"I have to go. Ellie's in there by herself..."

"I understand," Blaine reassured him. "It was nice seeing you."

"Bye." Kurt gave him one more quick hug before dashing back into the apartment building, never once looking back over his shoulder.

Ellie was perfectly fine, to his immense relief. After checking up on her and ensuring himself that she was content for the moment, playing with her Barbie dolls, Kurt returned to the kitchen. He had some business to take care of.

Sure enough, only one bottle was gone from the six pack of beer Dave had bought. Kurt took the remaining five out of the fridge and set them on the counter by the sink.

There was really no reason to do this, he told himself. Dave was going out to drink anyway, and when he returned, there was no doubt in his mind that he would get hurt again. But doing this brought Kurt a slight edge of satisfaction, so he proceeded.

One at a time, he unscrewed the cap from each bottle of beer with the bottle opener he'd fished out of the back of the utensil drawer. One at a time, he poured each one down the drain.

...

Blaine had an enjoyable dinner with his parents at their favorite local seafood restaurant. They asked him lots of questions about Derek and Chicago and life as a lawyer at the most powerful firm in the Windy City. He answered them all gracefully and even babbled for a little bit about the Emily Jade case. They seemed particularly interested in that, like Kurt had been.

Kurt. Of course. Now that Blaine was thinking about him, he couldn't get him off his mind. He thought back briefly to the confrontation with Dave in the parking lot and hoped that it had all just been a jealous lover's quarrel, nothing more. He hoped that Dave had come to his senses and returned home to Kurt with regret, begging for forgiveness. He hoped Kurt had forgiven him and they'd gone on with their lives as the happy family that they were.

Blaine didn't know that Dave had come home late that night, piss drunk. He didn't know about the bruise Kurt had on the back of his shoulder. He didn't know that after tonight, Kurt would have more bruises that expanded over more of his body. He didn't know that Dave would scream at Kurt, telling him that he had no right to invite another man into their home, that Kurt was *his* and that Blaine would just need to accept that.

He didn't know that Kurt would be reduced to tears, and so would Ellie. He didn't know that Kurt would grab Ellie and lock the two of them inside her room, barricading the door before huddling together on her Disney Princesses comforter, both of them attempting to stop their tears. He didn't know that Kurt would reassure his daughter countless times that night, even through the tears that coated his own face, that he would never let anything happen to her, and that Daddy would keep her safe.

Blaine didn't know any of that. All he could think about was the happy glow that had lit up Kurt's face when he stepped into the coffee shop that glorious afternoon.

Chapter Four

"What's this?"

Dave stared at the stapled packet of paper that Kurt had slammed down onto the kitchen table in front of him. It was Sunday afternoon, Ellie was at one of her friends' birthday parties, and Kurt had apparently decided to take advantage of this time alone to have a serious discussion.

"We need to talk." Yep, here it was.

Dave picked up the papers and stared them over, unable to make out a single word on the page. He was hung over as fuck, and his vision was blurry beyond belief. Thankfully Kurt jumped in to help him out, although not without his signature bitchiness.

"I printed out some information on Alcoholics Anonymous," he snapped. "What happened last night was unacceptable, Dave. You *need* to get help."

Dave squinted at the papers. "I'm not an alcoholic," he mumbled.

"Maybe not yet, you're not addicted, but you have a problem. You have mood swings, you're rude, you're violent. I don't want to get hurt anymore, and I don't want Ellie to have to be around you when you're like that."

Dave pressed the heels of his palms into his eye sockets. "Kurt, can we talk about this later? I don't feel good at all."

"That's because you're hung over," Kurt stated this as if it were the most obvious thing in the world as he reached out and flipped back the first page of the packet. "And no. We can't. This can't wait any longer. Here," he said, pointing to a paragraph halfway down the page, "there's a meeting on Monday night at 7 o'clock. That's tomorrow. Are you working late?"

Dave sighed. He wasn't, but he considered lying and saying that he was, because he really fucking didn't want to go. But that would just make things worse, and Kurt would probably find out anyway.

"No, I'm not." He couldn't lie to Kurt.

But you already have, the annoying voice in the back of his head reminded him. You told him you'd never hurt him again. You promised him. You need to go to AA.

"Great." Kurt smiled wryly and flipped the front page of the packet back over to the front. "We're going."

"Okay," Dave said quietly. A few seconds of silence hung in the air between them, because Dave knew Kurt could sense there was more that he wanted to say.

"Kurt?"

"Yes, Dave?"

"I really am sorry about last night."

Kurt stared at him straight on and lifted his chin slightly. "You should be."

That was one of the things Dave loved most about Kurt. He wasn't afraid to say what needed to be said. The word *tact* was not in his vocabulary.

Dave attempted a smile. "T-thanks for doing this for me."

They stared at each other from across the kitchen for a few moments, neither of them saying a word. Dave took a few seconds to study Kurt's expression. His beautiful eyes looked sad. Dave immediately hated himself that *he* had to have been the one to do this to Kurt. He knew he needed help.

"I want to help you," Kurt said softly.

He turned around and left the kitchen, leaving Dave lost in his own remorse.

...

Blaine woke up Monday morning to dreary, damp rain. Right away, he could tell that this would be a long, slow day, especially if this downpour kept up. He'd driven home to Chicago yesterday afternoon, and the weather had been absolutely perfect until he hit a torrential thunderstorm in Gary, Indiana. The storm had seemed to follow his car into Chicago, where it - or the rain, at least - had remained for the entire rest of the day and into this next morning, too.

He lethargically made his way out to the kitchen and grabbed a Pop-Tart out of the box in the cabinet, not really in the mood for a real breakfast today. He wished he could have stayed down in Ohio for another day, maybe gotten together for lunch with Kurt or something, but he couldn't afford to miss work with this big trial coming up. Emily would be calling soon to let him know what their court date was.

After eating half of the Pop-Tart, brushing his teeth and getting dressed, Blaine was out the door. Since he hadn't taken the time to eat much, he had a little extra time. He decided to stop at the Barnes & Noble on the corner of State and Elm to buy himself a cup of coffee, and maybe some reading material.

It must have been a slow morning for the rest of Chicago as well, because there was virtually nobody in the bookstore. Blaine parked his car and went inside; he came out just ten minutes later with a Starbucks decaf, today's issue of the *Tribune* and a copy of *The Fountainhead*.

When he got to the firm, there was already a message waiting for him on the answering machine in his office. Blaine set his things down on the desk and settled in his chair without even taking his coat off as he pressed Play on the machine.

"Hi Blaine, it's Emily," his new client's prerecorded voice said. "Just wanted to let you know that I took the summons to the courthouse clerk, and they got me all set up with a date...the trial starts Monday the seventeenth at ten a.m. I think we might need to be at the courthouse a little bit early, but I'm not sure yet...I'll let you know if I find anything out." There was a pause. "Thank you again for doing this for me. I appreciate it so much, and I know my son does too, even if he's too young to really understand." She giggled. "Anyway. I'll see you on the seventeenth. Bye."

Blaine slipped his coat off and hung it up on the hook behind his desk, then typed the court date into his computer desktop calendar. He supposed he could get a head start on writing his opening remarks, but decided it was a lazy, rainy day so he really didn't feel like doing anything productive. He flipped open the newspaper and skimmed through it, getting caught up on what had happened here in Chicago while he was gone over the weekend.

It wasn't until he'd flipped to the classifieds page, though, that anything really caught his eye. A large ad in the bottom left-hand corner, composed of black lettering against a striped rainbow background, immediately drew his attention.

SUPPORT GAY MARRIAGE IN ILLINOIS

PROP 21 RALLY

FRIDAY, FEB 14 4PM

GRANT PARK AMPHITHEATER

Well, Blaine thought, it seemed a little ridiculous to hold an outdoor political rally in February in Chicago, but it sounded interesting. He might just have to go to that. Maybe Derek could go with him if he wasn't sleeping off his jet lag; he was supposed to be getting back from London on the thirteenth.

Blaine clicked back over to the calendar on his computer and entered the information about the rally into the little box for February 14. Then he minimized the calendar and picked up *The Fountainhead*, in which he got lost for the next few hours.

...

Kurt,

Just wanted to thank you again for such a nice weekend. I had a great time with you and your family...it was so neat to see Ellie again! She looks so different than even the last time I saw her which was just a few months ago haha. It was really cool spending time with you guys :)

Emily called me back. I'm taking the case to trial next Monday; I'm also going to a support rally for Prop 21 this Friday. It's kind of surreal, because I keep thinking about our conversation at the Lima Bean and how you said this whole thing was going to be historical. I think you're right. Everything seems so exciting already, even though nothing's really happened yet. It'll be neat to see what happens on Friday - I've never been to a political rally before, and maybe I could quote some of the keynote speakers in my opening statement for the court case.

I've been reading The Fountainhead all afternoon. It is fantastic. However, I think I have to disagree with what you said about me being similar to Peter Keating (aside from the obvious fact that I'm a lawyer and he's an architect). Keating's too much of a conformist. He lives to please the masses. I think I'm more like Howard Roark. He doesn't really seem to care what anybody thinks, and he doesn't compromise his vision. Dude is a boss.

But anyway. I'm like 100 pages into it and I haven't been able to put it down. Thanks for telling me about it :D

So yeah, the point of me saying all this is just to let you know that I really enjoyed getting to see you again. I'd love to have you and your family come up and visit sometime, maybe in the summer when you and Ellie are done with school? We could go up to the top of Sears Tower or the Hancock Building, and see the Bean in Millenium Park, and go out to lunch at one of the cute little boardwalk restaurants on Navy Pier. And of course, I need to take you shopping on Michigan Avenue. You would LOVE Chicago.

Hope to see you again soon.

Blaine :)

Kurt had the most ridiculous smile on his face as he read Blaine's email that afternoon, but he was in the privacy of his classroom so he decided he didn't care. Today had been a significant improvement over Saturday night and yesterday. Going to work had helped, because he loved every second of teaching. The fact that he'd finished his after-school preparations early didn't hurt, either. It wasn't even three thirty but he was just about to head out to the playground to pick up Ellie; usually he didn't finish getting things ready for the next day until at least four. He had to take Dave to that AA meeting tonight, but he knew that would be a good thing, too. It was going to help him, right?

Okay, and the best part of his day had been seeing Blaine's name in his email inbox just a few minutes ago. Kurt decided that he was running early anyway; he could send a quick reply before he left.

He glanced at the time the message had been sent: 1:38 pm. That meant 12:38 pm Chicago time. Kurt hoped Blaine wouldn't think he was weird for replying within two hours, but he was so excited, he *had* to write back right away.

It was great seeing you, too. I would be lying if I said I didn't miss you. :) I know Ellie really enjoyed spending time with you, too, and once again I will apologize for Dave's rude behavior in the parking lot as you were leaving. He'd had a beer that afternoon, I guess, and he's a completely different person when he's been drinking. His jealous streak is very prevalent, I'll just say that.

Not that he has anything to be jealous of, I mean. You're my absolute best friend in the entire world, but I guess he assumes there's something even more between us. He doesn't seem to understand that I'm allowed to have other male friends who happen to be gay. I'm horribly embarrassed by the way he treated you. I will make sure that doesn't happen again.

I knew I was right, I always am. ;) I can't tell you how excited I am for you. I almost wish I lived in Illinois so I could see this happening firsthand. This trial and the whole Prop 21 thing, and the fact that they're both happening at the same time...it has to mean something. I may not be very religious, but I honestly believe that some higher being planned for this to happen together. It's like someone's trying to tell the world that there's no room for intolerance anymore.

I'm probably over-thinking this way too much. Am I? You can totally say "Kurt, stop freaking out, it's just a coincidence." I'll understand.

I see you being as more like Keating in the professional sense. You've already established yourself as one of the best in your profession at such a young age, you're well-known and everybody likes you, you're handsome and suave and dapper and pretty much just an all-around good guy. I could see some of Roark in you, though. You've never given a damn about what anybody thinks. You're like the happy medium between those two characters, I guess. I'm glad you like the book, though. I knew you would. You're probably one of only a handful of people in the world smart enough to understand it and grasp the concept of Ayn Rand's complex Objectivist philosophy.

Oh my gosh, that all sounds like so much fun! I'm going to leave right now and come drive up to Chicago to see you so we can do all that stuff. Okay? Cool. :) Actually, I'm joking, but I'd love to come visit you this summer, and I'm sure Dave and Ellie would, too. And the part about you and I going shopping? Yeah, that needs to happen. ;)

Thanks again for coming down to visit. Seeing you was quite honestly the best part of my weekend. Good luck with all your legal and political endeavors.

Kurt :)

He pressed Send without even really thinking. Maybe he shouldn't have hinted towards Dave's problems, and maybe he shouldn't have seemed quite so enthusiastic about seeing Blaine again. But he really didn't care about that right now. He was too happy to really be paying much attention to things like that.

Kurt shut down his computer and gathered up his things. He flicked off the light on his way out the door and made his way out to the doors that exited the building closest to the playground. This hallway was usually empty when he left at the end of his school day, but today there was a little girl standing alone, staring sadly out at the rest of the kids on the playground.

He took a few steps closer and immediately recognized her as Claire Johnson. At first he wasn't sure if he should say something to her, but decided that ignoring her was a bad idea. She obviously seemed upset. Plus, her mother wasn't here, so...

"Hi, Claire. How come you're not outside with the rest of the kids?"

She turned away from the full length glass door. "Hi, Mr. Hummel," she said quietly. "My mommy doesn't want me playing with Ellie anymore, so I have to stay in here until she comes to pick me up."

Kurt didn't really know what to say to that, so he simply responded with, "We missed you in music today." Her mother apparently hadn't been kidding when she'd said she was going to call the principal and request that Claire be exempt from taking Kurt's music class. She hadn't been there today.

Claire didn't say anything, just kept staring forlornly out at the rest of the kids on the playground. For a second, Kurt thought maybe he'd made her more upset with what he'd said. He was about to apologize and walk away, but then she turned around.

"Mr. Hummel?"

"Yes, Claire?"

"My mommy says you're sick in the head, but you seem okay to me."

And if that wasn't enough to make Kurt's heart absolutely melt, she stepped forward and wrapped her tiny arms around his waist for a hug.

Kurt hugged her back to the best of his ability, considering how much smaller she was than him. When he spoke, his voice was a strained whisper. "Thank you."

She let him go after a few seconds; Kurt cleared his throat and managed to blink away the uncried tears that had been pooling up in his eyes. He smiled at her. "Do you want me to wait here with you until your mom comes, so you don't have to be by yourself?"

Claire shook her head. "No thanks. I'm not supposed to talk to you. But I wanted to tell you that I don't think you're sick. She'll be mad if she sees you with me."

"Okay. I don't want you to get in trouble," Kurt said, starting for the door. "Bye, sweetie."

"Bye, Mr. Hummel." She smiled a little bit and waved after him.

Kurt stepped outside and waved over to Ellie on the swing set to let her know it was time to go. As usual, she came running towards him along with a deluge of other kids who wanted to give him a hug or babble excitedly. As usual it took him a few minutes to shake them all free, but he did so with an apologetic smile as he told them he had to get home and he'd see them all tomorrow.

"We get to go home early!" Ellie said cheerfully as they made their way to Kurt's car.

"Yep, we do," Kurt agreed. "I finished getting my classroom ready for tomorrow earlier than I usually do. Want to go get ice cream?"

"Sure!" Ellie seemed to enjoy this idea.

Kurt smiled as he pressed the Unlock button on his key, but then squinted in confusion at the driver's side door as they approached. Something looked funny about it...like there was something carved into the paint.

As they got closer to the car, Kurt almost stopped cold as he realized he wasn't seeing things. Sure enough, there was something on the door.

Someone had keyed his car. Three letters, right on the driver's side door.

Ellie hadn't noticed it yet. Kurt immediately started leading her around to the other side of the car and opened the back door behind the passenger seat so she wouldn't notice it. Unfortunately, she'd seen and heard that word before, and Kurt knew it, but he also knew she would have been very upset if she saw it keyed into his car.

Once Ellie was situated in the backseat, Kurt walked around the car practically in a trance. Before opening his own door, he took a moment to stare down at the word that was there, clear as day now.

FAG.

The handwriting seemed crude; Kurt couldn't place it, but then again he assumed that words scratched into the side of a car would probably not be in a person's usual penmanship. He stared at those three letters for a second, wondering who in the world could have possibly been able to do this on school grounds without being caught. The three letters stared back at him, trying to mock him, but Kurt didn't dare shed a tear. He wanted to, but he didn't.

He thought for a moment about little Claire Johnson, standing alone in the hallway, waiting for her mother. Kurt found it amazing that a six-year-old girl, who still knew so little about the world, could tell right from wrong and know that being gay was *not* wrong. On the other hand there were people like her mother and the person who had done this to his car, who were still struggling with differentiating between the two.

Still, though, he couldn't drive around like this. He thought for a moment about going out to buy some paint buffer, but decided against it. He knew someplace where he could get it for free - plus, he decided, he really needed to stop by and see his dad.

"I don't think we'll be able to get ice cream," Kurt told Ellie apologetically as he got in the car. "There's a big scratch on my car. I need to go stop by Grandpa Burt's car garage and see if he'll let me borrow some paint buffer, okay?"

"Okay," Ellie said. "It'll be cool to see Grandpa, though."

"Yeah," Kurt said softly, hating himself for being too afraid to tell his daughter the truth. "It will."

...

There were a lot of things about Kurt's email that stood out to Blaine, but only one thing that legitimately worried him. There was Kurt's liberal use of smileys and winking faces. His enthusiasm about...everything, particularly the concept of coming to Chicago. The short paragraph in which he detailed Dave's "jealous streak" that was apparently prevalent when he'd been drinking.

That was what got Blaine worried.

He started thinking back to the confrontation in the parking lot. Dave had been on his way to the bar. If he'd been that angry after just one beer, Blaine couldn't even imagine what he must be like after a full night of drinking.

Blaine prayed that Dave hadn't done anything drastic when he came home to Kurt that evening. Kurt hadn't mentioned anything about that, but that's not to say nothing happened. Now Blaine was *really* starting to worry.

He checked the time: almost three. Kurt would probably be done with work by now, since Ohio was an hour ahead. His fingers pulled his phone out of his pocket and dialed the number they knew by heart without Blaine himself really noticing. He was in too much of a state of worry.

Straight to voicemail. Of course.

"Hi, you've reached Kurt Hummel!" Kurt's prerecorded voice chirped. "Please leave a message after the beep and I'll get back to you as soon as I can! Thanks!" *Beep.*

"Kurt, hi, it's Blaine," he started to say breathlessly. "Listen, I need you to call me back. Y-your email has me a little worried. I just want to make sure everything's okay." He sighed. "Look, maybe I'm overreacting, but *please* call me back and reassure me when you get a chance."

Blaine paused for a moment before continuing. "I-I really care about you, Kurt," he said softly. "If you need *anything*, I'll always be here for you. Please know that. Okay. I'm just really worried about you. Call me back. Bye."

He ended the call and slid his phone back in his pocket, then closed his eyes. Who knew. Maybe he *was* overreacting.

But was it fair to call it "overreacting" when his best friend was possibly in danger?

...

At sixty-three, Burt Hummel was still making a good living for himself as owner and manager of Hummel Tires and Lube. He didn't do as much physical work on the cars anymore, but occasionally he would step out of his office and go out to the garage to help out the mechanics. Today was one of those days.

He was just closing the hood of a silver Honda Civic when suddenly he caught sight of the headlights of another car approaching the next vacant space in the garage. Burt stepped out of the way so the car could get through, assuming at first it was just one of the mechanics driving it over here to work on it, but as the car got closer, he immediately knew who it was.

It was Kurt in that damn Corvette. Burt had urged him not to buy such a flashy car, but Kurt hadn't listened and had gone and splurged on it, anyway. His son gave him a little wave as he pulled the car up next to the Civic and turned off the engine.

"Hey, kiddo!" Burt greeted his son with a hug as he stepped out of the car. "Nice of you to drop by. Where's my granddaughter?" Ellie had been his first grandchild, and Burt adored that little girl. She was like Kurt in so many ways. Her eyes that seemed to change color from blue to gray to green, the way she sometimes smiled with her mouth closed and didn't show any teeth, her overall cheerfulness. Ellie was so much like Kurt, and Kurt was so much like his mother.

"Oh, she's in the car." Kurt glanced back towards the Corvette. Ellie waved and called, "Hi, Grandpa!" through her open window. Burt smiled and waved back at her.

"We won't be long, so I didn't want to have to make her get out," Kurt was saying. "I just need some paint buffer. T-there's a s-scratch on the door."

Burt thought maybe Kurt seemed a little uneasy, but didn't say anything. He turned around to grab a rag and a tub of buffer from the shelf behind him. "Sure thing. Need any help?"

Now Kurt seemed nervous. "Oh, no thank you. I did actual body repairs on the cars when I was in high school and I used to help you out here, remember? I can buff the scratch out myself. No, I don't need any help." He paused his ramblings for a moment before stepping forward to grab the rag and buffer out of Burt's hands. "Thank you."

"Kurt," Burt said sternly in that fatherly voice he knew he'd always have occasion to use. Kurt, who had been hastily turning back towards his car, froze. "What's going on?"

Kurt shook his head. "Nothing, absolutely nothing. It's not a big deal, really, the scratch. I'm sure it was an accident. Somebody...somehow...you just get back to working on that car, okay? I got this."

That was another thing he'd gotten from his mother, Burt noticed. Elizabeth had always been a terrible liar. She got flustered whenever there was something she was trying to avoid saying.

"I know you, Kurt," Burt said slowly. "I've said it before, and I'll say it again. You *are* your mother."

Kurt blinked. "Just come look at it over here," he said softly.

Burt stepped over to look at the driver's door.

The second he read the word that was keyed into the side, he grabbed the rag and buffer out of Kurt's hands. He was well aware of Kurt's stare boring into the back of his head as he knelt beside the car and buffed the scratch marks out, rubbing tirelessly until they had completely faded away into invisibility. Neither of them said a word.

When he was finished, Burt stood up and twisted the cap back onto the container of buffer. "There you go," he said gruffly as he turned to put the container and rag back on the shelf behind him.

He looked at Kurt, and there was no denying that there was something more his son wanted to say.

"Dad...," was the only word that quietly escaped from Kurt's mouth.

And then he was crying, bursting out into sobs on Burt's shoulder. Burt knew his son all too well; he knew Kurt had probably been holding in these tears ever since he'd first saw what had been done to his car. He knew Kurt had tried to stay strong in front of his daughter, but it had all become too much.

"You okay?" he asked as Kurt picked his head up off of Burt's shoulder and attempted to collect himself.

Kurt swallowed, then nodded. "Yeah," he gasped out through one more sob. "I-it's been a rough couple of days, and this was kind of just the last straw."

"You sure you're all right? Anything you need to talk about?"

"No, thank you. It's something I need to figure out for myself," Kurt said with an emotionless smile. He glanced at his car door, which now looked almost as good as new. "Thank you, Dad." His smile this time was genuine.

"No problem." Burt pulled his son into one more hug. "Listen. You need anything, and I'm not just talking about car buffer, don't forget that your old man's always here for you. Got it?"

Kurt nodded. "Yeah. Thanks again."

He definitely had his mother's smile. Burt could still see so much of her in Kurt.

"See you," Burt called as Kurt got back into the car. Kurt smiled again and gave him a little wave before starting the car and reversing out of his parking spot.

He had not the slightest idea what his son, his little boy - his *Kurt* - was going through.

...

Kurt usually didn't turn on his phone until he left work. Today he'd obviously been a little distracted as he was leaving, so when he turned it on upon arriving home, he noticed he had a missed call from Blaine.

He listened to the voicemail message Blaine had left him and literally almost swooned from happiness. Blaine really cared about him. He *was* Kurt's best friend, there was no doubt in Kurt's mind about that now. Kurt knew he was very lucky to have someone so concerned about him even from four hundred miles away.

He called Blaine back. Blaine picked up after two rings. "Kurt?"

"That's my name, don't wear it out," Kurt joked lamely.

Blaine exhaled an obvious sigh of relief. "Thanks so much for calling me back. Look, I know it's probably just me overreacting - I *hope* it's just me overreacting - but I just wanted to make sure everything's okay."

Kurt was confused. "Everything's fine, why?"

"The email you sent me," Blaine explained. "What's going on with Dave?"

Oh.

That.

Kurt knew he probably should have read that over once before he'd sent it. He had some explaining to do.

So he explained. He poured his heart out and told Blaine everything that had happened, about how Dave got possessive and physically violent when he was drunk. He reassured Blaine that there was no reason to worry, that he was taking Dave to an AA meeting tonight and he would ensure that Dave got the help he needed.

"Kurt, I want you to listen to me," Blaine said after a long pause that had followed Kurt's confessions. "I love that you're trying to help him. That's very brave of you. But you don't have any guarantees. Those programs only work if the person is *willing* to make them work. Are you sure that Dave is committed to this?"

"I-I don't know," Kurt admitted. "I'm just going to try it out and see what happens."

"Okay," Blaine said solemnly. "But if it doesn't work out, and he keeps this up...I want you to get out of there."

Kurt's heart stopped. "Get out of...where?"

"That apartment. That town. His life. Take Ellie with you and just *go* somewhere. You can't stay there if he's going to hurt you, Kurt."

Kurt didn't quite know what to say. "But...but where would I go?"

"You could come here and stay with me," Blaine suggested as if it were the most obvious thing in the world. "It's probably the safest place for you to be. Dave doesn't know where I live, other than in Chicago, which doesn't really narrow it down. If you went to stay with your dad or Finn, that would be one of the first places he'd look for you."

"I don't want him to come after any of my family," Kurt whispered. "Y-you would be okay with it? But what about Derek? Wouldn't he get...suspicious?"

"I would let him know what was going on and tell him about your situation. He would understand completely," Blaine reassured him. "I just want you to be safe, Kurt."

Now if that didn't completely melt Kurt's heart, nothing would.

"Thank you," Kurt said softly. "I'll let you know how it goes, okay?"

"Please do," Blaine urged him. "I-I'm really worried about you."

"I promise," Kurt whispered. He cleared his throat and his voice returned to its normal volume as he continued. "I gotta go. Dave should be getting home soon."

"Okay," Blaine said gently. "Bye, Kurt."

"Bye," Kurt murmured, and didn't press the End button until he'd heard Blaine hang up on the other end of the line.

...

It was six fifty. Dave had yet to leave the office.

He lived fifteen minutes away, so he knew he might be able to make it home in time and not be *too* late to the AA meeting. But the truth was, he had stayed late unnecessarily because he didn't want to go.

Yes, Kurt would be terribly disappointed, but Dave wasn't ready for something like this yet. Come on. The name said it all. *Alcoholics Anonymous*. Dave wasn't a fucking alcoholic. He was just a guy who lost his temper when he drank, is all. He hoped Kurt would understand.

Who was he kidding. Kurt wouldn't understand.

And so there he sat, alone at his desk, staring blankly into space as his few remaining coworkers drifted away one by one. Soon there was nobody in the office except for Dave and the nighttime custodian, who paid him no mind as he pushed a vacuum cleaner amid the cubicles.

Seven o'clock slowly but surely melted away into eight. Dave sighed and pushed himself up from his chair, knowing that he had to get home and face the music at some point.

As he walked out of the empty building alone, there was only one thought that kept pulsating throughout his mind. Dave kept mentally repeating it until it became like a mantra.

Don't be afraid. What is he going to do to you? It's Kurt. He's not going to hurt you like you hurt him. Stop worrying. Be a man.

Be a man.

Be a man.

Chapter Five

Dave was right in one respect, at least - Kurt didn't hurt him physically when he came home late from work Monday night and thus skipped the AA meeting.

Instead, he'd settled for the silent treatment, and in a way that was much, much worse.

It was Thursday now, and Kurt had scarcely said a word to him all week. He barely even looked at him, and when he did, his beautiful eyes were wide with hurt and sadness. All Dave wanted to do was wrap Kurt in his arms and tell him how sorry he was, but Kurt wouldn't let him. Whenever Dave approached him at all, Kurt would move away almost instinctively.

Ellie had been avoiding him, too. She'd always been closer to Kurt, probably because she was his biologically, but now it she would intentionally situate herself closer to Kurt whenever Dave so much as walked in the room. If she and Kurt were sitting on the couch, for example, and Dave came over to sit next to them, Ellie would crawl into Kurt's lap and wrap her arms protectively around her daddy's neck.

It broke Dave's heart. It really did. He knew he had to get help, but he didn't want to go to one of those fucking meetings. Ellie and Kurt were his *family*. If he kept this up, he knew he would lose them.

...

There had been two people on Blaine's mind all week: Kurt and Emily. Kurt, because Blaine had been unable to stop worrying about him ever since that email and the subsequent phone call. Emily, obviously, because Blaine had been working tirelessly on preparing this case that he was taking to trial. He'd spent any given waking moment writing his opening remarks, researching the radio station and its past patterns of hiring policies, talking to Emily on the phone, digging up dirt on Greg Roberts (the man who had been hired instead of Emily) and Joe Stanton (the radio station employee who had conducted the interview) and doing other things of the like.

This afternoon, however, he had to call Derek and find out what time his flight was due in from London. Plus there was that Prop 21 rally tomorrow, and now would be as good a time as any to find out if Derek wanted to go with him.

But once he'd actually called Derek and asked, it was obvious that Derek would not be attending any such political rally in the continental United States anytime soon.

"Oh, Blaine, I'm so sorry," Derek told him apologetically. "I'm not coming home. I'm flying into Paris later on today, I completely forgot."

Blaine narrowed his eyes. "You forgot that you were going to France?"

"Yes! I'm sorry!" Derek said exasperatedly. "Well...I didn't forget that I was going, they told me when I first got to London that I'd have to go to Paris after this. I forgot to let you know. I'm really sorry, okay?"

Blaine sighed. "Fine." He ran one hand absentmindedly through his hair, not even caring that he'd gelled it this morning and therefore had just messed it up. "There's just this rally for Prop 21 tomorrow I was thinking about going to. I was just wondering if you wanted to go with me, but I guess you kind of can't."

Derek sounded upset. "Aww, Blaine, I would have loved to go. Next time, okay? I'm only in Paris for a few days. I'm due back home on the 21st. I'm sure there will be more rallies."

"Okay." Blaine nodded and tried not to let Derek hear the distress in his voice. "I gotta go. I'm researching some stuff for the case. I'll talk to you later."

They said their goodbyes and Blaine sighed again as he hung up the phone. The only thing more stressful than being a lawyer, he decided, was having a boyfriend who for whatever reason had decided to pursue a career in international business.

Having remembered what Kurt had told him about Artie Abrams, Blaine was taking the liberty of sorting through old photos to see if he had any of Artie playing football. Kurt had taken him to a few McKinley games during high school and if Blaine was lucky, he would find a picture he'd taken of Kurt's wheelchair-bound friend doing his thing on the field. Maybe he could use it as an example while presenting evidence at the trial.

Blaine knew the sensible thing to do would have been to simply creep Facebook until he found the pictures he needed, but decided he would rather spend the afternoon sifting through old photo albums. He'd been working his butt off lately doing online research and making phone calls. This would be a nice break and give him time to relax.

Plus, Blaine had always liked photo albums. They gave him a tangible sense of the memory that was presented in the pictures. Hard copies of photos were more permanent than their online counterparts, which could be deleted with a simple click. The nostalgia was so much more prevalent in the actual physical photographs. Blaine had always been something of an old soul.

He pulled two or three thick photo albums out of the stack at the back of his closet and plopped them down on his bed. Once seated, he grabbed the first one and flipped it open.

Right away, he knew this was the wrong album, because the pictures in here were from a few years after he and Kurt had finished high school. But he didn't care. Once he started flipped through a few of the pages, Artie Abrams playing football was the furthest thing from Blaine's mind.

A week after Ellie had been born, Kurt and Dave had invited several relatives and family friends over to their apartment to meet their new daughter. Blaine had been one such friend. The pictures that had been taken on his camera that day - and there were lots of him - had been immortalized in the photo album through which he was now looking. He knew he should probably close this book and see if the picture he needed was in any of the other ones, but he couldn't take his eyes away from these pictures.

There were several of Dave holding Ellie. Blaine's heart sank with disgust as he looked at those. Dave was looking at the baby in his arms as if he actually cared about her, when Blaine knew he didn't. Why else would he continue to treat Kurt the way he did and not care that Ellie was there to see it? Maybe it wasn't Blaine's place to judge, having no kids of his own, but Dave was a horrible father.

Then came some family shots of Kurt, Ellie and Dave. Once again, these were hard to look at. They looked like the picturesque same-sex-parent family. Kurt was holding Ellie and Dave's arms were wrapped around Kurt's waist with his head resting on Kurt's shoulder.

I wonder what Dave's thinking there, Blaine thought as he stared at the picture. Does he truly care about them, or does he already know that his actions are going to tear his family apart someday?

Burt holding Ellie. Those were cute. He looked so happy to be a grandpa. The next few shots were of Finn, Ellie's uncle and Kurt's brother, and his wife Quinn holding the little girl. Those pictures were sweet. It was only the ones that had Dave in them that were slightly difficult to look at, because Blaine knew what Dave would become.

It must have been Blaine's turn to hold her next. Blaine hadn't looked at these pictures in years, and he was surprised to see how...*fatherly* he looked in them. He looked so happy and proud, and Ellie wasn't even his. Blaine turned the page in disappointment. He had no right to be looking at her like that. He wasn't even her father.

Blaine's heart almost stopped when he flipped to the next page. These pictures were solely father-daughter, Kurt and Ellie. It was clear, Blaine noticed, from the way Kurt held her cradled against his chest that he loved her more than anything in the world, he would fight to the death for her, he would protect her no matter what. And Blaine knew those sentiments still rang true today, even through the chaos that plagued their family.

Kurt looked so young in these pictures. Granted, he *was*- Blaine did the mental math; Kurt was twenty-six now, so he had only been twenty years old when Ellie was born. He had been dressed simply that day - well, simply for Kurt - skinny jeans, white tee, black vest, un-coiffed hair that fell freely into its natural bangs. And Blaine's heart ached because he looked so beautiful.

There was one picture, though, that stood out to Blaine. It had been taken at close range, and Kurt had Ellie pressed lovingly against his chest with one hand. The other was taken by Ellie, whose tiny hand was wrapped around Kurt's entire index finger. She was looking up at him, and his eyes were locked on hers like he couldn't see anything else in the world. His lips were slightly parted. A single tear was caught in his long eyelashes.

It was so poignant today. The way they were looking at each other...it was painstakingly obvious how much Kurt loved his little girl.

Blaine slammed the album shut and pulled his knees up to his chest, shoulders shaking with suppressed sobs. Neither of them deserved what they were going through right now. In a way, Blaine just wanted Kurt to move out here with him right away, because then he knew for sure that he would be safe. But the only reason that would happen would be if Dave hurt him again, and Blaine didn't want Kurt getting hurt *anymore*.

After sitting there trying not to cry for a few minutes, Blaine finally managed to pick up the next photo album in the stack. *This* one had some pictures from high school in it. He found an Artie football picture in no time at all.

...

Kurt stood in front of his fourth grade music class that Friday holding both hands in fists down near his hips. Every child in the room was singing *do*- middle C, in this case - in perfect unison.

He smiled to himself and opened his right hand, holding it flat with the palm down. The group on that side of the room moved up two whole steps to *mi* while the students on Kurt's left held out *do*.

This pattern continued for about a minute as Kurt kept switching hand signals and the group of students on the corresponding side of the room sang the matching solfège pitch. They were singing wonderfully in tune; Kurt was proud of them and himself. They'd only been working on solfège for about two weeks, and they sounded fantastic.

He ended with both hands in fists, about level with his forehead, while the class sang high *do* in unison, then smiled as he cut them off.

"That was *amazing*, you guys," Kurt told them, clapping enthusiastically. "You've come a long way since we first started working on solfège. That was wonderful."

He glanced up to notice that their teacher was waiting for her students at the door, and with another quick glance realized that their time together for the day was up. "Great job today, guys. I'll see you on Monday," he called out as they started lining up at the door.

The fourth graders filed out of the room as his next class - third grade - began spilling in. They chattered excitedly as they took their seats. Kurt moved over to the piano to rearrange a few piles of sheet music that lay on top of it. He was searching for a new song he wanted to try with the third graders today when he felt someone tugging at the hem of his jacket.

"Mr. Hummel?"

He looked down and smiled when he saw Jessie, the little girl who sat in the second row on the far left. She returned his smile and held out a makeshift bouquet of fuzzy dandelions that had been bound together with a rubber band.

"I picked these for you at recess," she told Kurt as she handed it to him. "They're really cool! You blow the fuzzy stuff off and make a wish."

"Thank you, Jessie." Kurt gave her an appreciative smile and a hug as he set the dandelions on top of his piano. "They're lovely."

Jessie dashed happily over to her seat. Kurt's eyes followed her, then looked out to survey the rest of the room. The third graders were still getting situated in their seats. As he looked over his class, it occurred to him that he loved these kids that he taught. Every single one. It broke his heart to think that he might have to leave this - leave *everything* - behind and move up to Chicago. Yes, he knew he'd be safe with Blaine, but teaching was his *life*. He couldn't imagine what it would be like to leave these kids behind.

He glanced at the dandelions Jessie had given him and thought for a moment about what he'd like to wish for.

...

Blaine was pleasantly surprised when he woke up the morning of February 14 and turned on the weather channel to learn that it would be relatively warm today. Not too warm - it was February, after all, and he lived in Chicago - but he decided that forty-five degrees and overcast this afternoon would not be too unbearable for an outdoor political rally.

He dressed accordingly and headed over to Grant Park Amphitheater right as he got out of work at four, which happened to be the same time the rally was due to start. Consequently, he was a few minutes late and the excitement was already in full swing when he arrived.

It was insane, but in a good way. The crowd was filled with rainbow flags and "Yes On 21" signs. The attendees were packed in like sardines, but Blaine thought it was great that so many people had decided to come out (no pun intended) and support the cause. Onstage, a young man whose name Blaine had missed was making a fiery speech.

"We need to show the rest of the world that this is *our* time now! We want the same rights as everybody else, we're human too!" the man shouted into the mic. The crowd roared.

"We've been waiting long enough for this. Full equality is not a difficult request...after all, straight people have had it for *years*..."

More enthusiastic cheers. Blaine applauded and glanced around to see if he could go about getting a sign to hold up. As he did so, he locked eyes with a familiar-looking woman who was sitting in a wheelchair a few yards away.

"Blaine!" Emily had seen him at the same time he'd seen her. She immediately began wheeling herself through the crowd towards him, calling "Excuse me"s to fellow rally-goers who were too busy shouting their approval at the man onstage to hear her.

"Oh my gosh, hi!" Blaine smiled as he leaned down to give her a hug. "It's so nice to see you, I don't know anybody else here." He laughed.

Emily smiled. "I'm here with some really cool people I think you'll like. Come on."

She pivoted herself around to face the direction she'd come from, and Blaine was about to follow her when he caught sight of the man onstage saying and doing something that shook him to the core.

"Well, I've had enough of this so-called 'equal' government! If they can't give us what we want, then to hell with it!"

He was holding a wrinkled American flag in one hand and a lighter in the other. The crowd uttered an almost-collective gasp as he flicked a flame and set fire to the flag.

What happened next could only be described as deafening white noise. The audience began to go insane as they watched the flag burn. Insults were shouted, punches were thrown. It wasn't long before a full-scale riot was occurring.

Emily turned around and glanced frantically at Blaine. "Why isn't someone doing anything?" she pleaded desperately.

And that was all Blaine needed to hear.

He pushed his way through the crowd towards the stage, on which a few zealous attendees had jumped and were now in the process of beating up the flag-burning man. A plan was already formulating in his head as he made his way to the mic. Whether or not it would work, he was about to find out.

Once in front of the mic, Blaine held up one hand and began snapping his fingers to a steady beat. The crowd, upon hearing the snapping noise from the speakers, settled down considerably as they glanced around in confusion to figure out what was going on.

Blaine, somewhat nervous, tried to calm his fears as he kept on snapping the familiar beat and began to sing.

Gotta make a change

For once in my life

It's gonna feel real good

Gonna make a difference

Gonna make it right

The crowd had fallen completely silent. Even the men onstage beating up the flag burner had stopped throwing punches for the time being and listened to Blaine. Feeling a small swell of confidence, he continued.

As I turned up the collar on

A favorite winter coat

This wind is blowin' my mind

I see the kids in the street

With not enough to eat

Who am I to be blind

Pretending not to see their needs

A few people in the crowd had started singing along. Blaine smiled and took this as a sign that he should keep singing.

A summer's disregard

A broken bottle top

And a one man's soul

They follow each other

On the wind ya' know

'Cause they got nowhere to go

That's why I want you to know

When he launched into the chorus, everybody was singing along.

I'm starting with the man in the mirror

I'm asking him to change his ways

And no message could have been any clearer

If you wanna make the world a better place

Take a look at yourself and then make a change

Na na na, na na na, na na na na oh ho

The sudden change of mood throughout the amphitheater was exhilarating. Blaine began the second chorus with a huge smile on his face. The entire crowd was singing and clapping to the beat along with him.

I've been a victim of

A selfish kinda love

It's time that I realize

There are some with no home

Not a nickel to loan

Could it be really pretending that they're not alone

A willow deeply scarred

Somebody's broken heart

And a washed out dream

They follow the pattern of the wind ya' see

'Cause they got no place to be

That's why I'm starting with me

I'm starting with the man in the mirror

I'm asking him to change his ways

And no message could have been any clearer

If you wanna make the world a better place

Take a look at yourself and then make a change

And he kept singing on through the whole song, with the crowd even taking the initiative to sing the specific background chorus parts at the appropriate parts. Blaine couldn't stop smiling. He felt so powerful, but it was a good kind of power.

At the end of the song, he held out his arms to gesture to the entire audience, who sang, "Change" in unison just as the choir in the song did.

"Make that change," Blaine whispered into the mic, and was met with a rousing ovation unlike any he'd heard in his life.

It took a while for the applause to die down, but when it finally did, Blaine stepped up to the mic again.

"Michael Jackson had a good point with that song," he said. "We can't change the rest of the world. We can only change ourselves. Violence is not the answer, everybody. That makes us just as bad as our enemies. The only thing we can do is vote yes on 21 and encourage our families and friends to do the same. If we want to make the world a better place, then *we* have to make that change."

He stepped out from behind the mic and took a shy bow as the audience roared. Somehow, he managed to make his way back to Emily in the enthusiastic crowd.

"D-do you think that was okay? That I did that? I mean, someone had to calm everybody down, I didn't want anybody to get hurt..."

Emily simply smiled up at him from her wheelchair. "Blaine Anderson, I think you may be well on your way to making history."

...

Dave didn't go to work that day.

Well, he did, but there was a retirement party going on for one employee who had been with the company for thirty years. Dave decided he would go to that and wish the guy well in retirement.

There also happened to be moderately priced champagne at the affair, he noticed. Would Kurt kill him if he found out? Probably. But was Kurt here? No, no he was not.

Dave shrugged and ordered a glass of bubbly. A couple sips couldn't hurt him. It was a special occasion.

Right?

...

"Blaine Anderson, you are the *only* person I can think of who could pull off an impromptu performance like that and calm down an entire maddening crowd."

Kurt smiled and set the phone in the crook of his neck as he turned on the burner to heat the pot of water on top of the stove. Blaine had just told him all about the rally, and to be honest, Kurt was thrilled for his friend. He knew Blaine would go on to do amazing things. Kurt couldn't be more proud of him.

Blaine was babbling excitedly about the rally and the implications it meant for the trial and the issue of gay rights in general. Kurt smiled to himself as he listened and rooted around in the pantry for the ingredients he needed. It was a little early, but he decided it couldn't hurt to get a head start on dinner.

"Blaine, that's incredible," he gushed sincerely, leaning back against the counter. "I..."

Before he could finish his sentence, the apartment door opened and Dave stepped inside. Right away, Kurt could tell that whatever happened next would not be good.

"I...gotta go, Blaine. Bye," he whispered, and hung up.

"Was that *Blaine*?" Dave hissed as he stormed into the kitchen.

Kurt backed fearfully against the stove. "Dave. Y-you're drunk," he noticed. How had this happened? Dave had just been at work all afternoon...

"So it *was* Blaine," Dave sneered. "How many times do I have to tell you, Kurt? You're *mine*, okay? Not his. *Mine*."

"I know!" Kurt's voice rose and trembled with fear. "I-I'm all yours! There is *nothing* going on with me and Blaine!"

"You expect me to believe that?"

And before Kurt knew it, Dave had picked up the pot of boiling water off the stove and hurled it in the direction of his face. Kurt screamed and managed to duck before too much of it could come in contact with his skin, but a little bit still managed to splash onto his face.

Kurt stood back up to look at Dave straight on. He could feel mild burns forming on his face, but right now he needed to protect himself and reassure Dave that there was *nothing happening whatsoever* between him and Blaine.

"Dave," he whispered. He fell to his knees and pulled Dave's hand so that the other man was kneeling in front of him as well. Almost reluctantly, Kurt leaned in and kissed him.

"There's nothing going on," he repeated in between kisses. "Nothing."

The more affection he showed, the more he kissed him, the more Dave seemed to calm down. Kurt decided he would do his best and keep at it so he wouldn't get hurt anymore.

That night, Dave "made love" - if you could even call it that - to an unresponsive Kurt in their bed. Kurt lay on his back, perfectly still as Dave moved in and out of him. He was consent to this, yes, but that didn't necessarily mean he wanted to do it. He was only doing it so Dave would give him a break and not do more damage than he'd already done.

Kurt stared over Dave's shoulder, up at the ceiling, and closed his eyes. Despite being so full, he felt so empty.

He had to get out of here.

...

The next day, Kurt made his annual trip to the cemetery a few weeks early.

"I know I usually don't come until the sixteenth of March," he said to his mother's headstone, which read *Elizabeth Hummel: October 19, 1964-March 16, 2003*, as he laid a small bouquet of lilacs on the grave. "But...I came early this year."

He lay down on his stomach and felt the cool blades of grass brushing against his skin. He'd had to cake about half a ton of makeup onto his face this morning to hide the burns, but as tears began slipping out of his eyes, he realized the makeup had been unnecessary. He was about to cry it all off, anyway.

"I don't know if I'll be here next month at this time," he whispered to his mother six feet under. "I'm moving to Chicago to live with Blaine. I-I can't stay here much longer, Mom. Dave...he's mean. He's horrible to me. I have to leave him, and I can't let Ellie be around him any longer."

Kurt let himself be reduced completely to tears as he continued. "I miss you so much, Mom. You would have known exactly what to say to make me feel better about this. I feel so worthless, I can't even begin to tell you. I...I...guess part of my reasoning in coming here today is because you were always a good listener. Even now, I feel like you're listening to me. I don't know when I'm moving, but it's going to be soon. I just have to pack up and talk to the principal at Lincoln about finding a substitute. But...I have to go. And I won't be here to come back and visit you on the..."

Eighteen years later, and Kurt still found it hard to finish that sentence.

He lay there in the grass on top of his mother's grave for a long time. When he closed his eyes, he imagined that he was a little boy again and she was holding him close, making him feel safe. He was a grown man now, and he knew it may have seemed ridiculous, but he just needed his mom.

"I love you, mommy," Kurt whispered as his tears soaked into the grass.

Rays of bright sunlight streamed down from the sky and warmed the damaged skin of his face. Another shuddering sob rippled through Kurt's body as he felt the sun's warmth.

His mommy loved him, too. At least somebody did.

Chapter Six

By the time Kurt returned to work on Monday to begin what he knew would be his last week of teaching at Lincoln Elementary, he was beyond ashamed of what he looked like because of Dave's actions. So ashamed, in fact, that he could barely look his boss, Principal Kelly Tyler, in the eye while informing her of his resignation.

"Kurt...I can tell that this is obviously a very emotional decision for you, but if you don't mind me asking, what made you decide to leave?" Principal Tyler, a kind woman in her mid fifties, looked at Kurt sitting on the other side of her desk with nothing but concern in her grandmotherly eyes.

"I'm leaving my partner," he whispered almost inaudibly, so that Principal Tyler had to lean across her large, dark wooden desk in order to hear him. "It's a long story that I'd rather not get into at the moment, but I don't think it's right for Ellie or myself to live there anymore. She and I are moving up to Chicago to stay with a friend of mine. We're leaving this week."

His boss closed her eyes for a moment. "I'm sorry to hear that," she said sincerely. "But you have to do what's best for you and your daughter. I understand that."

Kurt nodded. "Thank you for understanding. This isn't easy for me to do, just leave like this...it's one of the most difficult things I've ever done. I love my job. I love these kids. I hate having to leave them."

Principal Tyler nodded. "It's going to be hard seeing you go," she admitted. "You have a real gift, Kurt. The kids here absolutely adore you."

"Thank you," Kurt whispered. "I'm aiming to be out of here by Wednesday. I know it's short notice, but in the meantime, I'll be willing to help look for a long-term substitute for the rest of the year."

"Actually," Principal Tyler began, "I got an email a few weeks ago from the school system, just like I always do when a new substitute registers. There's a new girl who just moved back to Ohio from New York. She has a degree in music and is thinking of becoming a music teacher. If I call her and ask, would you be willing to have her sit in on your afternoon classes today and show her the ropes?"

"Absolutely." Kurt nodded. "It's the least I can do, considering I'm giving you such short notice. That's completely fine with me."

"Okay." There was a beat of silence before Principal Tyler sighed and reached for Kurt's hand across the desk. "Kurt, if there is *anything* I can do for you or your family, please let me know."

"Thank you," Kurt said again. "But I think this is something I need to figure out for myself."

"I understand." She nodded as Kurt stood up and pushed his chair back. "Take care, Kurt."

There. It was done. Last night, he'd told Ellie what the two of them were going to do, and had also called Blaine to let him know he'd be coming up as well. The only people he'd had left to tell had been Principal Tyler (he'd obviously just taken care of that) and each of his classes. God. That was going to be hard.

He tried to push the thought from his mind and left the principal's office to make his way to his classroom. As he walked, he reached up to touch his face with one hand. Even through the makeup he'd caked on yet again, he could still feel the burns.

Kurt absolutely had to get out of there. There was no doubt in his mind about that now.

...

The one thing Blaine had not expected as he walked up the stairs of the Illinois State Courthouse that morning was cameras. Lots of them. But there they were, being wielded by photo-hungry members of the mass media, all of whom shouted his name in an attempt to get him to turn their way and maybe answer a few questions.

It was weird, though. Yes, Blaine knew this case was important, but he didn't think there would be this much attention paid to a typical lawsuit trial.

"Blaine! What compelled you to instigate your impromptu performance of Man in the Mirror on Friday?"

"Mr. Anderson, if I could just ask you one question...you're obviously a very successful lawyer at such a young age, but would you ever consider a career in music?"

"How do you think your actions at the rally will affect the jury's opinion of you in this case?"

And on. And on. And on.

It brought him so much relief when he finally met up with Emily in the quiet courtroom. They greeted each other before heading over to sit behind the plaintiff's table. Blaine couldn't help but steal a glance towards the defense table, at which a stuffy-looking old lawyer and a representative from the radio station sat. The other lawyer was staring at Blaine with nothing but disapproval written in the wrinkles on his face. Blaine swallowed and turned back around to face forward, nervously shuffling some of his papers.

He would never admit it, but the first day of a new trial always seemed to be the scariest experience of his life. Everyone's eyes were on him, everyone was scrutinizing him. He was barely twenty-seven years old, and here he was having to prove that he could argue and win something so monumental. Being a lawyer was a lot like being a musician, in a way. He really had to work at carrying his own part and not letting the conflicting harmonies get him off track. At times like this, as a new trial began to unfold and everyone was judging him, he always seemed to feel even younger and more naive than he was.

People were still filing into the courtroom so Blaine took advantage of this moment to pull his phone out of his pocket and pretend to check the time. But really the time was the last thing on his mind. He just wanted to re-read the text that Kurt had sent him this morning for a little last-second boost of confidence.

Good luck today! I know you'll do amazing. Make me proud. :)

Blaine had every intention of doing that. He was so touched by the fact that even though Kurt had been through so much lately, he'd managed to forget all about his own problems for the thirty seconds it had probably taken him to text Blaine and wish him well. It proved to Blaine, once again, just how compassionate Kurt was and what a beautiful heart he had. And it made Blaine so happy to know that Kurt was leaving Dave and coming to live with him this week. Blaine could finally stop worrying when he could see for himself that Kurt was safe.

He closed the message and allowed himself to stare for a moment at his phone wallpaper. It was a picture of himself and Kurt that he'd taken at the coffee shop when they'd met up last weekend. Blaine couldn't help but notice how happy Kurt looked, and maybe it was wrong but he just wanted to hold Kurt in his arms and keep him safe and never let anybody hurt him again. He wanted to kiss away all of Kurt's tears and maybe even allow himself just one taste of those beautiful lips. Yes, he *knew* it was wrong to be thinking about Kurt like this when, after all, they were *friends* and Blaine already had a boyfriend and the last thing Kurt needed right now was a romantic relationship, but he knew in his heart that he would have given anything for one sweet, perfect kiss.

Blaine felt proud as he slipped his phone back into his pocket and attempted to read over his case notes one more time before the trial actually started. In that picture at the coffee shop - for that entire *day* - he, Blaine Anderson, had been the cause of Kurt's smile.

Suddenly he wasn't nervous anymore.

...

After teaching his last class of the morning - fifth grade - and announcing his resignation to them, Kurt made his way to Principal Tyler's office to meet the new substitute she'd been talking about this morning. He was happy that at least it hadn't taken too much trouble to find someone who would be willing to take his place. He already felt bad enough about having to leave so suddenly. He only hoped that the new teacher would be someone intelligent and kind, someone who cared about kids, someone who loved to teach as much as he did. His students deserved someone who cared about them.

But nothing could have prepared him for the person he was about to meet when he stepped into the office. Or rather, meet again.

"Hi, Kurt," the new teacher said quietly when Kurt stepped through the door. She was waiting in the same chair across from the principal's desk in which Kurt had been sitting just this morning.

Kurt took a moment to just look at her. He couldn't believe *she*, of all people, was here. It had been *years*...

"Kurt, this is Rachel Berry. If all goes well today, and I'm certain that it will, she will be taking your place for the rest of the year," Principal Tyler introduced.

"I know," he told his boss with a small smile. "She and I went to high school together. We were in glee club."

He didn't tell the principal this, but he hadn't seen or heard from Rachel since they graduated. She had moved to New York City immediately after graduation to attend NYU and pursue her lifelong dream of becoming a Broadway star. Obviously, though, that had not worked out because here she was back in Ohio working as a substitute teacher. Kurt wondered what had happened.

"Perfect!" Principal Tyler's voice interrupted his nostalgic musings. She seemed pleased with the way their meeting was going. "Kurt, as I told you this morning, I was thinking that maybe Rachel could come shadow your afternoon classes...see the way you teach and how you run the class. Is that okay with you?"

"Yeah," Kurt told her. "That's fine." He smiled at Rachel. "It's my free period. Want to have lunch with me? We have a *lot* of catching up to do."

Rachel returned his smile. "Of course." She turned to the principal. "Thank you, Kelly."

She stood up from her seat and the two of them left the office.

...

"So tell me," Kurt said once they were seated across from each other at a secluded table in the teachers' lounge, "what brought you back here? You should be in New York like the superstar that you are." He smiled.

Rachel laughed humorlessly before taking a small bite of her salad. She chewed thoughtfully for a moment before responding.

"I went to New York after high school. You already know that. I had a dream to be a *huge* star on Broadway. When I got there, I got some smaller parts in some off-Broadway things during college, but never anything major. I told myself to give it time and maybe bigger and better things would come my way."

Her voice grew quieter. "But then I graduated. And I never did get anything bigger than a couple supporting roles in those off-Broadway musicals. I tried and tried *so* hard to make it to the big time, but it never happened.

"I still continued performing, but one summer I decided to take some time off and volunteer at a workshop for children that one of the local theaters was running. The kids who went learned how to sing, dance, act...and at the end, they put on a big performance for all their parents and families. And it was while I was helping out with that little workshop that I realized how much I enjoy working with kids.

"So I did a lot of thinking and finally moved back here last year when I made the decision that I wanted to be a teacher. I've been substituting here and there while I work on getting my official teacher's license.

When Tyler called me this morning and said she needed a long-term sub to teach music for the rest of the year, and she mentioned your name, I knew I had to do it, no questions asked."

She exhaled deeply and gave him a tiny smile. "But that's way more than enough about me. What about you? Tyler told me you're moving to Chicago with your daughter..."

Kurt sighed. "Yes," he said, and proceeded to tell her everything that had happened with Dave.

...

"And so permit me to remind you all that the reason we're here today is to fight a very serious injustice. This is not just about a woman who didn't get a job. This is about all the intolerance that still exists in our world today. It's the twenty-first century and we can't even uphold a law that the majority of people would agree is fair or at least reasonable - the Americans with Disabilities Act. And to tell you the truth, there is really no reason whatsoever why we even need to *be* here today. That job should rightfully belong to my client. If you don't believe me, feel free to look it up in the Constitution for yourself."

As Blaine finished his opening remarks, he couldn't help but train his gaze on the ancient defense lawyer who had been eying him with disapproval all morning. The man's steely stare hadn't wavered, but he blinked as if he couldn't believe what he's just heard and was trying to remain stoic.

Blaine gave a slight nod. "Thank you," he said to the courtroom collectively, and moved down from the stand to sit behind the plaintiff's table with Emily again.

The power behind Blaine's words still hung heavy in the air as the defense attorney made his way up to the stand to give his own opening statement. Blaine decided to kill him with kindness and stare at him with the most polite expression he could muster.

The older man cleared his throat - a phlegmy, disgusting sound, and Blaine had to refrain from wincing as he began the speech.

"I was sworn into the bar thirty-six years ago," he began, "and unlike some younger, more inexperienced attorneys may think, this is not a case against discrimination at all. This is simply a question of who was more qualified for the job."

Once again, he was staring right at Blaine as he spoke. His wasn't the only gaze Blaine felt being trained on him - every single eye in the courtroom was on him, waiting for him to react. And for a moment, he wanted to. He was just about ready to stand up and inform the judge *Your Honor, the defense's statements are irreverent to the matters at hand*, but forced himself not to. He had to be the bigger person here, even if this guy had more than thirty years' experience on him. Blaine kept his expression polite and unwavering.

He kept that same expression on his face as the defense attorney prattled on and on about how the radio station had made the right call in hiring Greg Roberts, who was supposedly more qualified for the position than was Emily. But Blaine knew he wouldn't have needed a law degree to tell that the other man was grasping at straws. He knew the other attorney's opening statement was much weaker than his own had been, because he was fighting a losing battle.

When he was finished, the defense lawyer returned to his seat. Blaine knew it might have been cocky, but he looked over and flashed him a tiny, polite smile.

The other attorney gave him a glare that may very well have been the facial equivalent of the middle finger.

...

Rachel knew that Kurt had already made the speech a few times today to his earlier classes, but that didn't seem to make it any easier for him to get the words out.

"Kids, I have something to tell you," he said quietly as he stood in front of his third grade class that afternoon. "I'm leaving. I have to move all the way up to Chicago. After this week, I won't be your teacher anymore."

She felt her own heart break along with that of every single child in the room, who groaned, "No!" and "Don't go!" in somewhat collective unison. It was painstakingly obvious how hard it was for him to do this. She was still agonizing over what he had told her at lunch, and hearing him announce this to his class just tore her heart into more tiny pieces.

"I know. I don't want to go, but it's the best decision for my family and me. A lot of bad things have been happening here lately, and I don't think it would be right for us to stay here any longer."

Rachel knew right away that he was referring to himself and Ellie when he spoke of "his family." Dave was excluded, as he should be. Rachel had never liked Dave Karofsky, and now she found her hatred for him bubbling up higher than ever before.

Kurt gestured over to where Rachel was sitting in the leather swivel chair behind his desk. "This is Ms. Berry. After I leave, she'll be your teacher for the rest of the year. She's a very good friend of mine, so please be nice to her." He smiled.

The rest of the class period proceeded just as a normal class would, or so Rachel assumed. Kurt played the piano and sang along with the kids and it was clear that every single child in that room adored him. She knew it was probably killing him that he had to leave this all behind.

Forty minutes later, after the class was over and the last child had filed out of the room, Rachel stood up and headed over towards Kurt. He was leaning up against his piano with a forlorn expression on his face. When she got closer, she noticed the burns on his face that he had told her about earlier. They were covered in makeup, but they were still there.

"Those kids love you so much," she whispered, her voice thick with uncried tears. "I have *huge* shoes to fill."

Kurt gave her a small smile. "You can do it," he reassured her. "Remember in high school when you told me we were more alike than I may think, and I told you that was a terrible thing to say?"

Rachel laughed. "Good point. B-but still. I can never be what you are to these kids. Kurt...you're *amazing*."

He bowed his head. "Thank you," he whispered almost inaudibly.

A single tear rolled down his cheek and cleared a clean trail through the foundation that was caked onto his cheeks. She could clearly see part of the burn now.

...

"Hey! Um, excuse me. Can I just talk to you for a second?"

Blaine turned around, his hand poised on the door handle of his car, and found himself face-to-face with a tall, balding man who looked to be in his mid forties. Blaine remembered seeing him briefly as one of the

spectators in the courtroom while he was on the stand. He hoped whatever this guy wanted to say wouldn't take too long. The first day of the trial had worn him out, and he just wanted to get home.

"Blaine Anderson, right? My name's Nick Goldberg." He extended his hand, and Blaine shook it. "Hey, I was one of the organizers of the Prop 21 rally last Friday. We were all very impressed by what you did. We're planning another rally for next weekend, and we'd like to invite you to be one of our keynote speakers."

Blaine couldn't believe what he was hearing. His face spread into a wide grin and his heart started beating in overdrive, completely thrilled that he'd made *that* big of an impact.

"Wow. Sure," he said, very unprofessionally, then cleared his throat. "I mean, yes. I would love to."

"Great!" Nick smiled and handed him a business card. "Here's all my information, I'm with the local chapter of GLAAD. Is there any way I could get a hold of you?"

"My email address and phone number are on the Carter & Perry firm website," Blaine told him politely as he slipped the card into his pocket.

"All right, sounds good. I'll be in touch." Nick shook his hand again. "Thank you for agreeing to do this. I've talked to literally over a hundred people this past weekend who all told me how inspired they were by what you did on Friday. Having you there could help us gain even more support for the cause."

"Thank you for *asking* me to do this," Blaine said sincerely. "I just wanted everyone to calm down before that riot got too intense and someone got hurt. I didn't know it made that big of a difference."

"That's the funny thing about making a difference," Nick said casually. "A lot of the time, you don't even realize you're doing it."

...

In Revolutionary War terminology, Kurt was a minuteman.

He had already packed suitcases for himself and Ellie and stashed them in the trunk of his car just in case something happened that required them to leave immediately. Likewise, his car keys and wallet never left his pocket. And finally, he never let his daughter out of his sight.

He used to just leave her in the apartment with Dave while he went down the hall to do laundry, but that was before Dave had gone mad. Which is why, as he transferred his things from the washer to the dryer and stuck another quarter in the machine, Ellie sat on the floor against the wall, pulling a new rubber outfit onto her Polly Pocket.

It was seven. Dave still hadn't returned from work. Kurt had tried calling him, but he hadn't answered. Of course. Kurt had a sinking feeling that this meant Dave was probably out drinking and would come home in a drunken fury. As terrible as it sounded, Kurt secretly hoped he did that. It would give him an excuse to leave once and for all - he just hoped that he or Ellie would not be hurt in the process. Especially not Ellie. If Dave so much as laid one finger on her, Kurt wasn't quite sure he could be held responsible for the actions he would take.

"Daddy?" Ellie said quietly after a long silence.

"Yes?"

"When do we get to leave?"

Kurt took a moment to think about this. He hadn't set a specific date for their departure yet; he only knew that it would be sometime this week. He was about to open his mouth and tell her this when suddenly the laundry room door flew open.

Dave was standing in the doorway. Kurt could see the bloodshot red in his eyes from a few yards away. He recoiled away from the washing machine and stepped back against the wall, shielding Ellie from Dave's view.

"Today," he whispered to her.

"Would you like to tell me," Dave sneered as he stepped into the room, "why, when I looked at your phone records online this afternoon, you've been making frequent phone calls to a number with a *Chicago* area code?"

Kurt swallowed. "I've been talking to Blaine," he countered, his voice shaky. "Where have you been?"

Stupid question, he knew, but it had to be asked.

"I was out getting drunk," Dave scoffed. "You obviously don't give a shit about me any more, you're too busy talking to *Blaine*, so I went to drink it off at the bar."

He lunged forward and grabbed the fabric at the front of Kurt's shirt, lifting him into the air and away from the wall. "How do you think it makes me feel, that I have to do that? To know that my boyfriend doesn't love me anymore?"

Kurt had never said those words outright, but he knew Dave was right. He didn't love him.

"And how do you think *I* feel when you act like this?" Kurt's voice trembled.

The only sound of response Dave made was something between a growl and a yell as he released Kurt, sending him flying backwards into a bank of metal storage lockers. Kurt hit the lockers hard and fell to a crumpled heap on the floor. Ellie screamed. Before Kurt could pick himself up so he could grab her and run, Dave was looming over him.

"How do I think you *feel*?" Dave asked in response. He pulled his foot back and kicked Kurt hard in the stomach. "I don't know, but *I* 'feel' like you should be taking this like a man."

"Papa, stop!" Ellie screamed.

Kurt picked up his head and looked at her. "Sweetie, I told you not to call him that anymore." It was true. When he'd first told her that they would have to leave, he asked that she not refer to him as Papa anymore. When she asked why, he'd told her that real fathers didn't treat their families this way.

"Oh, so now you have *her* turned against me, too?" Dave kicked Kurt again, harder this time. Kurt's heart felt like it was about to pound right out of his chest. He was scared, he couldn't deny that, but he also had an unprecedented amount of adrenaline racing through his body.

He took advantage of said adrenaline rush and pulled himself quickly off the floor - ignoring the aches and screaming pain that shot through his body - shoved past Dave, and scooped Ellie up in his arms as he burst through the laundry room door. Dave stood in a stupor for a second, but immediately began barging down the hall after Kurt. Ellie buried her face in Kurt's chest as he ran, staining the fabric of his shirt with her tears.

Once outside, he quickly buckled his daughter into the backseat and then hopped into the driver's seat. He slammed the keys into the ignition, started the engine, and began to drive for his life - literally.

As soon as they were a safe enough distance away from the apartment building, he would pull over and call Blaine to let him know they were on their way up. But for now, he just had to focus on driving and make sure Ellie wasn't too shaken.

He glanced up into the rearview mirror at his daughter in the backseat. She was still crying quietly.

"Sweetie, you're okay now," he told her, wanting more than anything to be able hold her in his arms and take all her pain away. But he couldn't do that now, he had to focus on getting them the hell out of there. "He can't hurt us anymore. We're going to be safe with Blaine."

Ellie nodded. "Okay," she said softly.

"Why don't you go to sleep? We've got a long drive ahead of us...I can turn on some quiet music if you want," Kurt suggested. He was about to reach for the radio dial and stopped himself when another thought occurred to him. "Oh, but Ellie?"

"Yes, Daddy?"

"Don't use Karofsky as part of your name anymore," he instructed her gently. "From here on out, you are Elizabeth Anne Hummel. Just like my mother was. I don't want any part of you being associated with him."

"Ellie Hummel." She said her new name quietly to herself. "Okay."

Kurt turned the radio to a soft rock station. For the very first time since the confrontation in the laundry room, he allowed his restrained tears to spill down his face.

Chapter Seven

By the time Dave had barged out the front door of the apartment building, Kurt's flashy Corvette was already speeding out of the parking lot. He stumbled towards his F-150, not caring that he was drunk, not caring that he had absolutely no idea where Kurt was going - oh, yeah, probably Chicago, since that's where *Blaine* lived - and subsequently having no idea how the fuck to get to Chicago.

He ended up in the driver's seat with no memory of how he'd gotten there, but didn't take too much time to think about it. He had to catch up with Kurt. He thrust the keys into the ignition and miraculously managed to back the large vehicle out of the parking space without any trouble, then proceeded to exit the lot with squealing tires.

Dammit. Of course Kurt had already gotten far enough away that Dave could see hide nor hair of the Corvette. *Come on*, he thought, *the thing is bright fucking red, you should be able to see it even if you're drunk off your ass*. But he didn't.

Dave proceeded to run a red light as he headed in the direction of what his alcohol-soaked brain assumed was Chicago. He spotted a freeway entrance ramp and attempted to read the blurry letters as he sped underneath it. One lane was going north towards Cleveland, the other south towards Cincinnati. Dave had no idea where the fuck Chicago was, but he was pretty sure it was north of where he was, so he attempted to merge into the northbound lane. Once he got going, he presumed he would follow more signs until he found one that said Chicago.

In his drunken haste, Dave nearly cut off a small Toyota as he attempted to move over. The other car's horn blared loudly; Dave cursed and swerved back over to the other lane. Unbeknownst to him, he was now in the southbound lane of traffic.

Dave mistakenly swerved over into an exit only lane once on the freeway and consequently found himself back on the main road. He beeped the horn loudly for no reason and cursed. There had to be another freeway around here somewhere...

He kept driving, unknowingly getting faster and faster. He stared on ahead with his blurry eyes. What was up with the road? Was it getting wider? Dave couldn't recall there being so many lanes on this stretch of road, but whatever. He forgot to put on his turn signal and carelessly moved into one lane after another to get to the one that appeared to be on the far right...

Sadly for him, the traffic lane he saw was actually not there at all. Dave realized that the booze had been fucking with his vision at the same time as the front end of his truck slammed into a telephone pole.

The whole world had seemed to stop. Dave sat there blankly for a second, with half of his truck up on the curb and crunched against the telephone pole while the back half hung back out into the street. The realization hit him as suddenly as his truck had hit the pole.

Kurt was gone. Probably forever. Actually, yeah, after all the shit Dave had put him through, Kurt *was* gone forever. And so was Ellie, for that matter.

Dave had brought this all on himself. Maybe, just maybe, if he'd gone to one of those stupid alcohol meetings like Kurt had wanted him to, he would have learned how to control himself better. He wouldn't have chased Kurt completely out of his life.

No wonder Kurt didn't love him anymore. Sitting in his totaled truck all alone, Dave glanced up into the rearview mirror to look at his reflection with bleary, bloodshot eyes.

He didn't see himself. All he saw was the monster who had hurt the most kind, caring, loving man he'd ever known. Kurt hadn't intentionally done anything to hurt Dave. In fact, maybe the reason he'd been talking to Blaine so much was because he needed someone to confide in after all the things Dave was doing to him. Slowly but surely, it was starting to sink in.

He could hear police sirens in the distance. Someone concerned passerby must have called the police. If he'd looked up, he would have seen people pulling over and getting out of their cars to come and make sure he was all right. But he didn't. He just let his forehead fall against the steering wheel, and he cried.

Somehow through his tears, he managed to reach up and snap the rearview mirror off of its plastic support. Without bringing his head up, he tossed it over his shoulder and into the backseat.

He couldn't see the monster anymore.

...

Blaine immediately picked up his phone when it rang at a few minutes past midnight.

"Kurt?" he asked, and it was a stupid question because Kurt's name had been clearly visible on the caller ID screen before he'd answered the call.

"Hey," Kurt said. He sounded tired. "Um, we'll be there in about ten minutes. We just crossed over from Indiana." There was a pause. "Are you...do you have to get up early and go to court tomorrow morning? I'm so sorry if I've been keeping you up waiting..."

"Nope. Court's adjourned until Wednesday," Blaine said. He smiled and hoped Kurt could hear it in his voice through the phone. "I can stay up as late as you need me."

"Okay," Kurt said softly. "Thanks for doing this for us, Blaine."

"No problem." He decided now would not be a bad time to be completely, one hundred percent honest, so he continued.

"I care about you so much, Kurt. Ellie too. All I want is for the two of you to be safe."

"Thank you so much," Kurt responded quietly. "I'll see you in a little bit."

They said their goodbyes and Blaine set his phone down on the coffee table. He glanced around his apartment, finally realizing that now that Kurt and Ellie were going to live here, it would be like he had a family of his own. Almost. Plus, there was the tiny fact of the matter that involved telling Derek about all this somehow...

Blaine didn't have time to worry about that now. It was late at night, and Kurt and Ellie had been driving for about six and a half hours straight. They would probably be hungry. He headed out to the kitchen to fix something for them to eat when they arrived.

...

If Kurt hadn't been so emotionally drained, he probably would have stopped to admire the architecture and interior design of Blaine's apartment building. Hell, he would have stopped to admire the whole of Chicago's glittering skyline, since he'd never been here before. But truth be told, he was exhausted from driving and from everything that had happened that long day in general. He thought back to that morning, when he'd told his boss he had to resign, and realized that that seemed like it had happened weeks ago.

Ellie had slept for most of the car ride, so she was wide awake. Actually, not entirely wide awake, but she was at least able to walk around without her eyelids getting heavy and threatening to fall closed, unlike Kurt.

Once they reached the door to Blaine's apartment, Kurt knocked. They barely had to wait five seconds before the door swung open, as if Blaine had been waiting right there for them to arrive.

"Hi," he said. "Come on in. I can take those for you." He nodded to Kurt's Louis Vuitton wheelee suitcase and Ellie's pink Barbie duffel.

"Thanks." Kurt handed their bags to Blaine, who set them down and out of the way. He glanced around at what he could see of the apartment from where he was standing, which consisted of the front hallway, the living room and part of the kitchen. "Nice place, I'm glad I finally get to see it."

Blaine sighed. "Yeah, but I hate that you have to see it under these circumstances. Are you...are you guys okay?" Kurt had given him a brief rundown of what had gone down in the laundry room when he'd first called Blaine, but it was still nice to see that he was obviously concerned.

Kurt nodded. "I'm fine. A little sore, but I'm fine. Relieved now, actually. I'm so glad to be out of there." He squeezed Ellie's shoulder. "What about you, sweetie?"

"I'm hungry," she said quietly.

Kurt gave her a gentle but stern look. "Elizabeth, please, that's a little rude."

"But something smells really good and it's making me hungry," she pointed out.

Blaine laughed. "She's fine," he told Kurt. "I figured you guys would be hungry, so I put a frozen pizza in the oven after you called. It should be done any minute." As soon as he finished speaking, a loud *beep* that Kurt presumed was the oven timer sounded through the room. Blaine smiled. "Actually, it sounds like it's done now."

"Oh, thank you," Kurt commented as Blaine led them out into the kitchen. "I'm actually a bit hungry myself...I was thinking of stopping to get something, but I also wanted to keep driving and get the hell out of there. Plus, this one," he glanced at Ellie, "was fast asleep the whole time, anyway."

"Yeah, when you called me just now I figured you must have been driving nonstop," Blaine remarked as he opened the oven and pulled the pizza out. "Would you like anything to drink?"

"Can I have some lemonade?" Ellie asked, and Kurt nudged her. "Please," she added.

"Sure, no problem." Blaine opened the fridge and glanced at Kurt over his shoulder. "You?"

"Actually, if it isn't too much trouble, could I please have some coffee?" Kurt asked, still exhausted.

"Kurt, it's fine. I'm going to do my best to make sure the two of you feel absolutely at home here." Blaine smiled and poured Ellie a glass of lemonade, then two cups of coffee for himself and Kurt. They sat down around the table and ate their first meal as a new little family.

...

"How many times, Mr. Karofsky, would you say you physically abused your partner?"

Dave slowly counted on his fingers. "There were at least three major times when I hurt him," he said quietly to the stern police officer who had been interrogating him for about an hour. "But there were a few other times when I wasn't as wasted, when I would kinda threaten him and stuff."

He yawned involuntarily. This did not escape the attention of the officer, whose name Dave couldn't recall.

"Mr. Karofsky, would you like some more coffee? I'm going to need you to stay awake to answer these questions."

It had happened. Dave had broken down and turned himself in to the police officers who'd arrived at the scene after he crashed his truck. He confessed that he'd been violent and physically abusive to Kurt and had subsequently ended up here at the police station for questioning.

It felt good, in a strange way. Dave still felt terrible about what he'd done and knew he needed help, but he was relieved to be able to get all this off his chest. He was slightly disturbed by the fact that something in the back of his mind kept telling him that it was over, that he would never see Kurt or Ellie again. Dave knew he had nobody but himself to blame for that. He'd chased the man he loved right out of his own life because he couldn't learn how to control himself.

"Yes, please," he told the officer.

He poured more coffee into a Styrofoam cup and slid it across his desk to Dave, who thanked him and took a long sip.

"You realize that you will be required to attend numerous alcohol education classes and AA meetings, right? Also, you'll be spending some time in prison."

"Please," Dave mumbled. "I don't even care anymore. I'll do anything. I'll spend the rest of my goddamn life in prison."

"It won't be nearly that long," the officer reassured him gravely, "anywhere from one to five years at most, depending on what you plead at the arraignment."

"I plead guilty," Dave told him.

"If that's what you decide to plead, you won't have to go to trial. Like I said, you'll have to go to some classes and rehabilitation programs, you'll also have to pay a fine of about three grand."

Dave pulled his wallet out of his pocket and slid it across the table. "Take it all."

"I don't need that now," the officer told him gently, pushing Dave's wallet back towards him. "I also need to contact your partner to inform-"

"Kurt," Dave said quietly. "His name was Kurt. Kurt Hummel."

Was. As if Kurt no longer existed.

The officer nodded. "I need to contact Kurt Hummel and let him know you've turned yourself in. Any idea on his whereabouts?"

"He probably went to Chicago," Dave said. "That's where the other guy I was telling you about - Blaine - lives."

"All right. Could I get a phone number for Kurt?"

Dave rattled off Kurt's cell number, then hesitated.

"Yes, Mr. Karofsky?" The officer must have sensed there was more that Dave wanted to say.

"Can you...can you wait to call him until tomorrow? This is the first peaceful night's sleep he'll have had in a long time. I don't want him to have to start thinking of me if he doesn't have to."

"There's a very good chance that Kurt *will* be thinking of you, Mr. Karofsky. Experiences like this are not easily forgotten."

"I know, I know," Dave sighed. "But...can you please wait and call him tomorrow?"

"Fine." The officer slipped the Post-It note on which he'd written Kurt's number into his breast pocket. "But rest assured, I will be calling him first thing tomorrow."

Dave nodded. "Okay."

"We're done here for tonight," the officer told him. "Thank you for being cooperative. Officer Williams will escort you to your holding cell."

He nodded towards the door, where a tall, dark-haired policeman who Dave assumed to be Officer Williams was waiting. Dave followed him out of the interrogation room and down a long hall to his cell, which he entered without saying a word. Officer Williams slid the barred door shut behind him and locked it, leaving Dave alone with his remorse.

...

After showing Ellie and Kurt to the guest rooms where they would be sleeping, Blaine went into his own bedroom to change into the flannel pajama pants and white undershirt he usually slept in. It was almost one in the morning now but he wasn't even tired, thanks in part to the coffee he'd had with the pizza. Kurt, on the other hand, had downed two full mugs of coffee but still seemed exhausted. Blaine knew the events of the day had taken a huge toll on him both physically and emotionally, and that was probably why.

He was just heading out to the kitchen to finish cleaning up when he paused in the hallway outside of Ellie's guest bedroom. Her door was open just a crack, and Blaine couldn't help but stop and listen to Kurt as he told her good night.

"We're safe here now, okay?" Kurt's muffled voice reassured his daughter. "We're starting our lives all over. Think of it that way. We're starting fresh. No more tears, no more pain. We don't have to hurt anymore."

"I know." Ellie's voice was quiet. "But he was so mean to you in the laundry room. I can't stop thinking about it. I hate seeing my daddy get hurt."

Blaine could hear the smile in Kurt's voice. "Daddy won't get hurt anymore," he told her. "Like I said, we're starting new lives here."

Ellie's voice was even softer, and Blaine had to strain to hear her. "I don't know if I'll be able to sleep."

"You slept in the car just fine."

"Yeah, but I was scared. I was afraid I was gonna have nightmares."

"Did you?"

"No, but I'm still scared." The door was closed, but Blaine could just picture her hugging the stuffed teddy bear she'd immediately pulled out of her suitcase once she'd gotten situated in her new room.

"Don't be," Kurt said gently. "Do you want me to sing to you?"

Blaine's heart stopped. *Yes, yes, please say yes*, he chanted to Ellie in his head.

"Yeah," Ellie said. "Yes please. That might help."

Kurt was silent for a moment, probably racking his brain for a song. When he began to sing, his voice was quiet, but all the same, it had been a long time since Blaine had heard anything so beautiful.

"There was a time when men were kind

When their voices were soft

And their words inviting

There was a time when love was blind

And the world was a song

And the song was exciting

There was a time

Then it all went wrong..."

Blaine closed his eyes and leaned up against the wall as he let Kurt's voice wash over him. Not only was Kurt singing to Ellie, but unbeknownst to him, he was also singing to Blaine. His voice drifting from the bedroom was a comfortable reminder that reassured Blaine, once again, that Kurt was safe now.

"I dreamed a dream in time gone by

When hope was high and life worth living

I dreamed that love would never die

I dreamed that God would be forgiving

Then I was young and unafraid

And dreams were made and used and wasted

There was no ransom to be paid

No song unsung, no wine untasted."

As Kurt continued, his voice sounded somewhat darker. It took Blaine to realize that it was because he was holding back tears.

"But the tigers come at night

With their voices soft as thunder

As they tear your hope apart

As they turn your dream to shame..."

Despite the obvious tears that were now choking his voice, Kurt still managed to crescendo powerfully on the last word before returning to a softer tone.

"He slept a summer by my side

He filled my days with endless wonder

He took my childhood in his stride

But he was gone when autumn came."

Kurt launched into another crescendo that marked the most powerful part of the song. Blaine felt a chill race down his own spine.

"And still I dream he'll come to me

That we will live the years together

But there are dreams that cannot be

And there are storms we cannot weather."

Up until this point, Kurt had been pretty good about holding back his tears. As he ended the song, however, Blaine heard him choke loudly on an unmistakable sob.

"I had a dream my life would be

So different from this hell I'm living

So different now from what it seemed

Now life has killed the dream I dreamed."

Silence hung in the air for a moment before Blaine realized he could hear not one, but two people crying inside the room.

"That was so pretty, Daddy," Ellie sobbed.

"Are you okay?" Kurt sounded concerned even through tears of his own. "I...I didn't mean to make you cry."

That makes two of us, Blaine thought as he blinked and realized that he'd gotten a little teary-eyed himself.

"It's okay," Ellie said. "The song was beautiful. But whenever I see you cry, *I* want to cry."

Blaine heard something shift inside the room and assumed Kurt was giving her a hug.

"I love you so much, Elizabeth," he murmured. "Never, ever forget that, okay?"

"I love you too, Daddy." Ellie's voice had the tiniest edge of a smile in it.

"Try to get some sleep now," Kurt told her. "I know you just slept in the car, but it's really late and I don't want you to end up becoming nocturnal." Ellie giggled a little bit. "I love you," Kurt said again. "Sweet dreams."

Blaine could hear him walking towards the door and realized that meant Kurt would be coming out into the hallway any second now. Meanwhile, Blaine was still standing there. It was too late to try and leave now. Blaine tried to think of some excuse for why he was standing out in the hallway eavesdropping, but unfortunately for him he couldn't think fast enough.

"Hey," Kurt said as he stepped out into the hall and gently closed Ellie's door behind him.

"Hi," Blaine said, then stammered through the explanation that Kurt hadn't asked for. "I...I heard you sing just now," he admitted. "It was beautiful."

Kurt blinked and opened his mouth but no words came out for a few seconds. Blaine took a moment to realize that Kurt probably hadn't received a compliment like that in a while and didn't know how to take it.

"Thank you," he said. His tone switched just a bit as he jumped subjects. "Can we...is it okay if I...talk to you?"

"Yeah." Blaine nodded. "Of course it's okay. We can talk."

He poured them each another cup of coffee and led Kurt out to the couch in the living room, where they sat down and Kurt proceeded to pour his heart out.

"I feel terrible," Kurt confessed. "I should have gotten out of there a lot sooner. I never should have stayed around as long as I did."

"You can't help that now. All that matters is that you *did* get out of there, and you're safe now," Blaine told him gently. He reached out for Kurt's hand to give it a reassuring squeeze, but Kurt immediately pulled it away.

"Sorry," Blaine mumbled, suddenly flustered.

"I'm sorry," Kurt whispered. "I just...get nervous whenever somebody tries to touch me. Nothing personal. It's just a little hard for me to trust people now."

"I understand." Blaine nodded, but Kurt wasn't done.

"I trust *you*, though," he said softly. "You're my best friend, Blaine. You always have been, and you always will be. And...and I can't thank you enough for opening your home to us like this. It means so much to me. To both of us."

Very tentatively, he slipped his hand into Blaine's. Blaine could tell this took a lot of courage for him, and his grip on Blaine's hand was extremely light, but he was so proud of Kurt. Plus, just simply holding hands with him like this was something he'd been wanting to do for so long, he couldn't lie.

"You're just about the only person in the world I can trust right now," Kurt whispered.

"I'll never do anything to make you lose that trust," Blaine swore to him.

"I know you won't." Kurt attempted to smile. "So enough about me. I've been talking about myself way too much. What are you up to, how's the trial going?"

"Kurt, the last thing I want to do is talk about myself. You...after everything you've been through today alone...I don't mind. Really."

"No, please, change the subject," Kurt urged him. "I'd rather get my mind off of things for the moment."

"If you insist." Blaine gave him a wry smile. "The trial's going well. Defense attorney seems to be out to get me, but I think it's because his argument is weak and he knows it."

"Oh, I'm sure he knows he's going up against one of the best lawyers in the state." Kurt smiled, but Blaine didn't miss that his eyes were still sad. "That could be a part of it, too."

Blaine blushed involuntarily. "I don't know about 'one of the best in the state...'"

"How many other lawyers have the balls to get up and sing to a maddening crowd at a political rally?" Kurt countered.

Blaine suddenly remembered. "Oh yeah! I forgot to tell you. I'm speaking at another rally for Prop 21 on Friday. I was actually invited this time." He smirked.

"That's amazing!" In his excitement, Kurt's light grip on Blaine's hand tightened just the tiniest bit. "Can I come?"

"Of course you can come." Blaine smiled. "It would mean a lot to me to have you there."

Kurt gave him another one of his sad-eyed smiles. It broke Blaine's heart to see that even though he was trying to look happy, it was painfully obvious in his eyes that he wasn't.

"Can I ask you a question?" Kurt asked quietly.

Blaine shrugged. "Shoot."

"Not to change the subject, but I couldn't help wondering...how long do you think I should stay here for?"

Blaine gave him a warmhearted smile. "Kurt, are you kidding me? Stay here as long as you need. I don't mind at all. Think of this as your new home."

"Oh, are you sure?" Kurt sounded uncertain. "I just don't want to feel like I'm getting in the way...and I don't have a job at the moment, so I can't help you pay the rent and I feel really bad about living here if I can't..."

He trailed off before picking back up with a non-sequitur. "Besides, what would Derek think?"

It was actually a very good question. Blaine wasn't quite sure of the answer himself.

"He's coming home Friday night," he told Kurt. "I think I'll break it to him then, rather than tell him over the phone or something. It's something I'd rather tell him in person, but I'll explain your situation and I think he'll understand completely."

"You *think*?" Kurt asked warily.

Blaine mentally kicked himself. "He *will* understand completely," he reassured Kurt. "Sorry. I promise."

There was a beat of silence before he continued.

"And don't worry about *anything*," he said. "You're not getting in the way, and I can handle the rent by myself. I know you and Ellie are safe with me, so that's all I care about."

"If you're sure," Kurt said, then yawned involuntarily. "I need to call my dad in the morning...and Finn...let them know where I am...I called Lincoln on the way up here, told them it was official and that they could start Rachel tomorrow. Did I tell you they got Rachel Berry as my substitute for the rest of the year?"

Blaine vaguely remembered the short, dark-haired diva of McKinley's show choir. He also noticed that Kurt was starting to ramble, which he sometimes did when he was getting tired.

"No, you didn't," he told Kurt. "Hey, you look exhausted. Maybe you should get some sleep."

Kurt yawned again. "I *am* exhausted," he admitted.

"Come on." Blaine gently slipped his hand out of Kurt's and stood up from the couch. Kurt followed him down the hall and they stopped in front of the door to the remaining guest room.

"Kurt, if you need anything at all...," Blaine gestured to the master bedroom door across the hall, "my room's right here. Come in and wake me up. I don't even care."

"Thank you." Kurt gave him a tiny smile of appreciation. "For...everything."

"No problem." Then, without really thinking, "Can I...can I give you a hug?"

Kurt answered that question for him by stepping forward and locking his arms around Blaine's neck. Blaine's arms wound their way around Kurt's waist, pulling him closer for a second before Kurt recoiled.

"Ow," he murmured, rubbing his side.

Blaine felt terrible. "I...I'm so sorry."

"It's not your fault," Kurt mumbled. "Damn bruises. I'm so sore."

Blaine now was feeling absolute rage. Yes, he knew what had been going on, but hearing Kurt bring it up so suddenly like this was different. Blaine couldn't believe anyone would dare to hurt this beautiful man.

"Come here." He held out his arms to Kurt, who hesitantly stepped into his embrace. Blaine hugged him again, this time more gently so as not to squeeze too hard and hurt him again. He wished he could keep Kurt safe in his arms forever.

Kurt slipped away from the embrace. "Thank you so much again, Blaine," he said sincerely. "Good night."

"Good night, Kurt," Blaine said softly.

They stepped into their respective bedrooms. Blaine left his door open; Kurt closed his halfway.

Try as he might, Blaine couldn't sleep that night. He lay there with his eyes wide open for about two hours before deciding that attempting to sleep was futile. He stood up out of bed and stepped out into the hallway.

He could hear the sound of deep, slow breathing coming from Kurt's room. Blaine wasn't quite sure what possessed him to step inside the half-open door to check on him, but he did just that.

Kurt was out like a light. Blaine couldn't help noticing how peaceful and serene his face looked in sleep as he watched invisible dreams behind his closed eyelids. Blaine wondered what he was dreaming about and hoped for Kurt's sake that they were good dreams.

In his sleep, Blaine noticed, Kurt had kicked the blankets off of himself. Very carefully, Blaine reached down to pull the blankets back up over Kurt's tiny frame. Kurt stirred the tiniest bit and made some kind of "mmmnrhhh" noise that Blaine found adorable, but didn't wake up.

"Sweet dreams, Kurt," he whispered as softly as possible, taking one more glance down at the sleeping man. Blaine suddenly wanted to lean down and press a soft kiss to Kurt's forehead and mentally debated it for a few seconds before finally deciding to just go ahead and do it. As gently as humanly possible, he touched his lips to the smooth skin of Kurt's forehead.

It was the first time his lips had touched any part of Kurt. Blaine wondered for a sleepy moment if it would also be the last.

Chapter Eight

The first Friday after she moved to Chicago with her daddy, Ellie Hummel started school again.

Daddy had gone into the office with her that morning to get everything finalized. The ladies working in the office at her new school were very nice, but Ellie was still terrified. She didn't know any of the kids here. Plus, nobody here knew who her daddy was. Back at Lincoln, everyone knew Mr. Hummel was her father - and *everyone* loved Mr. Hummel. Here, though, Daddy would walk her to her new kindergarten classroom, and then he would have to leave.

"Daddy, I don't want you to go," she admitted once they were standing in front of the classroom door. She gave him a big hug, knowing she never wanted him to go anywhere.

"I have to go, sweetie," her daddy told her. "I don't work at this school. You're going to be fine. Everything will be okay. Remember what I told you this morning?"

"No one pushes the Hummels around," Ellie said quietly, repeating the advice her daddy had given her over breakfast this morning. He said it was something *his* daddy used to say to him. Ellie thought that sounded like something Grandpa Burt would say.

"Exactly." Daddy smiled and kissed the top of her head before gently guiding her towards the door. "Good girl. Now go get 'em."

"Bye, Daddy." She turned around over her shoulder as she headed into the room. "I love you."

"Love you too, sweetheart." He smiled, and seeing her daddy smile at her like that after everything that had happened gave her the courage to go into the classroom and start all over.

...

Kurt tried not to think about what he was doing as he walked out the front doors of Friendship Valley Elementary School. He could only hope his daughter's new school lived up to its name. In all honesty, he was terrified. After everything that had gone down with Dave, Kurt had been worried about letting Ellie out of his sight for more than a fraction of a nanosecond. But she had to go to school, so after checking out

a few local elementary schools he'd come to the conclusion that Friendship Valley, located in a suburban neighborhood, was a much more promising fit for his daughter than one of the rough inner-city schools.

He hoped she would make friends. He hoped the other kids would be nice to her. The poor child had already been through so much in her six short years on this earth, and the last thing she needed was to experience the same constant bullying and harassment that had plagued Kurt's own school years.

"You okay?" Blaine asked as Kurt slid into the passenger seat of his car, which was waiting along the curb.

Kurt nodded. "I'm fine," he said. "It's just...I'm worried about her. Everything she's been through..."

"What did you tell the administrators when you enrolled her?" Blaine asked.

"I said we just moved here from Ohio for personal reasons. I didn't feel like getting into all that detail...the last thing I needed was a pity party from those secretaries in the main office."

"Oh." Blaine frowned as he drove out of the parking lot. "Were they rude or something?"

"No, they were nice, that's the problem," Kurt said. "The last thing I want is for anyone to feel sorry for me. I just want to move on with my life, not wallow in self pity for the rest of it."

"That's a good thing." Blaine nodded. "I know it has to hurt, and I can't even imagine what you're going through, but the best thing for you - and Ellie - would be to move on as much as possible, instead of dwelling on all the pain."

"Exactly." Kurt gave him a tiny smile. "Which is why I'm coming to watch you argue your case this morning. And I'm coming to the rally tonight to watch you there, too. And I'm thinking I should start looking for a job."

"Kurt, you really don't have to do that," Blaine told him. "I told you I can handle the rent just fine."

"I know, but I need to do *something*," Kurt sighed. "So I'm not just sitting around all day. I need to be doing something. Get back into the swing of things. Plus, I miss teaching."

"I can tell," Blaine observed with a small smile. "Maybe it would be a good thing for you to get back into that."

"I think so, too," Kurt mused. "Do you happen to know if any of the local schools around here are looking for a music teacher? I suppose that's something I should have asked when I was talking to some of the principals of different schools when I was trying to figure out where to send Ellie."

"Um...", Blaine paused for a second to think. "Do you *have* to just teach elementary school?"

"I double-majored in music and education," Kurt told him. "I can teach anything musical."

"Okay," Blaine said. "I remember reading in the *Tribune* a while back that Buckley Middle School was looking to start some kind of choir or something. They have the funds, surprisingly, but they can't find anyone to teach the class."

"Buckley...", Kurt thought the name sounded slightly familiar. "Isn't that..."

Blaine nodded, knowing exactly what Kurt was getting at. "Inner city. The majority of the kids who go there come from single-parent families that live on welfare and unemployment checks."

Kurt sucked in a breath through his teeth. He wasn't so sure about the idea of teaching at a school he wouldn't send his own child to. "Are you sure there's nowhere else?"

"That's the only potential position I know about," Blaine said apologetically. "Sorry. I know it doesn't sound so appealing."

But strangely enough, the more Kurt thought about it, the more it *did* appeal to him.

"It's perfect," he said quietly. "What better way to get my mind off of my own problems than to help teach kids whose situations are the same or potentially worse?"

"Kurt, I don't know," Blaine said warily. "Those kids have all had it pretty bad. They're a rough crowd. I don't know if that's exactly the situation you want to be in." He flicked on the turn signal as he pulled into a left turn lane, then shrugged. "But if you want to, I guess, you could look into it. Whatever you think is best for you."

"I'm not sure," Kurt said thoughtfully. "It seems like a really good chance to make a difference."

...

"Could you state your name for the record?"

Emily sat up straight in her wheelchair. "Emily Jade."

Blaine paused for a second before asking the next question. He awkwardly cleared his throat.

"What was the name of the woman with whom you were in a domestic partnership?"

He knew that these memories would be painful for Emily to recall, and he felt terrible that he had to do this, but questions like these were standard procedure when direct-examining one of his own clients.

"Renée Scott," Emily said quietly.

"Is it true that you and Renée adopted your first child almost four years ago?"

"Yes."

"What is your child's name?"

"Parker Andrew Jade-Scott."

"Is it true that your partner died unexpectedly in an automobile accident in November of last year?"

Blaine could see Emily swallow what was probably a huge lump in her throat, and she was all the way on the witness stand. "Yes."

"Were you paralyzed in the same accident?"

"Yes."

"And you have been the only caregiver of your son since that accident occurred, is that correct?"

Emily nodded. "Yes."

Blaine asked each question slowly and precisely. He was more nervous than he usually was, and he couldn't understand why. Something in the back of his mind told him that it was because Kurt was here

today, watching him, and he wanted to make a good impression since this was the first time Kurt had ever seen him in court. There was also that rally tonight, and Blaine had been so preoccupied with the case and Kurt that he'd barely started to write his speech. Then again, there was also the fact that Derek was coming home from France later on today. Blaine had to pick him up at the airport that evening. Derek still had no idea about Blaine's current situation, or even who Kurt was. Blaine was not exactly looking forward to explaining things to his boyfriend.

"What has been your primary means of employment since then?" he asked finally.

"I waitress a little bit here and there, but never can make enough money to pull in a steady income to support us both. My parents have been helping me out and sending me money, but I feel terrible that they have to do that."

"Is it true that you recently sought out a public relations position at the radio station 97.5 FM?"

"Yes."

"What were your qualifications for the position?"

"I graduated with a degree in public relations from Northwestern, which has one of the best communications programs in the country. At the time of the interview, I was going back to school to complete my master's degree, but since then, I've had to drop out since I didn't have enough money to pay for that *and* support myself and Parker. I had lots of experience working similar positions at other local radio stations and TV news shows. 97.5 would have been the biggest station I'd ever worked for."

"Can you please describe what happened during the interview process?"

Emily sighed. "The interviewer seemed very friendly at first, but I could tell he was taken aback when he found out I was a lesbian. I didn't bring it up directly - I was saying something about Renée and the accident and our son, and that's how he knew. From there on out, it was obvious that he was uncomfortable with that. He didn't seem very interested or focused on the interview or what I had to say."

"How do you feel you performed during the interview?"

"I think I did well. In all honesty, I would have hired me."

"Did you eventually get the job?"

Emily inhaled a deep breath and let it out before she answered. "No."

Blaine paused again before asking his final question, although this pause was mostly for effect.

"Do you honestly believe you were denied the position because of your sexual orientation?"

Emily's answer was clear and confident. "Yes."

Blaine turned to acknowledge the judge. "Your Honor, the plaintiff rests."

As the defense attorney who didn't like Blaine stepped to the stand to begin direct-examining his own witnesses, Blaine and Emily made their way back to their seats behind the plaintiff's table. Blaine couldn't help but glance out towards the spectators as the two of them sat back down. He caught sight of Kurt in the middle of the crowd, who gave him a tiny smile and a thumbs up.

...

Blaine was glad to notice that Kurt seemed genuinely excited about attending the rally later that afternoon. Since Kurt had been wary about leaving Ellie with anybody besides himself or Blaine, she was tagging along as well. Chicago's police department was sending more officers to keep control at this rally after the near riot that had erupted at the previous one, so Blaine felt better knowing that Kurt and Ellie would be safe. Emily was going to be there tonight as well; Blaine planned on introducing her to Kurt since he wouldn't know anybody else.

"This is amazing," Kurt said breathlessly as the three of them made their way into the Grant Park Amphitheater. He looked around in amazement at all the people waving rainbow gay pride flags and *Yes On 21* signs. "I've never seen anything like this before."

Blaine smiled. "I told you this was fun."

The first thing he had to do was find Nick, the GLAAD representative who had originally invited him to speak at the rally, and let him know he was here. Blaine found him standing at the front near the stage and went to introduce Kurt and Ellie to him.

"Is this your boyfriend?" was the first thing Nick asked Blaine as he shook Kurt's hand.

Both Blaine and Kurt blushed. "No, just a friend," Blaine explained. "He just moved here from Ohio."

"Ah." Nick nodded understandingly, then smiled at Kurt. "My apologies. Thank you for coming, it's always great to see new faces here supporting the cause."

"Oh, it's no problem," Kurt said with the tiny smile that seemed to be all he could muster lately. "The gay rights movement is very close to my heart. I wanted to do whatever I could to support it."

"Plus, I kind of dragged him here to watch my speech," Blaine joked, carefully slinging an arm over Kurt's shoulders.

Kurt rolled his eyes; Blaine was slightly distracted by how cute he looked so he didn't hear Nick excuse himself to go onstage and get things set up for the speeches. Kurt called a goodbye to him, then glanced down to make sure Ellie, who was holding his hand, was doing okay.

"There's so many people here," she said in amazement. "It's really cool."

"I know, isn't it?" Kurt smiled at her.

Blaine was about to say something, but his train of thought was interrupted when he heard someone who was not Kurt calling his name.

"Blaine! Hi! Over here!"

The familiar female voice belonged to Emily. She was parked in the front row, in a special wheelchair section that had been added as an extra security measure during this rally.

Blaine smiled and turned to Kurt. "Come here, I think it's about time you met my client." Kurt had been at the courthouse that morning, but Blaine hadn't introduced him to Emily due to the crazy hustle and bustle that accompanied the trial. He had, however, told Emily all about Kurt and his situation the previous afternoon when they'd gone out to lunch together. Emily was no longer just his client, but she was also becoming his friend.

"I'm so glad you two are finally meeting," Blaine said with a smile after they'd made their way over to Emily. "Kurt Hummel, Emily Jade. Emily Jade, Kurt Hummel."

"Hi, Kurt," Emily said with a smile as she shook Kurt's hand. "It's so nice to meet you. Blaine's been telling me all about you."

"Nice to meet you as well." Kurt returned her smile. "Blaine's been telling *me* all about *you*, too."

"Oh, I hope he hasn't been talking too much about me," Emily said. "What you're going through is so much more important. I'm so sorry to hear about that. How have you been doing?"

Kurt nodded humbly. "Thank you. I've been getting a little better each day. Now that we're out of there, I'm glad I finally have a real chance to start my life over." He glanced down at his daughter, then looked back up at Emily. "This is my daughter, Ellie. She's six."

"Hi," Ellie said shyly with a little wave.

Emily leaned forward in her chair and gave Kurt's daughter a friendly smile. "Hi, Ellie," she said softly. "I have a little boy just a few years younger than you."

"Oh, yeah," Blaine said. "Where *is* Parker, anyway?" He'd met Emily's son on a few occasions.

"He's at Grandma and Grandpa's," Emily explained. "My parents live in Evanston, so they babysit whenever I need them to."

Kurt looked like he was about to say something, but then the sudden voice of someone onstage boomed through the amphitheater. It took Blaine a few moments to realize that it was Nick welcoming everyone to the rally.

"I gotta go. I should probably be backstage," he told Kurt, Emily and Ellie. "I'll see you guys later."

"Good luck!" Emily called after him cheerfully.

"Even though you don't need it!" Kurt called in response.

Emily laughed. "He really doesn't."

Blaine smiled as he turned and walked away from them, glad to see they were getting along already. It was nice to see Kurt make a new friend.

...

Kurt watched expectantly as Blaine took the mic. He had to crane his neck to see, since he was in the front, but he didn't care. The entire amphitheater was dead silent as they waited to see what Blaine would do this time.

"Hey, everybody, I'm Blaine," he said casually, as if he were introducing himself to a new friend and not a crowd of thousands.

"I just turned 27. I'm a lawyer, but that doesn't mean I'm all business, all the time. I like to have fun, too." That got a laugh from the crowd. Kurt and Emily smiled at each other.

"I don't get a ton of free time, but when I do, I like to play guitar and watch football. Sometimes I write my own music. I'm from Ohio, so naturally I'm a huge Buckeyes fan. O-H...!"

"I-O!" Kurt shouted in response along with a few other audience members who must have been from the same state and therefore familiar with the callout.

Blaine waited a few seconds for the crowd to settle down after that small bit of excitement.

"I'm gay," he said casually after a short silence. "Based on what I told you before that, it shouldn't have changed your opinion of me. Because being gay, along with all those other things and so much more that I didn't get to mention, is just part of who I am."

Once again, he paused for effect.

"I'd like to get married someday," he added nonchalantly. "I'd like to have a wedding and a nice ceremony. I think it would be really incredible to share something like that with the man I love."

Kurt's heart stopped when he realized that Blaine's gaze flickered over to him as he said that last part.

Blaine shrugged after another pause. "I don't see anything wrong with wanting that. If anyone here *does* see something wrong with what I'm asking, please, I beg you, tell me right now."

There was silence. Nobody spoke up. Kurt's heart swelled with pride.

"Nobody here seems to have a problem with that." Blaine nodded slowly. "That's good to know. Now correct me if I'm wrong, but I assume that means you're all going to vote yes on 21?"

Now the crowd made some noise as everyone erupted into a rousing cheer.

"All right, cool," Blaine said as the noise died down. "I like seeing that. But I'm just one guy. I'm standing here representing millions of other guys - and girls - just like me, who are legally prohibited from marrying who they love. It's time we put an end to this. What do you say?"

The responsive cheer was even louder than the previous applause.

Blaine smiled. "Sounds good to me. Thank you."

The crowd rose into a standing ovation as he stepped down off the stage. Kurt liked to think that he was cheering the loudest. Blaine's speech had been short but powerful, and Kurt would be damned if his best friend hadn't involuntarily become one of the leaders of this entire movement.

...

Blaine talked to a few reporters after the rally before leaving to drop Kurt and Ellie off at his apartment building. He didn't even have time to come upstairs with them, because Derek had texted him a few minutes ago saying that his plane had landed and could Blaine please come pick him up at O'Hare?

So Blaine did. When he pulled up to the curbside sidewalk in front of the airport, Derek was already waiting for him with a smile on his face.

"Hi." Derek sounded tired but happy as he slid into the passenger seat. He gave Blaine a quick kiss. "I missed you."

Blaine didn't quite have the heart to say *I missed you, too*. He smiled at his boyfriend as he drove away from the sidewalk. "How was Europe?"

"Oh, it was incredible, but I didn't get to see as many sights as I wanted to," Derek explained with a sigh. "They work you and send you to meetings and seminars until you don't know what to do with yourself."

Blaine smiled apologetically. "I'm sorry to hear that," he told Derek.

They made small talk such as this as Blaine drove Derek back to his apartment building, where he'd left his car. The whole time, Blaine made a point to avoid anything that may lead him into unnecessarily bringing up Kurt. But when they got back to Blaine's building and he pulled into his usual parking spot, he realized there was no way to avoid it. Derek was going to find out sooner or later, and Blaine would rather it be sooner.

"Derek, there's something I need to tell you," Blaine said carefully after he'd turned off the engine.

Derek shrugged. "Shoot."

"There's a friend of mine," Blaine said slowly. "His name is Kurt Hummel. He just moved out here from Ohio with his daughter to get away from the abuse and violence they were facing at home. He's been staying with me all week, and he'll be living with me for a while. I thought you deserved to know."

Derek was quiet for a long time. Blaine gave him a moment to let this sink in.

"She was beating him so much he had to move all the way out here?" he asked incredulously.

Blaine shook his head. "No. Not *she*. His abusive partner is a man. Kurt's gay."

Derek's eyes went wide. Blaine could tell he was taken aback by this.

"He's one of my best friends, I've known him since high school," Blaine said gently. "This was one of the only places they'd be safe, so I invited them to come live with me."

Derek stared at him blankly for a long time before he spoke.

"I don't believe this," he said quietly. "You've had another man living with you - one who plays for our team, even - and meanwhile I've been all the way out in fucking *France* with absolutely no idea what's been going on." He snapped his seatbelt back angrily. "And why are you just telling me this now?"

"Derek, I thought it would be too difficult to explain over the phone," Blaine pleaded. "I thought you would understand. He and his daughter have been through so much. Please, please, *try* to understand." He paused for a moment. "They're right upstairs, if you want to come meet them."

Derek pulled the door open. "No, thank you," he scoffed. "I just sat on a plane for fourteen hours, and you surprise me with *this*. I think I'll wait to meet *Kurt Hummel* some other time."

He slammed the door shut behind him and marched angrily towards where he'd left his car the day he'd driven over here so Blaine could take him to the airport. Blaine stared blankly ahead through the windshield and wondered what the hell he'd gotten himself into.

...

Kurt found it weird that the nightmares hadn't started right away after he'd left Dave. Still, he wasn't surprised when he had another one that night.

The first night he'd slept here, he'd actually had a pleasant dream about Blaine tucking him in and giving him a gentle kiss goodnight on the forehead. But every night since, he'd had the same exact nightmare.

He was always in his car, and Ellie was always in the backseat, and he was always driving on an empty freeway. Then, out of the blue, he would see a familiar pickup truck gaining on him through his rearview mirror. At the same time, the needle on the gas gauge ran immediately down to Empty and Kurt's car stopped in the middle of the highway. He would try frantically to lock the doors, to no avail. The F-150 would always park directly behind him, and Dave would get out and yank Kurt out of his car. He would proceed to beat Kurt into oblivion for leaving him, and the worst part of it all was hearing his daughter scream from the backseat, terrified as she watched.

Kurt woke up, as usual, in the dead of night with sweat and tears streaming down his face. Eyes wide, he bit the corner of his pillow so he wouldn't scream.

Chapter Nine

Some know him as the attorney defending plaintiff Emily Jade in what is arguably the trial of the decade for the gay community. Some know him as the man who got up onstage at the Proposition 21 support rally two weeks ago and sang an impromptu cover of "Man in the Mirror" to calm the maddening crowd. Some know him as both. No matter. It cannot be argued that in the push for gay rights, five-foot-eight Blaine Darren Anderson, Attorney-at-Law, is standing tall.

So who is he, anyway, and why has he taken the initiative to lead this whole movement singlehandedly?

Anderson, 27, has a lot going for him. Young, handsome, dapper and friendly, he could easily be seen as an accessible local role model for much of the gay community. He has been employed by law powerhouse Carter & Perry for just six months, but has already established himself as one of the firm's most prominent attorneys. He grew up in Westerville, Ohio, a suburb of Columbus, and graduated as valedictorian from Dalton Academy for Boys in 2012.

After high school, Anderson began working towards his law degree at the Ohio State University in Columbus. Looking back, he admits that he never would have imagined being in such a powerful position back when he was in law school.

"This was never really something I ever planned on doing," Anderson said. "I never sat there while studying for the bar exam and thought, 'I'm going to try and take down homophobia once and for all.' The gay rights movement has always been special to me, but I never thought I'd be in a position like this where I was actually leading it, to an extent."

But all it took was one email from Jade, who requested Anderson to defend her in a discrimination lawsuit filed against hit radio station 97.5 FM. Jade, who is openly gay and requires the use of a wheelchair to get around, believes she was denied the position because of her sexual orientation.

"The second I heard about Emily's case, I knew I wanted to argue it for her," Anderson said. "There was no doubt in my mind. I might not have known it all along, but I think this is the case I'd been waiting for ever since I decided I wanted to be a lawyer."

As for his actions at the February 14 rally in Grant Park, Anderson says he made a "spur of the moment" decision.

"I didn't want anybody to get hurt, and I was afraid that was going to happen. If there's one thing I've always believed in, it's the power of music. So I got up there and sang," Anderson said.

"What Blaine did took tremendous amounts of courage," Chicago area GLAAD representative Nick Goldberg said. "I thought right away, 'This guy could end up leading the whole movement.'"

Anderson, who was the lead soloist of his high school glee club, received a tremendous ovation from the crowd after his impromptu performance. He was later asked by Goldberg to speak again at the rally that took place this past weekend.

So why does he do it?

"After Emily asked me to argue her case, it really hit me that I could take this opportunity and run with it," Anderson said. "It was just like, 'Why stop here?' I came to the conclusion that I wanted to throw myself into this movement heart and soul, and I would not rest until every single person in the state is allowed to love whoever they want."

When asked if he would ever consider running for public office, Anderson replied that he "wasn't sure."

"I honestly don't know if I'd ever want to be a politician," he said. "Maybe someday, but not now. I like being a lawyer. Right now, I think it's the easiest way for me to make a difference."

Kurt smiled as he closed the Tribune back to the front page. He was still smiling when Blaine came into the kitchen to pour himself his morning cup of coffee.

"Do I even want to know?" Blaine joked, acknowledging Kurt's ornery grin.

"There's an article on you in here." Kurt pushed the thick Sunday issue of the paper across the breakfast table towards Blaine as he sat down. "Front page of the Feature section. You didn't tell me they interviewed you after the rally."

"I know, I know," Blaine admitted as he flipped through the paper. "I also didn't tell you that I got a phone call from Dan Savage last night."

Kurt looked at him excitedly. "The guy who started the It Gets Better campaign?"

Blaine couldn't contain his smile. "He's hooking up with some guys from the Trevor Project to throw a benefit concert for homophobic bullying awareness, right here in Chicago. There's going to be some big-name performers there, but they want to feature some local artists as well, and he asked me to perform."

Kurt felt his heart swell with pride. He knew this was the exact type of thing Blaine would have always wanted to do, and here he was with the chance to do it.

"Oh my god, Blaine, that's wonderful!" He couldn't help returning his friend's smile. "Please tell me you said yes."

"Of course I did," Blaine said. "It's this coming weekend, and he apologized for the short notice, but I told him I didn't mind. This judge for Emily's case never brings court back in session for at least two or three days after the last session is adjourned, so I know I'll have some free time to pull something together since I don't think I'll have to be in court every single day."

Kurt leaned across the table towards Blaine, genuinely interested in everything the other man was saying. "How many songs do you think you'll get to perform?"

"I'm not sure yet," Blaine said. "There's going to be a lot of us local artists there, so I think he said we'll each get to do five or six different songs to make sure they have time for everyone to perform. It's like an all-day event, but they want to give as many artists a chance to perform as possible."

"This is so exciting." Kurt didn't care that he was gushing. "Too bad the Tribune writers didn't know about this at the time the paper went to press. They could have added that to their list of your many accomplishments." He grinned.

"Oh yeah, how's that article?" Blaine, who had ended up flipping to the sports section, asked. "I haven't read it."

"It was very good," Kurt told him. "Some of the stuff you said really made me think."

"Really?" Blaine glanced up from the paper at Kurt. "Like what?"

Kurt shrugged one shoulder. "Mostly all the stuff you said about making a difference. It got me thinking about maybe going for that teaching position at Buckley Middle School. I believe in the power of music, too, Blaine. I think it would be wonderful to use my gift to help these kids in a really special way."

Blaine tilted his head to the side as he thought about this. "I have to admit, I wasn't the biggest fan of the idea at first. But I'm starting to really like your thinking process in all of this. Those kids have had it pretty rough, and I think you could be exactly what they need to bring a little light into their lives."

Kurt gave him a tiny, hopeful smile. "Really? You think I could light up their lives?" He giggled as he repeated Blaine's terminology.

"I really think so." Blaine nodded. "I think you should go for it."

...

Naturally, Kurt would need a little support in making such a big decision, so Blaine had immediately agreed to go with him to the Chicago school district offices to inquire about the job. It was a Sunday, so the offices were only open through part of the afternoon, but Blaine had the day off as well. After they finished eating breakfast, he, Kurt and Ellie -who pretty much only left Kurt's sight while she was sleeping or at school - were on their way to the district offices.

They were greeted, with a wave, upon entering the main office building by a heavy-set African American woman who looked like she'd seen better days. She was sitting behind a desk and talking on the phone, but ended her conversation with whoever was on the other end with, "I'll call you right back," and hanging up.

"Can I help you?" she asked the three of them.

Blaine could tell Kurt was nervous. He placed a hand on the small of the other man's back and looked at him comfortingly.

"Hi, my name is Kurt Hummel," he said with minimal shakiness in his voice. "I'm interested in the music teaching position at Buckley Middle School."

The woman behind the desk took a long look at him before gesturing to some empty chairs that sat in front of her desk. "Go ahead and sit down."

Once the three of them were seated, the woman took a moment to look at Blaine before letting her face break into a smile.

"I know you," she said. "You're Blaine Anderson, that lawyer I read about in the paper this morning."

"Yes, ma'am, that's me," Blaine said politely. "I just wanted to come along today and support my friend Kurt here."

"That's very sweet of you," she told him before turning her attention back to Kurt. "You really want to look into this position?"

Kurt nodded. "Yes. I've thought a lot about it, and I think it would be a great opportunity to make a difference in these kids' lives. I taught music for three years back in Ohio - I just moved here this month, actually - and I loved it. I miss it so much. I'd love to be able to take a job I love and really make a difference with it."

Blaine didn't miss the way Kurt's voice choked up with emotion as he spoke. In that moment, he knew Kurt was one hundred percent serious about this.

"My oldest son goes to Buckley," the woman behind the desk said solemnly. "I'm a single mom raising four kids. My husband was a deadbeat drunk who used to beat me and the kids before I took the kids and we up and left. All the kids at Buckley are like that, you know what I'm saying? They all have it rough. Some of their situations's even worse than my kids'." She paused. "Mr. Hummel, you do realize what you're getting yourself into, right?"

Blaine's heart broke as he watched a flash of nostalgic pain shoot through Kurt's eyes before he spoke.

"I know," he said softly. "And I sympathize with you. I recently left my abusive partner as well - well, we did." He smiled at Ellie. "This is my daughter, Ellie."

Ellie smiled shyly. "Hi."

"It's very nice to meet you, sweetie," the woman said to Ellie with a smile, then looked back up at Kurt and Blaine. "I'm so sorry, I never introduced myself. I'm Leandra Simmons."

Kurt smiled. "It's very nice to meet you, as well." He cleared his throat. "Anyway, I think the main reason I'd like to look into this position is because a lot of kids who go to this school obviously don't come from the best of circumstances. I'd be able to relate to a lot of them with the whole issue of family violence.

And...and being able to share the gift of music with them, maybe help them to forget their troubles for one class period a day...I'd love nothing more."

Leandra nodded slowly. "You have a very big heart to even consider looking into something like this, Mr. Hummel."

"Please call me Kurt," he insisted politely.

"Kurt," she repeated. "All right. Buckley wants to start some kind of choir class or something. I'm not too sure on the specifics, I apologize. It would be a vocal music class, from what I understand, and I think they want the kids to be able to learn to read music and stuff like that, too. You can do that?"

"Absolutely," Kurt confirmed with a nod.

"Thank you for doing this," Leandra said sincerely. "I think it'll be real good for those kids to have something like this, and you're the first person we've had express any interest in the position. First of all, though, we're going to need to run a background check, and can I get your contact information so I can call you and set up an interview?"

Blaine noticed something different about Kurt as he rattled off his cell phone number for Leandra to write down. His posture was perfectly straight - not that Kurt had terrible posture to begin with - and he spoke with renewed confidence in his voice.

"Thank you so much," Leandra said, shaking Kurt's hand as they stood up to leave. "I'll be in touch." She reached out to shake Blaine's hand as well. "Nice to meet you as well, Mr. Anderson. I think you're doing a real good thing. Making a difference. You both are."

They both thanked her as they turned and left the office. Blaine had never felt a stronger urge to reach out and take Kurt's hand, but he forced himself to resist. He knew that together, they could accomplish more than either of them ever dreamed was possible.

...

Kurt wasn't surprised that evening when Ellie asked him to sing to her before she went to sleep. He'd been doing it every night since they'd come to live with Blaine because he knew it made her feel better, but if he was being honest, singing brought him comfort as well. He loved the feeling of freedom that flooded his

entire being whenever he sang. The song he chose that particular night could be interpreted many different ways, and he knew it, but he thought it could somewhat fit his own situation.

He began slowly, quietly, not looking at Ellie but instead staring wistfully into space as he sang.

"Step one, you say we need to talk

He walks you say sit down it's just a talk

He smiles politely back at you

You stare politely right on through

Some sort of window to your right

As he goes left and you stay right

Between the lines of fear and blame

You begin to wonder why you came."

As he began the first chorus, Kurt found himself blinking away tears. He wasn't sure why singing to Ellie every night always made him want to cry, but it did.

"Where did I go wrong, I lost a friend

Somewhere along in the bitterness

And I would have stayed up with you all night

Had I known how to save a life."

Kurt wished he had a piano here. Sometimes he found that it helped to play along as he sang, because the instrument gave him some tangible sense of the music as his fingers danced across the keys. But no matter. Now, all he had was his voice.

"Let him know that you know best

Cause after all you do know best

Try to slip past his defense

Without granting innocence

Lay down a list of what is wrong

The things you've told him all along

And pray to God he hears you

And pray to God he hears you

Where did I go wrong, I lost a friend

Somewhere along in the bitterness

And I would have stayed up with you all night

Had I known how to save a life."

Ellie was sleepy but listening intently, just like always. No matter how tired she was, she always stayed up until Kurt finished the entire song.

"As he begins to raise his voice

You lower yours and grant him one last choice

Drive until you lose the road

Or break with the ones you've followed

He will do one of two things

He will admit to everything

Or he'll say he's just not the same

And you'll begin to wonder why you came

Where did I go wrong, I lost a friend

Somewhere along in the bitterness

And I would have stayed up with you all night

Had I known how to save a life."

He repeated the chorus the appropriate number of times to end the song and faded out softly with his eyes closed. He hadn't cried yet, but he could still feel the tears pooling up behind his closed eyelids.

"Daddy?" Ellie asked.

Kurt let his eyes drift open. "Yes, sweetie?"

Ellie yawned. "I think it's good that you want to be a teacher again," she murmured sleepily. "You have a pretty voice. You can help teach the kids at that bad school to have pretty voices, too."

"Buckley isn't a bad school," Kurt corrected her gently. "It's a very different school than what you've been used to at Lincoln and Friendship Valley, yes. But the kids there have fallen on some hard times, and they can't help it. I want to do whatever I can to help them."

"I still think it's nice." She sat up and wrapped her arms around Kurt's waist to give him a hug before laying back down. "I'm tired. Love you, daddy."

Kurt leaned down to kiss her forehead. "I love you too, honey. Sweet dreams."

He flicked off her light as he left the room and closed the door gently behind him. When he stepped into his own bedroom, the tears he'd been suppressing as he sang finally started to fall.

It wasn't fair. He'd finally gotten away from Dave, and he was still causing Kurt so much pain. Yes, Kurt knew Dave had turned himself in. He'd gotten a phone call informing him of that fact the morning after he'd arrived here in Chicago. There would also be an arraignment hearing at which Dave would most likely plead guilty. Blaine had told Kurt that although he had a right to be present at the arraignment and testify, he was not required to do so. Kurt decided to pass. Being at the hearing would require driving all the way back to Ohio, which he really didn't feel like doing. It would also require seeing Dave again, which he also didn't feel like doing.

Kurt closed his bedroom door behind him so he was staring into the full-length mirror on the back side. He didn't take his eyes away from his own reflection as he pulled his white undershirt up and off over his head, then slipped out of his flannel pajama pants and let them fall to the floor as well. He forced himself to stare at his naked body in all its bruised and broken glory.

He felt so ugly. The bruises had faded somewhat since he'd gotten them, but they were still there, clearly visible. Kurt felt like they would never go away. No man would ever want him like this...who would want to lay beside a body that was covered in hideous bruises? He needed to start all aspects of his life over, including finding someone who loved him for all that he was, but that would be slightly difficult considering the present state of his body. He might be able to turn over a new leaf in all other parts of his life, but he felt like he would never find anybody who would want to be with him. Kurt decided to accept the fact that he was going to spend the rest of his life single. Blaine would help win approval for Prop 21, and then it would become legal and he would get married to Derek while hopefully still remaining friends with Kurt, who would be alone.

That's exactly how it was going to work. But why was he thinking about Blaine all of a sudden, anyway?

All of a sudden there was a knock on his closed bedroom door, accompanied by a soft voice.

"Kurt? Can I come in?"

It was Blaine. Shit. He knew he had no time to get dressed again, so he sprinted across the room towards his bed and pulled the covers up around him.

"Yeah, come on in!" Kurt called breathlessly. His voice came out with a higher pitch than usual, a sure sign that he was nervous.

Blaine opened the door and stepped into the room. He couldn't help but notice Kurt's usual sleepwear lying on the floor, but forced himself to stop thinking about the possible implications of that and instead look at Kurt himself.

"Just wanted to say you sounded amazing singing to Ellie just now," he said softly. "I heard you again. You always sound amazing."

"Thank you," Kurt said humbly with a tiny smile. "It helps her sleep better, so I'm happy to do it."

"That's sweet of you to do that for her," Blaine said. "Anyway, I also just wanted to say goodnight."

He stepped closer to the bed and smiled down at Kurt, but his smile immediately faded when he caught sight of a bruise near the top of Kurt's seemingly naked chest. Obviously he knew what had gone on between Kurt and Dave, but seeing a visible sign of that abuse was something else entirely.

"What's wrong?" Kurt asked, obviously noticing that Blaine was distraught.

"Kurt...," Blaine's voice was shaky. He sat down gently on the edge of Kurt's bed.

"You have a bruise," he finished stupidly.

"I know," Kurt said softly. "I have lots of bruises."

He sat up slowly and pulled the blankets in front of him around his chest. His back, however, was covered in more splotchy black-and-blue bruises and completely exposed to Blaine.

Blaine stared in horror at the injuries that marred Kurt's beautiful pale skin. He couldn't believe anyone could do this, especially to somebody as amazing as Kurt, who did nothing to deserve this.

"I hate my body," Kurt said in a tear-choked whisper. "I hate the fact that I look like this because of what he did to me. I hate...I hate him."

It was something he'd been wanting to say for a long time now. He'd given up and let his tears roll freely down his face.

"Shhh," Blaine whispered soothingly. "It's okay. You're okay." He reached his hand tentatively towards Kurt's injured back, but paused midway.

"Kurt?"

"Yes?" Kurt asked weakly.

"I'm going to touch you. Is that okay?"

Blaine had touched Kurt since he'd gotten here - occasional hugs and hand squeezes, but this was something else entirely. Something about this kind of touching seemed more intimate. Blaine's hand was still shaking in midair.

Kurt nodded. "Yes," he said softly. "I suppose if I'm going to let anybody touch me like this again, it may as well be you. I trust you."

His voice broke, but only from the tears. Blaine knew he meant it.

"I'll never hurt you," he swore to Kurt in a low whisper before gently placing his hand on Kurt's back.

Kurt drew in a shaky breath and trembled just the slightest bit under Blaine's touch. He knew there was nobody else in the world he trusted like this. Blaine was the only person he would ever allow to see his bruises and touch him like he was being touched now. Blaine's hand stroked slowly up and down his back a few times, and Kurt found it comforting. He actually liked the feeling.

"How do you feel?" Blaine whispered.

"Vulnerable," Kurt admitted. "Very, very vulnerable. But in a good way. It's like I'm finally coming to terms with what happened to me. I feel very safe with you."

Blaine slowed the movement of his hand just a little bit after Kurt said that.

"I have more," Kurt whispered after a few seconds of silence.

Blaine took his hand away from Kurt's back and watched as Kurt lowered the blankets from in front of him and set them down over his lap. His chest was now completely exposed to Blaine, whose heart

skipped a few beats as he suddenly realized that Kurt probably was naked. He wondered briefly what Kurt had been doing in here before he'd arrived.

His chest seemed to be in about the same condition as his back. With a wordless glance, Blaine raised his hand tentatively towards Kurt, who nodded. Blaine placed his hand on Kurt's chest and ran it all the way down to the blankets which covered up everything below the waist. Kurt's skin was unbelievably soft, and Blaine didn't miss the way Kurt trembled when the edge of Blaine's thumb grazed his nipple.

Blaine ran his hand back up Kurt's chest and looked him in the eyes as he told him what he'd been wanting to tell him since, well, high school.

"You're beautiful, Kurt," Blaine said softly but firmly.

Kurt's heart felt like it came to an abrupt stop. He couldn't believe what he'd just heard. Suddenly he felt the inexplicable urge to just be near Blaine, because he knew Blaine obviously cared about him very much and would never hurt him. Besides, he was still having that same terrible dream every night...

"Blaine, c-can I...," he trailed off, knowing there was no decent-sounding way to place his request, "sleep with you tonight? In your bed? I'll stay on the other side, I just want you to be close, and I've been having nightmares..."

Blaine was half-tempted to tell Kurt he was welcome to sleep on the same side of the bed as him - hell, Blaine was even up for snuggling - but he didn't want to come on too strongly. Still, there was no way he'd turn down Kurt's request.

"Absolutely," he said gently, standing up from the bed. "I'm just going to go brush my teeth. Come on in whenever you're ready."

Kurt came into Blaine's bedroom a few minutes later wearing the same white shirt and flannel pajama bottoms that Blaine had seen on his bedroom floor. Blaine tried not to think about the fact that Kurt had been naked earlier and now Kurt was going to sleep in the same bed with him and he mentally kicked himself for reflecting on all the fantasies he'd dreamed about since high school because Kurt had fucking bruises all over his beautiful body. That was what was important. Blaine's job was to comfort Kurt, and that was it. Kurt didn't come here seeking out another boyfriend.

"Thank you," Kurt said sincerely as he crawled into the opposite side of the bed from Blaine. "I'm sorry if this makes you uncomfortable. If you want to tell me to sleep on the floor at any time, go right ahead and say so. I just want to be close to someone when I wake up screaming in the middle of the night."

"No, no, you can stay here," Blaine said with a reassuring smile. "It's completely fine with me. I understand."

"Thank you," Kurt said quietly again.

Blaine reached over to turn off the lamp on his nightstand. "Good night, Kurt."

"Good night, Blaine," was Kurt's muffled reply. He was facing away from Blaine on the other side of the bed with the blankets all pulled up around him. Blaine looked at him for a while before deciding he should probably turn over and try to sleep, too.

...

It happened. Kurt wasn't surprised, but that didn't mean he wasn't terrified.

He woke up screaming, just as he predicted. Immediately a pair of arms closed around him, holding him tight, and Kurt screamed even louder.

"Shh, Kurt, it's just me," Blaine whispered softly. "I'm here. I've got you. It's just a dream."

Kurt blinked and looked up into Blaine's eyes. Blaine looked back at him comfortingly. He wondered for a sleepy moment how long he'd been in Blaine's arms.

"I hate that dream," Kurt whispered, crying softly into Blaine's chest and soaking the front of his shirt with his tears. "Why can't he just leave me alone?"

Blaine was pretty sure Kurt meant that rhetorically - at least Blaine hoped he did, because he couldn't think of an answer for Kurt. All he could do was hold Kurt and whisper soothingly to him as he fell back asleep. And he did - Kurt was sleeping soundly in Blaine's arms in no time.

Blaine wished he could fall asleep with Kurt in his arms like this every night. His heart filled with hope when he realized that Kurt seemed to like it, too. He was fast asleep in Blaine's arms with the faintest hint of a smile on his lips.

Chapter Ten

It was happening. He'd known about it for a while, but it hadn't really hit him until the first night he'd fallen asleep with Kurt in his arms. To put it simply, Blaine Anderson was falling in love.

Seeing the little smile on Kurt's face as he drifted off into sleep was what did it for Blaine. That small, beautiful smile was there because he, Blaine, was holding Kurt and Kurt seemed to like that. That smile did crazy things to Blaine's heart after he saw it. It made him realize that he was truly, completely in love with Kurt.

Nothing much changed after that first night they slept together. Kurt would always fall asleep on the opposite side of the bed from Blaine until he woke up from his inevitable nightmare, at which point Blaine would take Kurt in his arms and hold him there for the rest of the night. It felt amazing, but at the same time it killed Blaine that he could hold Kurt like this, but Kurt still didn't know how he felt.

And so he confided in Emily one morning when they met up for coffee before heading to the courthouse. Blaine was set to cross-examine the defense today, and he was more nervous than he usually got in the midst of a heated case. He needed to talk to somebody that wasn't Kurt. Out of courtesy, he'd invited Kurt to come get coffee with them. Kurt had declined because he needed to get Ellie to school, and doing so involved sitting in inevitable Chicago morning rush hour traffic. He would meet them at the courthouse later that morning to watch Blaine argue the case. Blaine had been secretly relieved when Kurt had turned down his invitation. He could get everything off his chest without Kurt knowing.

"Okay, so what is it you wanted to talk about?" Emily eyed him knowingly once they were seated with their drinks at a secluded table in the back of the sleepy coffee shop.

"I think I'm in love with Kurt," Blaine said all in a rush.

There. The truth was out there. He felt a tiny bit of relief.

Emily looked confused. "Then why do you seem so upset? Being in love is a good thing. It's a beautiful feeling, and you seem so stressed out."

"I am," Blaine admitted. "I *know* I love him. I've never felt like this about anybody else in my whole life. It's just...I don't know how much longer I can keep my feelings from him. But I don't even know how he feels about me. I mean yeah, we've been sleeping together, but then there's Derek..."

"Whoa. Hold up." Emily held up her hands to signal for him to stop talking. "Are you telling me you've been having sex with him?"

"No!" Blaine felt a furious blush overtaking his face. "Not 'sleeping with him' in *that* way. He's been having nightmares, so I let him sleep in my bed with me because he doesn't like waking up from the bad dreams all alone in his room by himself. And every night when he wakes up screaming, I hold him in my arms while he falls back asleep."

Emily gave him a small smile. "That's sweet," she said sincerely. "And you still don't think he has feelings for you?"

"I don't know," Blaine told her. "He's my best friend, and he has been since high school. He's always been nothing but sweet and caring towards me, and sometimes he even flirts a little, but I was never able to determine if that was just kind of part of his personality, y'know? And maybe he just likes sleeping in my arms because he feels protected. Maybe it has nothing to do with the fact that it's *me*, but he just likes knowing that *somebody* is there to hold him and comfort him."

"I don't think he would want to fall asleep in just *anybody's* arms after all he's been through," Emily pointed out. "I think it's because he feels something for you, too, and knowing that *you* are there to protect him makes him feel really good."

Blaine sighed. "I don't know," he said again. "I want nothing more than to be with him, trust me. But I can't do that until I know for sure that he feels the same and he's ready for another relationship."

Emily eyed him as he spoke and she took a long sip of her coffee. She set the cup down on the table and looked him straight in the eyes.

"There's really only one way to do this," she told him. "You have to let him know how you feel. That's the only way you're going to find out if he feels the same."

Blaine sucked in a breath through his teeth. "I have no idea how to do that without sounding like I'm coming on too strong. 'Hi, Kurt, I love you.' No."

Emily shook her head. "No. Don't do that."

Her face faded into a dreamy smile as her gaze wandered off into space while she began to reminisce.

"Renée was a bit of a musician," she said, her voice lost in the past. "She had a beautiful voice. About six months after we got together, my dad was diagnosed with cancer. He's all clear now, but at the time it was pretty scary. I was pretty upset when I found out, so Renée sang to me to make me feel better. She said music expressed what she wanted to say to me better than she ever could by herself."

Blaine considered this. "That's not a bad idea," he mused. "And I'm singing at that Trevor Project benefit concert this weekend. Kurt's gonna be there. Maybe if I sing something and dedicate it to him, it would give him a hint."

Emily grinned. "Exactly."

Blaine looked at her questioningly. "Just out of curiosity, what song did she sing to you?"

She told him the name of the song, and Blaine's face immediately brightened as a lightbulb went off in his head. "I *know* that. And I think it would be perfect for me to sing to Kurt."

"I think so, too," Emily said with a smile. "It lets him know how you feel, *and* reminds him that you're here to support him with what he's going through."

"I think I'm gonna sing it to him at the show," Blaine said, more to himself than to Emily. "It's perfect." He swigged the last of his coffee, then smiled at her with newfound confidence. "Ready to go get cross-examined? *I'm* ready to go do some cross-examining."

Emily rolled her eyes. "Oh, please, that defense lawyer is such a douchebag," she said as she wheeled herself back from the table. "I know you'll do great, though. Let's go."

...

Kurt kept a wary eye on Greg Roberts as he headed up to the witness stand. The media had already pegged this guy as the one witness who could make or break this case, depending on what he said in his testimony. Since he had been hired for the same PR position that Emily had been vying for, Greg was testifying for the defense. Kurt - along with everyone else in the courtroom - knew that Greg could either

defend the radio station's choice in hiring him or admit that he knew his hiring had been unconstitutional, thus supporting Blaine and the plaintiff's side of the case.

He couldn't see Blaine very well from where he was sitting, but he could hear Blaine's voice ring out clearly and confidently as he asked the first question of the cross examination.

"Would you state your name for the record?"

Greg, a skinny dark-haired man who suddenly seemed nervous, cleared his throat before answering. "Gregory James Roberts."

"Where is or where was your current or most recent place of employment?" Blaine asked.

"Uh...97.5 FM, which is a local radio station here in Chicago."

"You are aware that you have the same job for which the plaintiff applied and interviewed?"

Greg cleared his throat again. Kurt didn't need a law degree like Blaine to tell that this guy had never done anything like this before. "Yes, I am aware."

"Did you encounter Emily Jade at all during the application and interview process?"

"Yeah," Greg said, then corrected himself. "Yes. I did. She interviewed on the same day as me, we kind of started talking while we were waiting in the lobby."

"Were you aware of any aspects of Ms. Jade's personal life, such as the reason she is in the wheelchair, or her sexual orientation?"

"No, I wasn't. We were just talking for a few minutes. She seemed really friendly. She mentioned that she went to Northwestern. I went there, too, so I thought it was neat that we had something in common."

Kurt assumed that Blaine already knew the two had gone to the same university. Blaine had researched each of the defense witnesses tirelessly before the case began, and that seemed like something he would have found out. Still, he had to admit that Blaine was very good about asking questions he already knew the answers to. Such as:

"Did you graduate from Northwestern with a degree in public relations, like Ms. Jade did?"

"Yes," Greg said. "I never knew her, though. She graduated a few years before I did, so I had never met her before the interview."

"Did you hold any public relations positions before this?" Blaine asked.

"No. In college, I was already dating the woman who would become my wife. We married a few months after I graduated. She's a doctor, so she was the main breadwinner for our family...I kind of became the stay-at-home dad when we started having kids."

Kurt smirked. The guy's wife was a doctor. He wasn't a single parent trying to earn a living a la Emily. Blaine had this case in the bag.

"What made you decide to go for this position, then?"

"The kids are starting school now, and this job had flexible hours. I wanted to start working again, so I figured I could go out for the job and still be able to spend time with my family."

Blaine expertly followed this response with a complete non-sequitur. "Do you believe that you were hired fairly, now that you know more of the story?"

Greg hesitated. "No," he said finally. "I think Emily should have gotten the job. There's that whole Americans with Disabilities Act...she needs this more than I do."

As soon as Blaine asked the next question, Kurt knew it was his last for this particular cross-examination.

"Are you still employed by 97.5 FM?"

"No. I quit a few days before this trial began."

Kurt saw Blaine turn his head to acknowledge the judge. "Your Honor, the plaintiff rests."

He had to resist the urge to applaud as Blaine returned to his seat. Greg Roberts had pretty much given Blaine exactly what he needed to win the case.

Not that Blaine had needed any help.

...

Back in Ohio, Dave Karofsky was a mess.

He spent his time laying on the tough wooden bench inside his holding cell, staring up at the ceiling. When food was brought to his cell, he only ate a few bites of whatever meal the jail kitchen had managed to cook up before shoving the mostly-untouched tray across the floor back towards the barred door. He'd lost a tremendous amount of weight from doing absolutely nothing.

He still felt terrible about what he'd done to Kurt. His arraignment was coming up next week, and he still had no idea if Kurt was coming to testify. He knew Kurt didn't *have* to come testify, but he had a right to do so, and Dave wanted desperately to see him again although he wasn't quite sure why. He knew that if Kurt showed up, he would have to look at his ex-lover's face and come to terms with the fact that all the pain in those beautiful eyes was there because of *him*.

Dave could faintly hear the sounds of someone talking on the phone in the prison guard's office just down the hall from his cell. He strained his ears to make out what the guard was saying to the person on the other end, but was unable to hear anything clearly before the guard said "Thank you, Mr. Hummel," and hung up.

Kurt. He'd been talking to Kurt. Dave's heart broke.

A few seconds later, he heard the sound of footsteps coming from the guard's office down the hall towards his cell. He closed his eyes and waited.

"Karofsky?" the prison guard's gruff voice said a few seconds later.

"Yeah?" Dave mumbled.

"I just got off the phone with Mr. Kurt Hummel," the guard told him.

"And?"

"He's not coming to the arraignment."

Dave squeezed his eyes shut again and hesitated a few moments before responding.

"Thanks for letting me know."

He listened to the retreating footsteps that echoed through the hall as the guard walked away, then opened his eyes and stared at the ceiling some more as he tried not to think about anything.

...

Kurt's week had passed pretty slowly after he'd gotten the call from the police in Ohio, politely reminding him that Dave's arraignment was next week and Kurt was welcome to show up and testify. He'd declined. He really had no interest in seeing Dave again at all - or hearing anything about him, from that matter. The officer he'd spoken with had told Kurt that he would be notified of the outcome of the arraignment. Kurt could live with that. He knew Dave would be guilty, and when he found out for sure, he was going to be relieved beyond belief.

The day after he received the call about the arraignment, his phone buzzed with another incoming call. This one would bear good news.

"Hello?" he asked as he answered the phone, having not recognized the number.

"Kurt Hummel? Hi, this is Leandra Simmons from Chicago City Schools," the familiar female voice on the other end told him.

"Oh! Hi!" Kurt smiled. He hoped that her calling was a good sign for him about this teaching job.

"I'm calling to let you know that we've completed our background check and we'd like to set up an interview with you." Kurt could hear the smile in her voice. "Are you still interested in the job?"

"Yes, absolutely," Kurt told her, trying not to jump up and down with excitement. Blaine, who had just walked into the room, eyed him questioningly. Kurt pretended not to see him just yet.

"Would you be able to come in and talk to us on Saturday at noon? I know it's a little bit short notice, but we can always meet another day if that doesn't work for you."

"No, no, that's fine, I can come then," Kurt said, still smiling. "Thank you so much."

"It's no problem at all," Leandra said reassuringly. "We're looking forward to talking to you. See you then."

Kurt said goodbye to her and hung up the phone before turning to look at Blaine.

"Well?" Blaine asked expectantly.

Kurt couldn't contain his excitement. "That was Leandra! You know, that nice woman from the Chicago City Schools offices. They want to interview me!"

"Kurt, that's amazing!" Blaine stepped forward to give him a hug. He tried to ignore the sparks that shot through his entire body at the sensation of having Kurt so close to him. "Congratulations! When's your interview?"

"Saturday at noon," Kurt said, then his expression fell as realization set in. "Oh. But that's the day you're giving your closing argument. I'm so sorry. I was excited when she told me, and it totally slipped my mind..."

"Kurt, it's okay," Blaine reassured him. "This is really important to you. Besides, I'll argue a lot more cases after this, I'm sure. You'll have another chance to watch me do closing arguments." He grinned.

"I know, but it's *this* case," Kurt sighed. "Oh well. I'm so sorry I can't be there. Why are they having closing arguments on a Saturday, anyway?"

"They did the closing arguments on a *Sunday* back during the Casey Anthony trial," Blaine pointed out. "I thought *that* was weird."

Kurt rolled his eyes but smiled. "You *would* remember that."

"I remember literally throwing a shoe at my TV when they announced the verdict, *that's* what I remember," Blaine said flatly. "Anyway. I understand. I want you to go to the interview. Besides...", he let his face grow into a smile, "you're still coming to the benefit concert tomorrow night, right?"

Kurt returned his smile. "I wouldn't miss it for the world."

That was exactly what Blaine needed to hear. Granted, Derek would be at the concert, too. That probably would not end well. But Blaine didn't care about that right now. Kurt was going to be there, and that's all that mattered.

...

Kurt had been a bit wary about bringing Ellie to the concert the next night, since he didn't know what kind of people were going to be there. But he hadn't wanted to leave her by herself, so along she came. To Kurt's relief, the crowd seemed relatively calm and respectful. There were people of all ages here, including entire families. Plus, he was happy to see Emily there, her chair parked near the front of the crowd. A small boy sat in her lap. Kurt had known Emily was coming, but he didn't know she was bringing her son. He wasn't too much younger than Ellie, so Kurt thought it was nice that she would have another kid to talk to.

"Hi!" he called above the white noise of the crowd as he stepped up beside Emily's chair, Ellie clinging tightly to his hand so as not to lose her among the massive throng of people. Kurt smiled at the little boy in Emily's lap. "This must be Parker."

"This is Parker," Emily told Kurt with a smile before looking at her son. "Sweetie, this is my friend Kurt and his daughter Ellie."

Parker had bright blue eyes and blond hair. His face lit up in a smile as he waved enthusiastically at them. "Hi!"

"He's very excited," Emily said, still smiling. "He loves meeting new people."

Kurt and Emily kept talking, sharing stories of various funny things their children had done, and Parker hopped down off of Emily's lap to stand by Ellie. Kurt was happy to notice that his daughter seemed to be getting along well with Emily's son, even though she was a couple years older than him.

Neither got to talk for very long, though, because soon enough the emcee came onstage to start the show.

Emily flipped open her program as the emcee started to give a brief welcome speech. "Oh my god, he's first!" she whispered excitedly to Kurt. "Blaine's first!"

"Let me see that, I didn't get one." Kurt leaned over to peer at her program. "Oh my god, you're right. Do you know what he's singing?"

"I know one song," Emily told him. "I think he's doing three, though."

The emcee was walking offstage and the crowd had erupted into cheers, so Kurt assumed that Blaine had been introduced while he and Emily were talking. Sure enough, he was right. Blaine stepped onstage from the wings, smiling and waving to the audience. The screams from the audience intensified.

"Hi guys, my name's Blaine Anderson," he said as means of introduction. "This is my first real gig, so it's a huge honor for me to be here tonight and help raise awareness of such an important cause. I could say a lot more, but I don't want to bore you all...you guys probably just want me to get to the music. That's what you came here for, right?"

The crowd cheered. Kurt and Emily joined them.

Blaine started off with an acoustic version of Teenage Dream, and Kurt found that his heart was pounding just as erratically as the first time Blaine had sang this. He watched Blaine up onstage, singing his heart out, and was suddenly hit with the fact that his teenage feelings had never gone away. This time, though, there were no standard-issue teenage hormones in his way. What he felt for Blaine was real. Kurt knew it was so much more than just a crush.

His heart was still melting as Blaine began to sing the a capella version of Man in the Mirror that had won him so much notoriety. The crowd sang along and Kurt joined him, though he thought his voice seemed quiet and weak compared to the rest of the collective voices around him. It was Blaine, though. Kurt was so transfixed by him that he didn't care what his own voice sounded like.

Once again, there was an explosive response from the crowd when Blaine finished that song. Onstage, he smiled and took a shy little bow before stepping back up to the mic.

"Thank you guys so much," he told the room. "I have one more song for you tonight."

He made his way to the piano on the other side of the stage and sat down at the bench in front of the instrument. After adjusting the low microphone there for a moment, Blaine spoke again.

"This one is for Kurt," he said.

Kurt's heart stopped. He couldn't have moved even if he'd wanted to. He thought he felt Emily squeezing his hand excitedly, but his whole body was numb. He couldn't take his eyes away from Blaine as he began to play and sing.

"When the rain is blowing in your face,

And the whole world is on your case,

I could offer you a warm embrace

To make you feel my love."

Kurt knew this song, but he hadn't heard it in years. Now, though, the lyrics were coming back to him. He trembled as he realized what the rest of the song said.

"When the evening shadows and the stars appear,

And there is no one there to dry your tears,

I could hold you for a million years

To make you feel my love."

I wouldn't mind you holding me for a million years, Kurt thought as Blaine sang. It felt incredible to fall asleep in his arms every night. Kurt had always thought that Blaine held him like that to comfort him and reassure him that everything was okay. But now Kurt was starting to realize that maybe there was something more in the way Blaine held him every single night.

"I know you haven't made your mind up yet,

But I would never do you wrong

I've known it from the moment that we met,

No doubt in my mind where you belong."

The entire audience was silent as Blaine sang. A few of them were holding up cell phones as makeshift lighters and swaying back and forth. Kurt would have done the same, but he was a bit incapable of moving as Blaine's gorgeous voice swelled throughout the room.

"I'd go hungry, I'd go black and blue,

I'd go crawling down the avenue

No, there's nothing that I wouldn't do

To make you feel my love."

There was a short piano interlude during which Blaine didn't sing, and Kurt took advantage of this moment to try and remember how to breathe. He noticed for the first time that there was a tear on his cheek, and a second one about to slip out of his eye.

"The storms are raging on the rolling sea

And on the highway of regret

Though winds of change are blowing wild and free,

You ain't seen nothing like me yet."

Blaine slowed it down a bit before he sang the last few lines. He looked out at the audience and locked eyes with Kurt, who was still trembling.

"I could make you happy, make your dreams come true

Nothing that I wouldn't do

Go to the ends of the Earth for you,

To make you feel my love."

Blaine struck the last chord on the piano to a deluge of cheers from his audience. Kurt, meanwhile was sobbing. Emily reached up from her chair and wrapped her arms around his waist to hug him. Kurt hugged her back to the best of his ability with tears pouring down his face.

He'd been in love with Blaine ever since high school, as much as he hadn't wanted to admit it during his long relationship with Dave. Now, though, there was no way he could keep his feelings suppressed any longer. He didn't care that Blaine had Derek, although it frustrated him that Blaine had never been so explicit in expressing his feelings towards Kurt until just now. Kurt was happy and confused at the same time. Blaine had been planning this performance, so he obviously knew how he felt about Kurt. But why hadn't he done anything about it until now?

No matter. The song he'd just heard was not just a song of comfort, and Kurt knew that. Blaine had been singing him a love song.

...

"Hey, Blaine, what the hell?"

Blaine froze as he stepped out of his dressing room after the show and found himself face-to-face with Derek. His heart sunk immediately. He had a lot of explaining to do.

"How'd you get backstage?" Blaine tried unsuccessfully to change the subject.

"So Kurt's just a *friend*, but you're going to sing something like *that* to him?" Derek asked angrily.

Blaine pulled his coat on and began to walk away. "I don't know what you're talking about, Derek."

"Oh, sure you do, Mr. Law Degree. You're smart. You know *exactly* what I'm talking about." Derek paced quickly after Blaine, trying to catch up. "Helping him get over domestic abuse is one thing. Inviting him to live with you and then singing about how you want to make him happy and make his dreams come true...that's another."

Blaine sighed, but didn't stop walking. "Derek, I'm dating *you*. Not Kurt. Don't you think something would have happened between Kurt and I by now?"

"Who says something *isn't* going to happen?" Derek called, and Blaine froze in place with his back to his boyfriend.

"That song would make any boy in the world fall in love with you. Kurt's probably absolutely smitten now, if he wasn't already." Derek walked up to him and stood with his face close to Blaine's as he continued.

"Sure, nothing may have happened between you guys yet, but something is *going* to happen and you knew it, didn't you? That's exactly why you sang that song. You tried to play it off as, 'Oh, Kurt, I'm going to support you through your difficult time,' but you *knew* it was going to make him fall for you."

Derek hesitated for a moment. "You need to make up your mind, Blaine," he said quietly but firmly. "It's me or him. You can't have both of us."

And with that, he walked away.

Blaine was left standing alone in the middle of the backstage hallway. His mind was made up, he knew which one he wanted. That much was true.

But he still didn't know if Kurt felt the same way.

...

Kurt sang to Ellie again that night. The song he chose on this specific night wasn't particularly sad, as the others he'd sang to her usually were. This song, he thought, expressed his feelings about Blaine and his confusion towards the way Blaine seemed to be showing his seemingly-mutual feelings towards Kurt.

"I'd conjure up the thought of being gone

But I'd probably even do that wrong

I try to think about which way

Would I be able to and would I be afraid?

Cause oh, I'm bleeding out inside

Oh, I don't even mind..."

Ellie was listening sleepily but still hanging on every word. He knew she wouldn't understand the context of the song, but his voice would soothe her to sleep. She had no idea how anxious he was, waiting for Blaine like this.

"It's all your fault, you called me beautiful

You turned me out and now I can't turn back

I hold my breath because you are perfect

But I'm running out of air and it's not fair."

He knew Blaine could probably hear him. Blaine always seemed to hear him. Good. Maybe that would give him a hint to hurry up and just tell Kurt how he felt already. Kurt was more than ready for Blaine to love him. After all, he'd been waiting for Blaine since high school...

"I'm trying to figure out what else to say

To make you turn around and come back this way

I feel like we could be really awesome together

So make up your mind cause it's now or never, oh

It's all your fault, you called me beautiful

You turned me out and now I can't turn back

I hold my breath because you are perfect

But I'm running out of air and it's not fair."

He finally looked at Ellie as he finished, waiting for her to say something.

"That song was different than the others," she observed. "But I liked it."

"I like it, too." He leaned down to kiss her forehead. "Now get some sleep. Good night, sweetheart. I love you."

"I love you, too," she called after him as he stepped out into the hallway.

He was already dressed and ready for bed, so after brushing his teeth he went straight to Blaine's room. His heart was pounding intensely, not knowing what to expect when he and Blaine acknowledged each other.

But all Blaine said when Kurt slid into his side of the bed was, "I didn't know that song."

"It's Pink." Kurt made a point to stay facing away from Blaine as he pulled the covers up around him. "I thought you liked her."

"I do, but I don't know all her songs," Blaine said. "What's that one called?"

Kurt hesitated for a second.

"It's All Your Fault," he said quietly.

"I'll have to look that one up," Blaine said. "Good night, Kurt."

He turned off the lights, but neither of them closed their eyes. Kurt stared at the wall on his side, thinking that it *was* all Blaine's fault. Not necessarily in a bad way, though. Blaine had made Kurt fall in love with him tonight, but he'd also unintentionally brought some frustration as Kurt waited impatiently to find out for sure exactly how Blaine felt about him. Tomorrow, he thought, he would confront Blaine about the song he'd sang at the concert, and about everything else. Now, he was emotionally drained and all he wanted to do was sleep on it.

Blaine stayed wide awake as well, lying on his side and facing the opposite way from Kurt. He knew exactly why Kurt had chosen that song. He only hoped he could get up the courage to confront Kurt about it somehow and clarify his feelings once and for all.

Kurt never moved into Blaine's arms, because he never had a nightmare. Neither of them got much sleep that night.

Chapter Eleven

Dave had a relatively easy Saturday, considering his circumstances. He allowed himself to be led out of his cell and to the arraignment. When asked what he had decided to plead, he told them that he was pleading guilty. When called to the stand to testify, he told the truth and nothing but the truth. He couldn't lie. He felt incapable of doing anything else malicious in his lifetime - he'd already caused enough pain. Plus, Kurt deserved justice.

Before the verdict was announced, he let his mind wander for a brief moment as he wondered what Kurt was doing right now. Where was he? Was he safe? Was he with Blaine?

As weird as it seemed, Dave hoped he was with Blaine. Blaine was good to Kurt. He would never cause him any pain.

He snapped out of his reverie when the bailiff called for the defendant to rise. Dave stood up and stared out into space as the verdict was read aloud.

"On the charges of domestic violence and driving under the influence, we find the defendant guilty..."

That was all he needed to hear. He exhaled a sigh of relief, not bothering to listen to the rest of the legal gibberish that followed, including his sentence.

When it was over, he was herded into a police car and driven to his new home at a medium-security prison a few blocks away. Once there, the officers took him to his jail cell, where he would spend the next five years.

...

"I blew it. I knew he would take it the wrong way. He won't even look at me now."

Blaine was staring absentmindedly at his plate of waffles and scrambled eggs rather than looking at Emily, with whom he'd met for brunch before the two headed off to the courthouse. He couldn't even look at *her*. He couldn't make eye contact with *anyone* without feeling worthless.

Emily sighed. "Blaine, I am so sorry. This whole thing is my fault, I never should have told you to sing that song."

"No, no." Blaine held up one hand to gently stop her. "The song was great. *I* was the one who messed up. Before I sang that to Kurt, I should have broken it off with Derek for good. He came up after the show and confronted me about it. That's probably why Kurt's so confused about everything. He knows how I feel about him, but technically I still have a boyfriend, so he doesn't understand why I sang that to him." He let out a deep breath. "*I'm* the one who brought this on myself. Not you. I'm being really unfair to both of them. I'm leading Derek on, and I'm not being completely honest with Kurt."

Emily nodded. "I have to say you're right about that. Have you talked to Kurt at all?"

"Just a little bit, last night," Blaine said. "He was singing to Ellie before she went to bed - he always does - and the song he sang last night seemed to be directed towards me. When he came in to go to sleep, I asked him about it...like the title, and who sang it, stuff like that because I was too afraid to bring it up directly just yet. When I got up this morning, he had already left for his interview down at the school district office."

"Do you think he'll be back by the time we're done with the closing arguments today?" Emily asked.

Blaine shrugged. "I don't know. Probably. How come?"

"You need to talk to him," Emily told him. "Go right home after court and tell him that you plan on breaking things off with Derek - that you've been planning to for a while now, actually, but just didn't know when was a good time - and that you want to be with *him*. You need to get it out in the open that you have no intention of staying in this relationship any longer. That'll clear up his confusion."

Blaine smiled at her. "Y'know, most people probably wouldn't want to spend their Saturday mornings giving their attorney love advice over brunch, but thank you."

"You're only my attorney inside the courtroom," Emily said, returning his smile. "Everywhere else, you're my friend. And if there's one thing I hate, it's seeing any of my friends upset."

Blaine laughed, then looked at his watch and noticed that they had about a half hour before they were supposed to show up at court. He frowned at his plate.

"We should get going. These eggs weren't very good, anyway."

"Yeah, I know." Emily made a face, picked up both plates of food, and dumped them simultaneously in the trash can as they made their way out the door. "Now let's go win this case."

...

Leandra Simmons had been interviewing potential teachers for a long time, and she knew a good candidate when she saw one. She'd known she liked this Kurt Hummel from the moment she met him, and she still liked him today, but something seemed different about him as they progressed over the course of the interview. Maybe it was just nerves, but there was no denying that something seemed off.

"What do you plan to be doing in five years?" was one of the questions she asked him at one point.

"I plan....," Kurt's voice came out quiet and raspy; he cleared his throat and tried again. "I plan to be teaching, definitely," he said. "At this point in five years, I want to be able to say that I was one of the creators of the music program at Buckley and hopefully I will have made some kind of impact on those kids' lives. Five years from now, I want the music program at that school to be something that every student wants to be involved in."

Leandra nodded and wrote his answer in shorthand on her clipboard.

"Outside of a school environment, have you ever had to take care of another person?" she asked next.

"Yes." Kurt nodded and blinked rapidly. It almost seemed like he was trying to hold back tears. "My daughter, Elizabeth. I've pretty much been a single parent ever since I left my abusive partner. I'm living with my friend Blaine Anderson now - you know Blaine, you met him when we came to ask about the job - and he's been wonderful, but at the end of the day, she's *my* daughter, and we have been through so much together. First and foremost, *I* take care of her. I love her more than anything or anyone in the world."

Leandra had been writing his response down as he spoke, but she stopped once she heard the way his voice became choked up with emotion. Kurt just might have been one of the kindest, most compassionate people she'd ever met. He already seemed to possess all the qualities that defined an excellent teacher. She already had her mind made up about him, even though she knew she was going to have to sit down at a meeting with a bunch of other people from the district and the school, and they would all have to discuss

Kurt's answers to the questions and decide whether or not he should get the job. It didn't matter that the decision was not entirely hers. She would fight tooth and nail if need be to make sure he got this job.

"You really want this job, don't you?" It wasn't one of the standard interview questions, but she couldn't help but ask it.

"More than anything in the world," Kurt said quietly but firmly.

She flipped to the next clean page on her note pad and clicked her pen out again. "All right, we're just about done for today. Do you have any questions?"

Kurt asked a few questions about the school and the district in general, all of which she was able to answer for him. When they were finished, they stood up and shook hands, and Leandra told him to expect a call from the district within the coming week.

She watched through the window as he walked out of the office building and got into his car, a flashy red Corvette, and drove away. No doubt, there was something completely different in the way he'd carried himself today, but that didn't take away from the fact that he'd done an amazing job at the interview. She could only imagine what he was going through.

...

Blaine spoke for an hour straight in court that afternoon. It was undoubtedly his longest closing argument ever, but also his most powerful. He reminded everyone of the fact that Greg Roberts himself had stated that the job rightfully belonged to Emily and spoke of the unconstitutionality of the whole thing. He was aware that Emily was watching him with a look of polite satisfaction, because she already knew that they *had* this case, and the defense attorney was staring him down with disapproval just as he always did whenever Blaine stood up to do anything. There was one person, though, who wasn't here watching him, and that was Kurt. His absence was glaringly obvious to Blaine, who tried to push that thought to the back of his mind as he spoke.

When he was finished, he returned to his seat behind the plaintiff's table. Emily gave his hand an excited squeeze under the table.

"We got this," she whispered as the defense attorney made his way to the stand. "Let's see what kind of bullshit this guy tries to come up with now."

They joined back in to the silence that filled the rest of the courtroom as the other lawyer began his closing argument.

"Might I remind you all," he began in an unnecessarily loud voice, causing Blaine and Emily to flinch, "that I have been an attorney for longer than little Blaine Anderson here has been *alive*. I know a hell of a lot more about these types of cases than he does. Emily Jade isn't trying to seek compensation for a job she didn't get. She is trying to expose this business as discriminatory and unfair in its hiring policies - which it is not - and get some money for herself out of it, too, of course."

Blaine and Emily resisted the urge to look at each other and roll their eyes. Instead, they watched with expressions of polite interest unlike the glare that this attorney had fixed on Blaine while he was speaking.

He continued on like this, grasping at straws for only about another half hour before returning to his seat. The judge adjourned court, which would not be back in session until a verdict was reached. Blaine certainly didn't think *that* would take very long. Anyone in their right mind could tell that there really even wasn't an argument to be had.

Now it was time for him to go home and do something that freaked him out even more than the thought of dealing with that douchebag defense lawyer. He had to reveal his feelings to Kurt. It was time for him to finally let go of the secret he'd been keeping for ten years now.

...

Kurt didn't know how long he'd been sitting on the couch in the living room, staring off into space at absolutely nothing, when Blaine came in.

"Hello," he said politely as he hung his keys up, obviously trying not to allude to any of the tension that had developed between them in the past twenty-four hours. "How'd your interview go?"

"It was good," Kurt said to the coffee table, not even looking at Blaine. "How was court?"

His voice was so soft and barely audible. For whatever reason, this tugged at Blaine's heart.

"It went pretty well, I think," Blaine said as he stepped into the living room. "But I'll bore you with the details of my closing argument later, if you want. Can we talk?"

"Yeah." Kurt's heart started to beat a little faster. "I was actually going to ask you the same thing. C-can I go first? I have a lot to say and I really need to get this off my chest."

"Absolutely." Blaine decided there was no harm in letting Kurt say his piece first. He sat down on the couch beside him. "Shoot."

Kurt inhaled a shaky breath as he prepared to lay his heart on the line.

"Ever since high school," he said slowly, "ever since we met, I've had...feelings...for you. I know that sounds dumb. I can't think of any other way to put it. I...I knew that from the moment I met you, *you* were the person I wanted to be with, but I never got up the courage to say anything to you about it. I thought you were too perfect for me, and besides, I didn't want to risk ruining the amazing friendship we've always had. Plus there was the fact that you were at Dalton and I was at McKinley, and Lima's a good hour, hour and a half? away from Westerville so I thought *that* might make it hard to keep up a relationship...the distance...ugh, I made so many excuses. Really, though, you were the only person I ever truly wanted to be with."

Kurt was attempting to make eye contact, but his gaze would flutter nervously away from Blaine's after just a few seconds. Blaine, meanwhile, tried to remain calm even though he was listening to the boy he'd always wanted spilling his heart out like this. Just knowing that Kurt had felt like this about him, once upon a time, was more than Blaine ever could have asked for. *Be still, my beating heart.*

"Then Dave Karofsky came along, and I fell for his fake apology and believed him when he said he'd never hurt me again." Kurt smiled emotionlessly. "I settled for him. I was so deluded. I just wanted somebody to *want* me. But I knew there was no way I wanted you out of my life, which is why I made the effort to continue our friendship even after high school. But...my feelings for you never changed, Blaine." His voice was soft now. Blaine didn't quite know what was happening to his heart.

"I've always wanted you. I think Dave might have known how I felt about you and that's part of the reason he did those things to me, because he was jealous. And...and then for you to invite me and my daughter here to *live* with you, to open your home up to us after everything we'd been through...that was more than I ever could have asked for, and I will *never* be able to thank you enough for as long as I live. You have brought me so much healing and comfort and hope, Blaine, and I can't ignore these feelings any longer. I've been pushing them under the rug for ten years now, and I can't take it anymore.

"But the thing is...," Kurt continued, his voice so quiet that Blaine had to lean in a little closer to hear him, "I'm not entirely sure how *you* feel, and *that's* what kills me. You sang a love song to me in front of hundreds of people yesterday - yes, Blaine, a love song, that's how I interpreted it and so that's what it is - and yet you have a boyfriend. You let me sleep in your arms every single night, and yet you have a boyfriend. You called me beautiful that night when I showed you my bruises and you touched my skin, *and yet you have a boyfriend*. I don't know what to believe with you, and that frustrates me."

"Kurt...," Blaine reached out towards the younger man, who recoiled and pulled his hand away. He wasn't finished.

"And I've been trying *so hard* to pretend like these feelings for you don't exist, but the truth is I can't hide it anymore." Kurt was on the verge of tears now, and it broke Blaine's heart. "I feel so safe in your arms every night. I felt what it did to my body when you touched me and your hands were *all* over my skin. I can't pretend I don't feel this way about you any longer, Blaine. I just..."

For a long time afterwards, Blaine would still have trouble believing that what happened next had even happened at all. Everything Kurt had said thus far was hard enough to believe, but all of a sudden there were gentle hands on either side of his face and soft lips on his and Kurt was kissing him.

It happened so fast that Blaine didn't even have time to close his eyes. One second he could feel those lips he'd been dreaming about for *ten years* kissing him - and god, it felt more amazing than he had ever dreamed - and the next second Kurt was pulling away with a tear falling down his cheek.

Blaine stayed frozen exactly where he was. He stared at Kurt's lips for a second before looking up into those beautiful eyes which were shiny with more tears.

"I'm sorry," Kurt said in a broken whisper. "That was completely out of line. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry." He turned so that he was facing completely away from Blaine and buried his face in his hands. "Our first kiss was supposed to be some special, magical moment. Not some pathetic move instigated by me because I'm so fucking *desperate*."

"Kurt, I...," Blaine realized for the first time that he still hadn't said what he'd been wanting to say: *I'm breaking up with Derek because I want to be with you*, or something along those lines.

"Please go away," Kurt murmured through his sobs.

Blaine sat there in silence for a second.

"I...I just need a little bit of time to think," he added weakly. "I promise we can talk more later, because I didn't really let you say anything, did I? But right now I need to be alone."

"Okay," Blaine said gently after a few seconds. "I...need to go somewhere, anyway."

He stood up from the couch and walked towards the front door in a trance, remembering to grab his keys only at the last second.

Once he got to his car out in the parking lot, he sank down into the driver's seat and traced the tips of his fingers over his lips. That hadn't just *happened*, had it? He shivered at the memory of Kurt's lips on his and prayed he would be able to experience that again.

Finally, after sitting there for God only knows how long, he shoved the keys into the ignition so he could drive to Derek's.

He pulled into Derek's narrow driveway some time later without even remembering how he'd gotten there. That thought probably should have scared him a little bit, but for some reason right now it didn't. He got out of the car and went up to knock on the door.

Derek answered after only one knock, as if he'd been standing right there waiting.

"Hey there! Come on in!" He stepped aside so that Blaine could step into the narrow foyer. He seemed to be pretending that the encounter between the two at the concert had never happened. "What brings you here so unexpectedly?"

"We need to talk," was all Blaine said.

Derek looked taken aback.

"Oh," he said after a brief hesitation. "Okay. Well...shoot."

Blaine sighed. "Look, Derek, I think you're an awesome guy. Don't get me wrong. And I feel terrible because lately I don't think I've been completely fair to you..."

"You're breaking up with me for Kurt," Derek interrupted flatly.

Blaine sucked in a deep breath, then let it out. Derek was good.

"Yeah, pretty much," he sighed.

Derek was silent for a long time, then he shrugged.

"I guess I should have seen this coming," he said. "I *did* see it coming, actually, and I've just been bracing myself for it."

Blaine exhaled a sigh of relief. "Okay, so you're not mad?"

Derek shook his head. "As weird as this sounds, no. I really like you, Blaine, and I want you to be happy. I feel like a total douchebag after some of the things I said to you, and I'm really sorry."

"Okay." Blaine smiled. "Do you think we can stay friends?"

"We can try," Derek said. "Like I said, I still really like you, though, so it might be hard."

"I understand," Blaine said, nodding. "And please don't take this out on Kurt. None of this is his fault. I've been in love with him since high school and he just now poured his feelings out to me this afternoon. I can't handle not being with him anymore, y'know?"

"I guess," Derek said quietly. "I think you should leave now."

Twice in one hour, Blaine had been asked to leave. He didn't know where else he could go.

"I do, too," he told his now-ex-boyfriend. "Goodbye, Derek."

Derek didn't say anything. All he did was watch Blaine go and close the door behind him.

...

Blaine drove around aimlessly for the rest of the afternoon. He stopped to pick up a quick dinner composed entirely of fast food, which he ate while driving. He wasn't quite sure how much alone time Kurt

needed, but finally decided that four hours was about enough. He thought it was a good idea to start making his way back home so he could tell Kurt how *he* felt.

And maybe there would be more kisses. Who knew. Blaine really, really hoped there would be more kisses.

When he got up to his apartment, he realized that Kurt must have already sang to Ellie and put her to bed, because the majority of the apartment was dark and Ellie's bedroom door was closed. The only light was coming from Blaine's bedroom - well, Blaine *and* Kurt's bedroom now - so Blaine took a deep breath and headed in that direction. Yes, he was nervous, but Kurt had just bared his soul so completely to Blaine this afternoon. He deserved to know how Blaine felt as well.

Kurt wasn't in the bedroom. Not really. He was standing out on the balcony, looking over Lake Michigan with his back to Blaine.

Blaine quietly stepped to the French doors that led out onto the balcony. Kurt either hadn't heard him or was pretending not to have heard him, because he didn't turn around. When Blaine spoke, his voice was quiet.

"Kurt? Can we talk?"

Very slowly, Kurt turned around without saying a word.

"I broke up with Derek," Blaine told him gently.

Kurt blinked. "You didn't have to do that."

"I wanted to." Blaine took a step closer to Kurt, stepping actually out onto the balcony. "Because I want to be with you."

"Why do you want to be with me." The way Kurt said it was not as a question, but as a statement. He stared right into Blaine's eyes, still standing a few feet away.

"Because I love you, Kurt," Blaine said softly but firmly.

Kurt stared at him for a few seconds longer, then laughed humorlessly and turned away to look out over the water again. "You don't mean that."

"That kiss *was* magical for me," Blaine blurted out, stepping closer to Kurt once again. "It *was* special. And everything you said earlier is true for me as well. I've been waiting for you for *ten years*, Kurt. It killed me to see you with Dave. And when you kissed me earlier, I *finally* felt like this love I've been chasing for all these years is real."

Kurt blinked a few times, trying to keep his eyes locked on Blaine's.

"You...you really love me?"

"More than anything," Blaine whispered.

He moved in closer and shivered a little bit when he felt Kurt's warm breath on his face as the younger man drew in a shaky breath, then sighed. The movement itself was very slow, very precise, and culminated with the indescribable feeling of Kurt's lips on his own once again.

This time, they both melted eagerly into the kiss. There was no rush, no urgency, just the two of them. Blaine kissed Kurt slowly, savoring the adrenaline that was rushing through his entire body after being pent up inside him for so many years now. The most amazing feeling of it all, though, was feeling Kurt's lips moving with his own, kissing him back.

They broke away breathlessly after what could have been hours. Blaine's heart went into overdrive when it saw the beautiful smile that spread across Kurt's kiss-bruised lips.

"I've been waiting so long for this," Kurt said breathlessly. "If this is some sort of beautiful dream, I never want to wake up."

Blaine smiled and wrapped his arms around Kurt. The younger man rested his head against Blaine's chest.

"Neither of us have to dream anymore." Blaine smiled and looked right into Kurt's beautiful eyes. "This is real. This is happening. *We* are real."

"Oh, Blaine," Kurt sighed, and reached up to gently pull him into another kiss.

This kiss seemed to last even longer. After some time, Kurt decided to take things a step further and press the tip of his tongue against Blaine's bottom lip. Blaine opened his mouth, allowing Kurt access, and Kurt slipped his tongue inside. Blaine trembled as Kurt's tongue brushed against his own. This was all happening so fast, but it was wonderful and he wouldn't have wanted it any other way. Finally, finally, *finally*, Kurt was his.

"I love you too, by the way," Kurt gasped, smiling as they broke the kiss.

Blaine exhaled a sigh of delirious happiness. "God, I don't want to sound like a broken record, but I've been waiting for this moment since..."

"High school?" Kurt finished for him with a tiny smile. "So have I."

Blaine leaned his forehead against Kurt's and moved his face so that the tips of their noses were touching. He closed his eyes and basked in the warmth of Kurt's body pressed right up against his own, so close that he could feel the younger man's heart racing inside his chest.

"Come on," Blaine said after a while, giving Kurt one more soft kiss on the lips before taking his hand and leading him back inside off the balcony. "Let's go back in."

They ended up lying close together on the bed, staring lovingly into each others' eyes.

"Y'know," Kurt commented, snuggling closer to Blaine, "for the first time in a really, really long time, I can honestly say I'm happy." He smiled up at Blaine. "And it's all your fault."

Blaine's heart absolutely melted. Knowing that this beautiful man was finally happy again after everything he'd been through, and all because of *him*...it was almost too much for his heart to handle.

"I'll do my best to make sure you're always happy." Blaine kissed the tip of Kurt's nose, eliciting a giggle from the younger man, and then his lips once again. They'd been together for less than an hour, and Blaine already had the feeling that he was going to become a bit of an addict when it came to Kurt's lips. They were soft, sweet and gentle...much like Kurt himself.

They lay there together until the late hours of the night, just talking and exchanging sweet kisses every so often. When their eyelids finally started to grow heavy, they stood up and pulled the covers down, then

climbed right back into bed and pulled the blankets over them. For the first time since this new sleeping arrangement had been instigated, Blaine pulled Kurt into his arms right away.

Blaine reached over to quickly turn off the lamp on his bedside table, then gave Kurt another kiss.

"Finally," he breathed.

Kurt knew what he was talking about. "I don't know if I've ever been so happy in my life," he sighed happily. "I mean, yes, when my daughter was born, but this is different. I'm in love, and it feels perfect."

"You're perfect," Blaine declared quietly.

"I want to argue with you on that so much, because I know I'm not. *You* are," Kurt giggled, then yawned a little bit. He looked so cute that Blaine couldn't help but pull him in to snuggle up even closer. "I'm going to try and get some sleep."

"Good idea." Blaine began to absentmindedly stroke his fingers through Kurt's hair. "It's been a long day for both of us." He leaned down to give Kurt one more kiss. "Good night, Kurt. I love you."

"It's so amazing to hear you say that," Kurt said softly. "I love you too, Blaine. Good night."

This time, Blaine noticed, Kurt's smile was bigger than ever as he drifted off to sleep in his arms. He wouldn't change that for the world. Just knowing that he could put that beautiful smile on Kurt's face brought him more happiness than he'd ever felt before.

Chapter Twelve

Kurt had come to accept his recurring nightmare as a fact of life - every time he closed his eyes to go to sleep, there it would be haunting his dreams. But this time when he woke up screaming in the middle of the night, Blaine was already there to hold him. There was no need to move into his arms, because he was already there. That was nice, Kurt thought. He could get used to that.

"Blaine," he sobbed weakly into his boyfriend's chest once he'd managed to stop screaming. "*Why?*"

Blaine wished more than anything in the world that he had an answer for Kurt. He wished he could go into Kurt's dreams a la Leonardo DiCaprio in *Inception* and do something to get rid of that asshole Karofsky once and for all. Every single night since he and Kurt had been sleeping together like this, it killed him to see how terrified Kurt was whenever he woke up. Now that they had both revealed their love to each other, though, it somehow seemed worse.

"Shhh," Blaine whispered soothingly, "it's just a dream. He can't hurt you anymore. I won't let him."

He stroked his fingers lovingly through Kurt's hair and pressed a soft kiss to the top of his head. Kurt choked out another sob and snuggled even closer against Blaine's chest.

"Don't leave me," he gasped through his tears as he wrapped his arms around Blaine's waist to hold himself even closer. "I need you."

"I will *never* leave you," Blaine swore to him. "I can promise you that."

"Thank you," Kurt whispered.

Blaine didn't say anything in response. He was so overcome with the love he felt for this man that he gathered him up in his arms even closer, so that Kurt was curled into a tiny little ball against his chest. Kurt's body was still shaking with sobs even as he tried to stop his tears. Blaine settled for pressing soft kisses to the side of his face and rocking him gently back to sleep, all the while murmuring to him that everything was going to be okay.

"Hey," Blaine said after a long silence, and Kurt looked up at him with his eyes still swimming in uncried tears. "I love you."

"Love you too," Kurt murmured, trying to get ahold of himself. "God, I'm so sorry, I cried all over your shirt and now I feel disgusting..."

Blaine laughed quietly, and Kurt found that he enjoyed the soothing feeling of Blaine's laughter rumbling through his body. "You're not disgusting. Don't worry about it. It's just a shirt."

Kurt sniffed. "If you say so..."

"I say so." Blaine smiled and kissed his forehead. "Now I think you should try and get some sleep. Good night, beautiful."

Kurt finally managed to stop his tears, but he found it hard to go back to sleep once he started thinking. Sure, everything had fallen perfectly into place earlier that evening when he and Blaine confessed their mutual love, but seeing Dave in his dream yet again reminded him of the fact that he'd been in a relationship for eight years before this. Blaine, on the other hand, had never really had a steady romantic relationship with anybody - even with Derek, they'd only been together for a few months, and that was the longest duration of time for which Blaine had ever had a boyfriend. Kurt knew this probably made no difference to Blaine, but he couldn't help but be upset with himself - he'd already given everything away to a man who, as it turned out, didn't love him at all.

After a long time, he finally managed to push these thoughts from his mind and instead focused on the rhythm of Blaine's heartbeat as it soothed him back to sleep.

...

"Blaine?" Kurt asked the next morning as the two of them made their way around the bedroom, finishing up getting ready for the day.

Blaine pulled the blankets tightly over the top of the bed and smoothed it out. "Yeah?" he asked as he rearranged the pillows.

Kurt bit his lip as he tried to think of how to say this. "You're not...disappointed with me, are you?"

Blaine blinked. "Why would you say such a thing?" He immediately stepped around the front of the bed and took Kurt's hand as he moved to stand next to him.

"I...I don't know," Kurt admitted with a sigh as he sank down to sit on the newly made bed. "I was just thinking about it last night. I spent so many years in a relationship with someone who didn't even love me, and I just can't help but feel bad about it. You, on the other hand...you've dated a few guys, but for the most part you've been waiting to find the one person who you really, truly love."

"I've been waiting for *you*." Blaine smiled as he sat down next to Kurt on the bed.

Kurt attempted to return his smile. "I don't know. I just wish I would have done the same thing."

"Kurt...," Blaine sighed as he took both of the other man's hands and looked him in the eyes. "There is no way at all that I could ever be disappointed with you. I love you for everything that you are. It's not about who you've been with, it's about who you end up with, and...," he smiled hopefully as he squeezed Kurt's hands, "I'd really like to think that you'll end up with me."

Kurt smiled a real smile this time as he pulled his hands away from Blaine's, but only so he could place them on either side of the other man's face and pull him in for a kiss. He kept smiling beneath the kiss when he felt Blaine's arms constricting gently around his waist to pull him closer.

"Kurt," Blaine said in a low, heavy voice once they broke the kiss, trying to catch his breath. "You are *beautiful*."

Kurt's mouth fell open but no words came out. He felt his face turning warm with a blush and softening into a smile as Blaine reached up to caress his cheek. This was the second time Blaine had told him this - the first, of course, being that time when Blaine came face-to-face with Kurt's bruises. No matter. In that moment, Kurt forgot all about the fact that his bruises were still there, albeit fading. When those words came out of Blaine's mouth, he knew it was true. He *was* beautiful. For the first time in his life, Kurt could proudly think those words. *I am beautiful*.

"What?" Blaine asked softly. He kept stroking Kurt's cheek, sensing that there was something the other man was trying to say but couldn't verbalize.

"It's just...nobody's ever said that to me before," Kurt whispered.

Blaine squinted in disbelief. "*What?*"

"Nobody's ever told me I'm beautiful before," Kurt said quietly, feeling the blush on his face deepen.

"Kurt, you are *so* beautiful and you deserve to be reminded of that all the time," Blaine said softly but firmly, keeping his eyes locked on Kurt's. "I can't believe it. Dave never..."

Kurt shook his head. "He called me pretty, sexy, cute, hot...never beautiful. Not once in eight years."

Blaine smiled and traced his thumb lightly over Kurt's lips. "He was out of his mind not to tell you that. You are so much more than beautiful, even," he said. "You're perfect."

Kurt smiled that gorgeous smile that Blaine had grown to love so much over the past ten years that they'd known each other. He placed one hand on the back of Blaine's neck and eagerly pulled him in closer for another kiss. This one only lasted for a few seconds before Kurt broke away, giggling bashfully.

"I'm sorry," he admitted with a tiny smile. "I can't help myself. You're delicious."

"Don't be sorry. You are, too," Blaine sighed breathlessly as he pulled Kurt in so he could kiss him yet again. It still hadn't quite hit him that Kurt was *his*. Blaine half-expected to wake up any second now and find that this was all just some kind of wonderful dream, but thankfully that didn't happen.

Kurt melted into the kiss as Blaine kissed him back, moving his lips slowly so that he could savor Blaine and draw out the delicious taste of him for as long as possible. His arms constricted around Blaine's waist, holding him hostage there. For the first time in months, Kurt finally felt safe enough to reach out and pull another man closer. Not only that, but he never wanted to let go.

He had to, though. Ellie was already up and watching morning cartoons on the couch in the living room. Kurt had the sudden urge to make a nice breakfast for her and Blaine.

He pulled away from the kiss and smiled. "I think I'm gonna go fix some Belgian waffles for my girl and my man."

Blaine let Kurt take his hand and pull him up from the bed. "Kurt, you don't have to do that."

"No, it's fine! I don't mind." Kurt smiled and shrugged a little bit as he made his way towards the bedroom door. "I like to cook, and it's been a while since I made a nice meal for my family."

He half-expected Blaine to be taken aback at his usage of the f-word, but Blaine simply smiled and pulled him to a gentle stop in the hallway so he could kiss him on the cheek. "Whatever makes you happy."

A familiar, happy-sounding voice interrupted them before they could progress any further down the hallway.

"Daddy! Blaine kissed you!" It was Ellie, and Blaine noticed immediately that her excited smile must have been passed down directly from Kurt. She turned towards Blaine with a hopeful gleam in her glasz eyes, also a Hummel inheritance. "Do you love my daddy?"

Kurt hadn't exactly thought about how he was going to break the news of his and Blaine's newfound relationship to his daughter, but he thought she deserved to know. He gently guided her out back towards the living room.

"Sweetie, let's go sit down. Blaine and I will explain everything."

They all headed out to the living room and sat down on the couch. Kurt was unshy about sitting right up against Blaine in perfect cuddling proximity.

"Ellie...," Kurt spoke slowly, trying to figure out the best way to explain this to her, but nevertheless he was smiling the entire time. "Blaine and I...well, let me put it this way. Sometimes you can be friends with someone for a very long time before you realize that the two of you are in love."

Ellie gasped excitedly and looked at Blaine. "You *do* love him?"

Blaine smiled at her and reached for one of Kurt's hands so he could hold it in both of his. "Yes, I do. It's a little hard to explain, but your daddy and I talked for a long time last night and came to realize that we want to be with each other."

"As boyfriends?" Ellie asked.

Kurt laughed and squeezed Blaine's hands. "Yes. As boyfriends. You're okay with that, aren't you?" He wanted to make sure his daughter wasn't uncomfortable with this.

Ellie thought for a few seconds, then turned to Blaine. "If you really love my daddy, then kiss him. On the lips."

"Gladly." Blaine cupped Kurt's chin so he could pull him in for a kiss. Both of them were smiling as their lips met.

Ellie giggled as they broke the kiss. "I had to make sure he was telling the truth," she informed Kurt. "I don't want you to be sad anymore."

"That's very sweet. Thank you." Kurt kissed the top of her head, then smiled and stood up from the couch. "I'm gonna go get started on breakfast."

He walked out to the kitchen, leaving Blaine and Ellie sitting on the couch. Once he was out of the room, Ellie scooted over so she was sitting next to Blaine.

"Hi," she said, smiling the same tiny half-smile that Kurt had.

Blaine couldn't help but smile back. He'd always thought Kurt's daughter was so adorable. "Hey there."

"I just wanted to say how I think it's nice that you and my daddy are boyfriends." She spoke with the kind of innocence only heard in the voice of a little girl. "He's really happy. I can see it already. I miss seeing him happy."

"I would do anything to make sure he's happy," Blaine reassured her sincerely. "I love him so much, Ellie, I can promise you that. And I will never hurt him. I wouldn't be able to live with myself if I hurt him, believe me."

She grinned. "I believe you. So I guess you're kind of like my other daddy now, too?"

Blaine shrugged. Honestly, he loved the thought of that, because it made them feel even more like a family. But he also didn't want her to feel obligated to think of him in that way if she wasn't ready yet.

"Honestly, that's up to you," he told her. "I know this is really sudden for you, and I don't want to force anything on you right now. Just because your dad and I are together doesn't mean you *have* to think of me as a father figure, unless you really do."

"I don't know." Ellie suddenly seemed a little shy. "I mean, you seem like you would be a really good dad and stuff, so I guess I do." She smiled up at him.

Blaine returned her smile. "That's okay with me," he said, then suddenly got lost in thought as a new possibility occurred to him. "And who knows? Maybe sometime in the future, your dad and I will decide that we want to have another baby together. So you would have a little brother or sister." He shook his

head, unable to believe he was thinking this far ahead already. "Never mind. That was just a random thought. If it happens, it won't be for a while."

Also, now that Blaine was thinking about family life, he thought it might be really nice if he could marry Kurt some day. Over the past ten years, every time Blaine imagined his own wedding, he always saw Kurt as his husband. Always. He was suddenly grateful that he'd been working so hard to win support for Proposition 21, and now that he and Kurt were together, Blaine had all the more incentive to keep doing so. Not that he would admit this out loud in the present moment, of course.

Ellie tilted her head to the side and bit her lip as she considered what Blaine had just mentioned, just like Kurt did when he was thinking hard about something.

"I think that would be nice," she said, nodding. "I want a little sister. I want to play dress up with her, and go shopping, and paint her nails." She held up her own fingers to show Blaine her little pink fingernails. "Daddy painted mine, see?"

"Very pretty," Blaine said, then decided to play along with what she'd just said. "But what if you don't get a sister? What if you end up getting a little brother instead? *Then* what would you do?"

"Eww, boys have cooties." Ellie made a face.

Blaine laughed. "So...should I move over a little bit to give you some space?" he joked. "I'm a boy. Your dad is a boy."

"Yeah, but grown up boys are different," Ellie explained. "They don't chase you on the playground and try to get dirt on you."

"Y'know what?" Blaine took on a more serious-sounding tone. "If a boy does that, it just means he likes you."

"Really?" Ellie asked with a shy smile.

"Sure!" Blaine had a sudden flashback to his own elementary school days. "I used to be friends with a lot of girls when I was little. The boys back then would do the exact same thing. They chased the girls and tried to get their nice clothes all dirty. And then there was me. I chased the boys *while* they were chasing the girls." He laughed at the memory.

Ellie giggled. "Is that how you met my daddy? Chasing him on the playground because you liked him?"

"No, I didn't meet him until high school. That was later," Blaine admitted. "And it took me ten years of chasing him - so to speak - before I *finally* told him last night that I like him. Love him." He smiled and stood up to head out to the kitchen. "And speaking of your dad, I should go see if he needs any help with breakfast. He's never really cooked anything in the kitchen here before."

"Okay!" Ellie said, and happily returned her attention to whatever cartoon was playing on the television at that particular moment.

In the kitchen, Kurt had just closed the lid of the waffle iron and was in the process of whisking the eggs that were soon to become scrambled. Suddenly there was a pair of now-familiar hands on his waist and soft lips brushing along his jawline. He gasped a little bit and dropped the whisk into the egg bowl before turning around.

"Hi, Blaine," he breathed, smiling when he realized that it was only his boyfriend.

"Hi, Kurt," Blaine said softly. He laughed a little bit. "I came out here to see if you needed any help with anything."

"No, I think I've got it, but thank you." Kurt smiled appreciatively as he turned back around and picked up the whisk to continue mixing the eggs with the milk and salt that were also in the bowl.

Blaine suddenly noticed that Kurt had a little flour on his nose, probably from when he'd been making the waffles. He reached over and gently ran his index finger down the slope of Kurt's nose to wipe it off, eliciting a giggle from the younger man.

"You are so adorable," Blaine murmured as he leaned up against the counter and looked lovingly at his boyfriend, who was starting to blush as he attempted to focus on whisking the eggs. "And you're such a sweetheart for making all this for us. Really, you didn't have to go to all this trouble."

"Oh, but you're worth it." Kurt winked as he picked up the glass bowl containing the egg mixture and dumped the contents into the frying pan that was sizzling on the top of the stove. He reached out and grabbed a spatula, which he then used to push the eggs towards the center of the pan. After a few seconds of doing this, he said something that took Blaine completely by surprise.

"I heard you and Ellie talking, by the way."

Blaine was immediately glad Kurt's back was turned, because it seemed like all the blood in his body rushed up to color his face in that exact moment. "Oh. You did?"

"Mhmm." Kurt smiled knowingly as he tilted the pan and pushed the eggs around. "You really want to have more kids someday?"

"I...um, I don't know," Blaine stammered, suddenly nervous. He knew he shouldn't have said that. "I was just thinking...in the very distant future...because I love you, and I have an incredible feeling about this relationship, but we're still getting used to living together, y'know? Which is why I say in the very, very distant future...yeah, I think I'd like that." His voice was quiet by the time he finished speaking.

To Blaine's relief, Kurt was smiling when he turned around from the stove to face him.

"Blaine Darren Anderson, you and I think very much alike," he said with a tiny smile as he stepped forward to wrap his arms around Blaine's waist. "I can already tell you're a wonderful father. I would love to bring more children into our family someday, but for now I like this. Just the three of us."

"Yes. Exactly." Blaine smiled, suddenly relieved. "I didn't mean, like, this was something we had to think about right away. It was just a thought that entered my mind."

Kurt kissed him on the cheek before turning back to the stove to flip the eggs over. "I love you, you know that?"

"I love you, too," Blaine told him, then looked around the kitchen. The waffles were still cooking in the iron, bacon and sausage were sizzling on a griddle, and Kurt was obviously finishing up the eggs. "Everything looks and smells delicious, by the way."

Kurt set the frying pan back on top of the stove and reached out for the mixing bowl that had previously contained the waffle batter. He ran his index finger along the inside of the bowl to scrape up a little bit of the batter that hadn't made it into the waffle iron, then held up his finger to Blaine. "Try some?"

Blaine took Kurt's hand and closed his mouth around his entire index finger to suck the batter off. Kurt immediately stopped breathing and stared at Blaine, who returned his gaze almost seductively as he licked Kurt's finger clean.

"It's yummy," he said in a low voice, stepping closer to Kurt and placing one hand on the side of his face. "Not as yummy as you are, though. Nothing is."

Kurt tried to hold back a giggle as Blaine sucked gently on his bottom lip. Eventually he gave in and kissed him back. He'd never had this much fun making breakfast before, that was for sure.

He could have easily stood there in the kitchen kissing Blaine for the rest of the morning, but unfortunately it was only a few short moments before the kitchen timer buzzed loudly, rudely informing Kurt that the waffles were done cooking. Kurt broke the kiss with a sigh and smiled wryly at Blaine before turning towards the waffle iron to lift the lid.

"Would you please go get Ellie and tell her breakfast is almost ready?" Kurt asked Blaine as he turned the waffle iron off. "It's so hard to pry her away from the TV sometimes when she's watching those annoying morning cartoons."

"Sure thing." Blaine smiled and gave Kurt one more soft, quick kiss on the lips before he turned around and headed back out to the living room.

Ellie, to his surprise, immediately reached for the remote and clicked the TV off when she saw Blaine coming.

"Are the waffles ready?" she asked hopefully.

Blaine nodded. "Yup. Your dad's been working really hard on cooking this nice breakfast, and everything looks great. Come on out and get ready to eat."

Ellie jumped up from the couch and skipped happily out to the kitchen. Blaine followed her, opting to walk at a normal pace rather than skip. Kurt was just setting everything out onto the table when he got back to the kitchen.

"For you...," Kurt set one plate down in front of Blaine's usual seat, "for you, and for me." He set the remaining two plates of food in front of Ellie's place and his own respectively, then gestured to a few containers of fresh fruit, jam and maple syrup that sat in the middle of the table. "These are waffle toppings. Put whatever you want on them."

They all sat down around the table and began piling various toppings onto their respective waffles. He knew he'd made these for Ellie before and she liked them, but Kurt couldn't help but peek expectantly at Blaine out of the corner of his eye as he tried a bite.

"Oh my god, Kurt," Blaine mumbled with his mouth still full, then swallowed. "These are amazing."

"You think so?" Kurt asked with a tiny smile. "This is my mom's recipe. She used to make these for me all the time when I was little." He gazed off thoughtfully into space a little bit as he reminisced. "After she died, my dad tried to cook for the two of us, but it was clear that cooking was not his forte. After a few years of mostly eating out at restaurants and getting take-out, when I was old enough to use the stove and whatnot by myself, I started cooking. I found her old recipe book and made all the same food she used to make. This was one of my favorites."

Blaine had managed to down half of his waffles in the time it took Kurt to say all this. "Would you mind making more of those recipes sometime?" he asked as he swallowed another bite. "Because I'm sorry, I feel rude for eating so fast, but these," he poked his half-eaten pile of waffles with his fork, "are *really* good."

"No, you're fine!" Kurt reassured him with a smile. "I can make whatever you want. I'm glad you like it."

"Sounds good to me." Blaine smiled as he polished off the rest of the waffles on his plate. "So. I have the day off, because I haven't heard back from the courthouse about the jury reaching a verdict yet. *You* have the day off. What would you two like to do today?"

Ellie, who had remained quiet thus far, immediately spoke up. "Can we go to the playground?"

"Ellie!" Kurt gently scolded her for speaking up so suddenly.

Blaine laughed. "No, she's fine. Actually, that sounds fun. They just opened up a new park a few blocks away, we could take her to the playground."

"What do you think?" Kurt looked at Ellie, who was already smiling hopefully. "You want to go?"

Ellie just nodded enthusiastically and kept smiling that same smile she always used when she was trying to get her daddy to let her do something.

"All right." Kurt smiled and finally began cutting up his own waffles into bite-sized pieces. "We can go."

"She can convince you to let her do anything within reason, can she?" Blaine asked Kurt.

Kurt winked and squeezed his boyfriend's hand under the table. "She's not the only one. I have a feeling the two of you will be getting along *very* well..."

...

Later that afternoon, Blaine drove himself, Kurt and Ellie to the new park he'd told them about. Once they arrived, Ellie immediately sprinted out of the car towards the playground; Kurt called one of his standard-issue "Be careful" warnings after her as he got out of the car and waited for Blaine.

"It's gorgeous out today," Blaine commented as he and Kurt walked hand in hand towards the playground equipment. "I love spring, it's always my favorite time of year."

"Mine too," Kurt mused. He looked around as he and Blaine sat down on an empty park bench at the playground. All around him, there were little kids laughing and running and chasing each other. He caught sight of Ellie near the top of the tallest slide and exhaled a sigh of relief now that he knew where she was. "Looks like a lot of parents had the same idea as us today."

Blaine shrugged. "It's finally spring, there's a new playground in town...gets the kids out of the house, so why not?"

"That's true." Kurt moved over on the bench so he was sitting closer to Blaine and rested his head on his shoulder.

Feeling a sudden rush of tenderness, Blaine kissed Kurt's forehead and curled an arm around his waist. "You seem so much happier lately," he observed. "Why is that?"

"Oh, I don't know," Kurt said with a thoughtful little smirk. "Maybe it has something to do with the fact that one Blaine Anderson, Esquire, came into my life and showed me more love and affection than I ever thought I deserved."

"He can use Esquire after his name...so he's a lawyer, huh?" Blaine asked, laughing a little bit.

"He is, and a very good one at that." Kurt nodded as he spoke to reaffirm this.

"I think you're flattering this guy way too much," Blaine giggled, pressing another kiss to Kurt's cheek. "In all seriousness, though, Kurt...what do you mean when you say 'more love than you deserve'?"

Kurt sighed as he tried to think of a way to explain this. He'd felt like this for a long time, but he couldn't quite think of some way to put it into words.

"While everything was happening with Dave," he said slowly, hesitantly, "I began to think that maybe I didn't deserve a shot at real, true love. I *thought* I loved him - 'thought' being the operative word here, Blaine - and when he didn't show me love back, I started thinking that if the guy who is supposedly the love of my life hurts me like this, then maybe it was impossible for anyone to love me." He blinked, not even looking at Blaine anymore. "I thought I was incapable of being loved."

Blaine's immediate response was to wrap Kurt even tighter in his arms and pull him in even closer. He didn't care that they were in the middle of a crowded park and some of their fellow patrons may or may not have disapproved of their love. Right now, his precious boy just needed to be held.

"Oh. Oh, Kurt," he whispered. "Kurt, sweetheart, look at me. Look me in the eyes."

Kurt slowly lifted his head so he was making eye contact with Blaine.

"I love you," Blaine continued once Kurt's eyes were locked on his, "and it breaks my heart to hear you say those things. Please don't think that way about yourself ever again, Kurt. You deserve to be shown all the love and affection in the world. I don't know if I can ever forgive that asshole for what he did to you, because you are the last person on earth who deserves to be treated that way. But I *do* know that I will *always* be here to love you, no matter what anybody says about us. I love you for all that you are, every single part of you, I love you for *you*. I promise to always treat you right and I will never, ever, *ever* hurt you. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

Kurt's entire body trembled as he took a deep breath. He hadn't even realized he was crying until Blaine leaned in closer to kiss his tears away.

"That's the sweetest thing anybody has ever said to me," he whispered.

"I mean it," Blaine reassured him softly.

Kurt nodded as he blinked back more tears. "I know. I trust you."

Blaine felt nothing but pure, real love overflowing in every cell in his body as he wrapped his arms around Kurt in a tender embrace. Kurt hugged him back with surprising strength, considering that he'd been in tears just a few seconds ago.

Blaine smiled as they broke away from each other, then stood up from the bench and reached down for Kurt's hand. "Come on."

Kurt put his hand in Blaine's but didn't stand up yet. "What?"

Blaine glanced over his shoulder at the little ice cream cart that was selling frozen treats a few yards back from the playground. The ice cream company must have figured that selling their product at a brand new playground on a warm spring day was a great way to do business, and considering the size of the crowd gathered around the small cart, they were right. "I want to buy you an ice cream."

Kurt rolled his eyes and sighed in mock exasperation.

"Ice cream will go *straight* to my thighs," he said sarcastically, but all the same stood up and followed Blaine to the ice cream cart, where he let his boyfriend buy him the biggest dipped chocolate double scoop monstrosity either of them had ever seen. Kurt happily ate the entire thing, calorie counts be damned.

...

It was early evening by the time they returned to Blaine's apartment later that day. Ellie was exhausted from running around the playground all afternoon, so she headed to her room the second they arrived back home and promptly fell asleep. It was almost dinnertime, and Kurt kind of felt like making something, but he wasn't sure how long Ellie would be asleep for and decided to wait before he started cooking anything.

Kurt went back to her bedroom and quietly closed the door so that she could nap in peace. When he returned, Blaine was scrolling through the missed calls screen on the phone handset near the answering machine.

"Looks like the courthouse clerk called while we were out," Blaine mumbled half to himself, half to Kurt. "I wonder if this means..."

He trailed off and pressed the answering machine button, which was blinking to signal that they had a message.

Sure enough, the pre-recorded male voice on the message identified himself right away as the courthouse clerk. That was the only part of the message Kurt understood, because everything that followed was a jumble of legal-sounding gibberish that made absolutely no sense to him whatsoever. He stood back and waited for Blaine to translate.

"Jury's reached a verdict," Blaine explained with a nervous smile once the message finished playing. "I have to be at court tomorrow morning at nine."

"Why did they have to make it sound all confusing?" Kurt pondered out loud. "Why couldn't they just say 'We have a verdict, be here at nine' or something simple?"

"People who work at the courthouse usually just assume that everyone speaks Lawyer," Blaine explained, then smiled as he stepped closer to Kurt and pulled him into his arms. "So can I count on my wonderful, amazing boyfriend to be there tomorrow to give me luck?"

Kurt gave Blaine a soft kiss on the lips. When he pulled away, he was smiling.

"You mean to watch you win the case? Absolutely."

...

That night, Blaine was just getting out of the shower when he heard Kurt in Ellie's room. She'd taken a nap earlier that evening, so she was going to bed later than she usually did. Blaine headed into his own bedroom, wanting to give father and daughter privacy, but since Ellie's bedroom door was open, Blaine could still hear Kurt's gorgeous, pure voice as he began to sing her to sleep.

"Blackbird singing in the dead of night

Take these broken wings and learn to fly

All your life

You were only waiting for this moment to arise."

Blaine couldn't help but smile to himself. He knew this may not have been the happiest song ever written, but the way Kurt was singing it was so full of hope. It gave the classic Beatles song a whole new kind of beauty.

"Blackbird singing in the dead of night

Take these sunken eyes and learn to see

All your life

You were only waiting for this moment to be free

Blackbird fly, blackbird fly

Into the light of the dark black night."

Blaine could hear the hopeful smile in Kurt's voice even from one room away. Everything about him was lovely and beautiful, especially his angelic voice. Blaine wouldn't mind if Kurt sang *him* to sleep in that immaculate countertenor voice.

"Blackbird fly, blackbird fly

Into the light of the dark black night

Blackbird singing in the dead of night

Take these broken wings and learn to fly

All your life

You were only waiting for this moment to arise

You were only waiting for this moment to arise

You were only waiting for this moment to arise."

He couldn't hear what Kurt and Ellie said to each other after they finished the song, but he didn't care. After pulling the covers down, Blaine let himself collapse onto the bed with what he knew was probably a stupid-looking smile on his face. He didn't think it was possible, but after hearing that song, he was even more in love with Kurt than ever before.

...

Blaine was smiling before he even opened his eyes the next morning, due to the fact that he was gently waken by a soft kiss to his forehead.

"Hi," he whispered when he found himself looking into Kurt's loving eyes.

"Hi," Kurt said softly with a tiny smile. He stroked one hand through Blaine's dark curls. "It's your big day."

Blaine, who was about to sit up, let his head fall back against the pillow. "Thanks for reminding me."

"No worries!" Kurt said cheerfully. "I already know you're going to win, but I knew you'd be nervous." He reached over towards the bedside table and grabbed a tray that was sitting there, which he then presented to Blaine. "So I made you breakfast in bed."

Blaine's heart melted. This was arguably the most important day of his career, and Kurt had gotten up God-only-knows-how-early to make breakfast for him. He took the tray because quite honestly, the blueberry pancakes that were piled on top of it smelled pretty amazing.

"You are so sweet to me and I don't have the slightest clue why," Blaine said with an appreciative smile as he picked up the fork and knife from the tray so he could start eating.

"Because you saved me," Kurt said, giving Blaine a tiny smile of his own. "And because I love you. How is it?"

Blaine swallowed his first bite of pancakes. "Amazing. These might even be better than the waffles, which is saying a lot. Your mom's recipe?"

"Yup!" Kurt smiled proudly as Blaine continued to eat. "Hey, listen. I'm gonna take Ellie to school. You stay here and eat and get ready and I'll meet you up at the courthouse, okay?"

Blaine, who had already eaten his way through nearly half of the pancakes, smiled and nodded. "Okay. Thank you so much, this is delicious."

Kurt waited for Blaine to swallow the bite he was currently chewing, then cupped his boyfriend's chin in the palm of his hand and tilted his face up for a kiss. "I love you."

"I love you," Blaine said back as they broke the kiss. "I'll see you in a little bit."

After Kurt left, Blaine smiled to himself as he ate the rest of the food on the tray. He was still a bit nervous, but that was natural. For the most part his nerves had completely gone away, and it was all because of Kurt.

...

Kurt had managed to work his way up to the front of the crowd that had accumulated on the courthouse steps. The stairs were packed with people - photographers, news journalists, and a whole lot of people who had come to show support for either side of the case. A lot of the people in the latter group were really getting into it with homemade signs and t-shirts. Kurt was happy to see that most of the crowd seemed to be showing support for Emily and Blaine's side of the argument.

The noise of the crowd only intensified when Blaine began to make his way up the steps. He somehow found a way to politely ignore the numerous television cameras and microphones that were being shoved in his face. Kurt blew him a kiss as he made his way past that particular section of the crowd. The man standing next to Kurt gave him a dirty look after he did so. Kurt was immediately confused. Lots of people were shouting good luck to Blaine and blowing him kisses - women *and* men, to be exact - so why would this guy have a problem with Kurt in particular doing it?

Kurt kept his eyes on Blaine until he was in the building. A few minutes passed by before anyone else arrived and made their way past the crowd on the courthouse steps. The next person to do so was that annoying defense lawyer, the one who seemed to enjoy taking digs at Blaine and his lack of professional and life experience at every opportunity. Kurt didn't particularly care too much for him.

The white noise that accompanied the defense attorney's trek up the stairs contained none of the cheers and shouts of support that had been directed at Blaine a few minutes earlier. Most of the things people were shouting at this guy sounded angry in comparison. Even though he supported no part of this other

man's argument, Kurt found it interesting how a crowd could turn from receptive to hostile in a matter of minutes.

The defense attorney was just reaching the top of the stairs when another supportive-sounding cheer erupted from the crowd. Kurt glanced towards the bottom of the steps and immediately smiled when he saw Emily, who was being pushed up the stairs by a heavy-set court police officer. She smiled and waved back to all her supporters as they all cheered for her. When her chair was pushed past Kurt's section of the crowd, he smiled and blew her a kiss, too.

Somehow, even through all the people, Emily managed to see him and call out to him. "Hi, Kurt!"

"Oh." The sudden voice belonged to the man standing next to Kurt, the one who had given him a dirty look when he blew Blaine a kiss. "*So you're Kurt.*"

Kurt squinted at him in confusion. "Yeah...?"

"I'm Derek," was all the other man said. He waited for a hint of realization to set in on Kurt's face, which didn't take long.

"Oh my god," Kurt gasped when he realized who it was. "You're Blaine's...oh."

"Uh huh." Derek nodded as he returned his gaze to meet Kurt's. "I'd still be with him if you hadn't come along."

"I would say I'm sorry, but I'm not," Kurt said, breaking eye contact as if to seem uninterested. If Derek was going to be rude to him, Kurt could dish it right back. "Destiny works in strange ways. Blaine and I have been waiting ten years for each other. Those ten years have been filled with all kinds of what we thought was unrequited sexual tension. We've been chasing after each other for so long, I think it's nice that things finally managed to fall into place. What are you even doing here, anyway?"

He hadn't meant to say the last part, but it just slipped out without him even realizing.

"I came to show my support for Blaine and his case," Derek said pointedly. "What are *you* doing here? You're not allowed to go into the courtroom, are you?"

"Actually, I am. I've been to almost every court date so far. Blaine got special permission for me to observe the trial," Kurt said nonchalantly, trying to make it seem like it wasn't a big deal.

At that moment, Kurt noticed that the witnesses and the rest of the people who were allowed to be in the courtroom were now starting to make their way through the doors. He turned and smiled politely at Derek.

"I need to go in and watch my boyfriend win the case. It was nice meeting you."

He couldn't help but smirk to himself as he turned away from a dumbstruck Derek and started heading up the steps into the courthouse.

...

The entire courtroom was silent as the jury entered the room. Blaine forced himself to swallow the gigantic lump in his throat, knowing that the verdict was only moments away. In just a few short seconds, he would either feel the overwhelming satisfaction of having won this case he'd poured his heart into, or he would feel extreme disappointment.

Blaine took a deep breath as he watched the clerk hand the verdict to the judge, who read it to himself and handed it back to the clerk. He reached for Emily's hand under the table and held it tightly as the clerk stepped up to read the verdict out loud to the rest of the courtroom.

"On the charges of discrimination in the workplace and unfair hiring policies..."

Blaine stopped breathing for a few seconds.

"...we the jury find the defendants guilty."

Blaine sat frozen exactly where he was for a few seconds longer, just to make sure he'd heard it correctly. Guilty. He couldn't believe it. Sure, he knew the defense had been fighting a losing battle from the get-go, but actually *hearing* it spoken out loud that he'd won...it brought an entirely different rush of emotion.

He was so relieved, and so happy. He wanted to jump up and run around the courtroom, proclaiming victory at the top of his lungs, but he also knew that doing so would be quite unprofessional. He did, however, let a small satisfied smile grace his expression as the judge began to speak.

"The defendants are hereby ordered by this court to pay all compensation to the plaintiff. She will receive no less than sixty thousand dollars from the defendants, as would be her yearly salary had she been hired."

Okay, so Blaine couldn't help smiling even bigger when he heard *that*. Not only had they won, but Emily had gotten even more compensation than either of them had expected. He was suddenly overcome with the urge to look over at the defense table and see how his rival attorney was reacting to his loss, but resisted the temptation so as not to seem too arrogant.

He forced himself to sit still until the judge delivered those final words - "Case dismissed" - and people slowly began to filter out of the courtroom. Blaine decided he would take his time, knowing that there would no doubt be hordes of media waiting for him and Emily outside.

Emily turned herself towards Blaine as she wheeled herself back from the table. Her expression was overwhelmed with relief and gratitude.

"You did it," she said quietly, but her smile was huge.

"*We* did it," Blaine corrected as he stepped behind her chair and began to push it for her as they exited the courtroom.

"All I did was get up there on the stand and answer some questions," Emily informed him. "*You* are the real reason I won this case, Blaine. I can't thank you enough."

"Don't worry about it," Blaine reassured her as they made their way out of the courthouse. There, at the top of the outdoor steps (which were overflowing with media once again), he noticed the defense attorney gruffly making his way down towards the inevitable cameras and microphones that would be shoved into his face within moments. Without even thinking about what he was doing, Blaine called out to him before he could get too far down the steps.

The other attorney turned around and headed back up the few steps he'd managed to walk down before Blaine called out to him. He obviously didn't look very pleased to see Blaine, as exemplified by the rude way he asked, "What do *you* want?"

"I just wanted to say I think you did a very good job presenting your argument," Blaine said politely, extending his hand. He figured now that the trial was over, there was no point in keeping up this hostility

any longer. He knew he had a chance of maybe arguing against this guy in court another time in the future, and he thought it might be a good idea to extend an olive branch, so to speak.

The defense attorney stared down at Blaine's outstretched hand, then spoke without shaking it.

"The only reason you won is because you're *young* and you're *handsome* and you're *charming*." He spat out each adjective as if it were a curse. "Not because you actually did a good job. It's a damn shame that most courts today don't appreciate real legal experience anymore."

He turned away and headed down the steps towards the crowd of media, who had just been witness to his whole rude spectacle and had captured the entire thing on camera. Blaine heard him muttering under his breath as he walked away: "Not even fucking thirty years old yet and employed by fucking Carter & Perry for fucking six months, and the motherfucker wins the entire fucking case and fucking sues my client for fucking sixty grand, my *ass*."

Blaine shook his head. "Nothing but class," he commented sarcastically to Emily as he carefully began to help her down the steps.

Emily laughed. "Nothing but *fucking* class, you mean."

Blaine resisted the urge to bust out laughing hysterically at her reference to the other attorney's muttered deluge of f-bombs.

"Oh, of course," he said, and finally managed to push her chair off of the steps onto flat ground as they both braced themselves for the inevitable media barrage coming their way. "So fucking classy."

...

Kurt was practically walking on air when he got back to the apartment. He knew all along that Blaine had this case in the bag, but that didn't mean he wasn't incredibly proud of his boyfriend now that he'd officially won it.

Since he and Blaine had driven separately to the courthouse, Kurt beat him home. He knew Blaine wouldn't be back for a while, considering the massive amounts of reporters and photographers that had converged on the courthouse steps following the dismissal of the trial. And Ellie was still at school, so he had the apartment to himself for a little while. That was kind of strange, he thought.

Kurt hung up his keys and noticed that the answering machine light was blinking to signal him that there was a new message. He pressed Play and listened to the message as he opened the refrigerator to look for something to drink, but practically dropped the can of Diet Coke he had just taken out of the 12-pack in the fridge when he realized what the pre-recorded female voice was saying.

Suddenly in a stupor, he set the pop can down on the counter and left the fridge open as he made his way back over to the answering machine to replay the message. He wasn't quite sure he'd heard it right.

But sure enough, after listening to the message about five more times, there was no doubt in his mind that he'd heard it absolutely right the first time. He couldn't believe it. Today was almost too good to be true.

He was standing by the answering machine, listening to the message for a sixth time and smiling like a complete idiot to himself when suddenly the door opened. Blaine was home. Kurt immediately deleted the message as it was still playing and headed to the door to greet his boyfriend with a kiss.

Blaine smiled against Kurt's lips as he kissed him back for a second, then pulled away. "If this is what happens every time I walk through the door, I must be the luckiest man on the planet."

Kurt giggled and leaned his forehead against Blaine's to keep their faces close.

"I am *so* proud of you," he said sincerely. "I knew you were going to win, but seriously, Blaine...this means *so* much to everyone in the gay community. Do you even understand how huge this is?"

"I honestly can't even really wrap my mind around it," Blaine confessed. "Hopefully this will teach a lesson to employers and make them realize that it's *not* okay to discriminate against potential employees based on their sexual orientation. Otherwise..."

"Sixty *thousand* dollars!" Kurt squealed, hopping up and down excitedly as he wrapped his arms around Blaine's neck. "I mean, yeah, that might not be a huge loss of money to them, being a commercial radio station, but it's a hell of a lot of money to Emily and Parker. Plus, nobody likes getting sued."

He smirked, then gently slipped away from Blaine so he could crack open the can of Diet Coke that was still sitting on the counter. A tiny but elated smile was on his face as he took a long sip, then spoke again.

"Y'know what? I think I'm going to take everyone out to dinner tonight," he mused out loud. "Me, you, Ellie, Emily and Parker. I think our families should celebrate together. Yes. I think I'm gonna go call her and ask."

Blaine could immediately see that there was something Kurt wasn't telling him. "What's your angle?"

Kurt looked at him innocently. "What's my angle? My boyfriend just won a landmark discrimination lawsuit and I want to celebrate with him and his client. Is that so wrong?"

"No, it's very nice of you, but I feel like you're keeping a secret from me." Blaine smirked knowingly.

Kurt was already on the other side of the room and reaching for the phone. "It's a surprise!" he called teasingly to Blaine in a singsong voice.

"Aww, come on," Blaine whined jokingly.

"You'll find out at dinner tonight, I promise," Kurt said to Blaine with a wink, then suddenly started to speak to the person on the other end of the phone. "Hi, Emily? This is Kurt."

...

Six hours later, Blaine found himself sitting at a large outdoor table at Riva Cafe on Navy Pier with Emily, Parker, Ellie and, of course, Kurt. It was a warm spring evening set against the backdrop of a gorgeous Chicago skyline, but Blaine was too preoccupied to focus on any of that at the present moment. Really, he just wanted to find out what Kurt's big surprise was. Also, apparently, Emily had good news as well. Kurt had informed Blaine of this after he got off the phone with her that morning. He couldn't lie, he was getting anxious to find out what they were both so excited about.

Kurt, of course, waited until after their drinks arrived and they'd ordered their food to broach the subject.

"I have an announcement to make," he said with a huge smile gracing his expression. "Blaine has been bothering me about this all day, but I told him he had to wait and I would tell everyone at dinner. It's about a phone call I got this morning. Actually, a missed call. The message was on the answering machine when I got home from the courthouse."

"You sure know how to leave people hanging," Blaine said, shooting Kurt a wry grin. "Who was it from? There weren't any messages on the machine when I got home."

"That's because I deleted it. I didn't want the surprise to be ruined." Kurt's smile was almost proud. "It was from Leandra Simmons."

Blaine, suddenly realizing what this probably meant, let his jaw drop into an amazed smile.

"Daddy, who's that?" Ellie asked.

"She's a nice woman who works at the Chicago City Schools district office," Kurt explained to her, then turned to acknowledge the rest of the table. Everyone, even the youngest two, was looking at him expectantly. Suddenly he couldn't contain his thrill any longer.

"Igotthejob," he said breathlessly and all in a rush.

Emily gasped. "The music teaching position at Buckley?"

"Yeah!" Kurt nodded enthusiastically. "I got it!"

Blaine leaned over and gave his boyfriend a hug. "Congratulations, Kurt. This is amazing, I knew you'd get it."

"I'm so happy," Kurt said as he hugged Blaine back. "I think this will be an amazing chance for me to change these kids' lives through music. I myself have already been through so much in the past few months, so I think I should use my experiences to help them out." He let out a content sigh as he let Blaine go. "Anyway. I'm sorry, I just wanted to share that. The real reason we're celebrating tonight is because of Emily and Blaine. I don't want to steal their moment."

"Kurt, you're fine." Blaine squeezed his hand, then looked at Emily with an expectant smile. "Does this mean we get to hear *your* good news now?"

"Yes, it does." She nodded and smiled. "I figured out what I'm going to do with the sixty grand, and I wanted you all to be the first to know."

"Wow, I feel honored," Blaine said, laughing a little bit. "What is it?"

"First of all...," she said slowly, "I got a job, too. I've been getting calls from *tons* of news networks and radio stations as the trial has been going on, asking if I want to work in their PR departments. Due to court orders, though, I couldn't talk to any of them until after the trial, but today I finally accepted a position with Chicago News Daily."

"Oh my god, Blaine watches that pretty much every morning." Kurt smiled as he referred to the well-known local morning news show.

"I do," Blaine admitted.

Something in Emily's smile told them that she had even more good news to deliver. "The main part of my job will be booking people to get interviewed on the show and helping promote them. Actually, Blaine, when I called them back to accept the position, they asked if I might be able to get *you* on the show."

Blaine blinked in disbelief. "Chicago News Daily wants to interview *me*?"

"Yup." Emily nodded. "They said you have 'an inspiring message of equality and tolerance.' Those are the exact words the guy used, I'm not even kidding. I told them I'd see what I could do."

"Yeah, sure, I'd love to." Blaine smiled incredulously. "Just tell me where I need to be and when."

"I'll get back to you on that," Emily reassured him. "Anyway. There's that, and like I said, I also figured out what I'm going to do with the sixty thousand dollars. You know that old building a couple blocks away...it was abandoned a few years ago, but it used to be a homeless shelter or something?"

Blaine nodded; Kurt shrugged and said "*Now* I do."

"Kurt, you actually inspired this," Emily said, smiling at him. "I want to buy that piece of land and restore the old building, fix it up and make it appealing again. Then I'm going to re-open it as a shelter for families who have suffered and escaped from domestic violence."

Kurt's heart was immediately touched. He couldn't help feeling tears of pure emotion welling up in his eyes and blinked them away to the best of his ability. "Emily, oh my god...that's so amazing."

"Like I said, *you* inspired me." She reached for his hand and held it on top of the table. "What you went through was horrible, but the good thing is, you and your daughter managed to get away from it. I want all

families to have that option. If one parent's spouse or partner is being abusive, I want them to feel like they have a safe place to bring their children and get away from the abuse. My goal is to make this more than just some average battered women's shelter. After all, you're living proof that there are some men who experience this, too. This would just be somewhere that *anyone* could come to get away from those situations."

Kurt leaned over and gave her a hug. "Thank you so much for doing this," he said sincerely. "If there's anything I can do to help you out, please let me know. I'd be more than happy."

Emily squeezed his hand and smiled. "Will do. Oh, and I might as well tell you now. I'm naming it after you."

Kurt rolled his eyes but smiled. "Oh, you don't have to do that."

Emily laughed. "I want to," she said. "I was thinking of calling it...Hummel House. Do you like that, or does the alliteration sound weird?"

"I love it," Kurt said sincerely. "I seriously...I can't thank you enough for wanting to do something like this. And the name doesn't sound weird. I'm honored, actually."

"Jane Addams started Hull House here in Chicago back during the Progressive days," Blaine pointed out. "That name had the H alliteration, too, and people obviously didn't think *that* sounded weird because high school kids today are still being forced to learn about it in history class. I was, anyway." He grinned. "I think this is so incredible, Emily. And like Kurt said, I'll be glad to help you out with this, too."

Before anyone could say anything more, the waiter arrived with their food. The conversation was put on hold for a few seconds until the waiter left and they were alone once more.

Kurt smiled and picked up his glass before anyone had a chance to start eating. "We three all have our own amazing pieces of good news to celebrate tonight," he said. "I propose a toast."

They all raised their glasses together. Even Parker and Ellie picked up their kiddie cups to join in.

"Today, we've all been put on the path towards greatness," Kurt said slowly for dramatic effect. "We're all working to change people's lives. To all of us."

Together, underneath the sparkling lights of the city, they lifted their glasses and drank to their own ambitions, each of them determined to make their own positive mark on their little world.

Chapter Thirteen

Kurt really did look like an angel, or so Blaine thought as he studied his boyfriend's sleeping face. The first few rays of early morning sunshine were starting to stream in through the slits in between the blinds, which hadn't been shut all the way, and the soft light cast a gorgeous glow over Kurt's face as he continued to sleep peacefully in Blaine's arms. Kurt's lips were slightly parted, his long eyelashes practically skimmed the tops of his cheeks, his chest rose and fell slowly with the rhythm of his breath and as Blaine looked at him he was suddenly overcome with emotion as he thought about how much he loved this beautiful man. Blaine still had trouble wrapping his mind around the fact that such a perfect human being could possibly have been made just for him.

He knew he could probably spend the rest of his life simply staring at Kurt and he wouldn't complain at all, but Blaine knew it was probably time to wake him up. Today was a big day for both of them. Kurt was starting his new job at Buckley Middle School today, and Blaine had his big televised interview with Chicago News Daily - Emily had immediately booked him for the show as soon as she'd started working there last week - later this morning. To be honest, he was terrified. He couldn't imagine why anybody would care so much to tune in and hear what he had to say, but he figured it would be a good opportunity to maybe spread some more awareness about Proposition 21. The vote was only a little over a month away, and Blaine was determined to push himself heart and soul into this cause now that his big trial was over.

Blaine gently moved his head down so he could press a soft kiss to the corner of Kurt's mouth. Kurt stirred a little bit and snuggled even closer against Blaine, which Blaine didn't mind at all, but it was really about time for him to get up. Blaine kissed him again, on the lips this time, and Kurt's eyes slowly drifted open.

"Morning," Kurt murmured, squinting sleepily as he attempted to keep his eyes open.

"Good morning, sleepyhead." Blaine laughed a little bit. "You're so cute when you're sleeping, but it's time to get up. You've got a big day ahead of you."

"Oh." Kurt blinked a few times as he sat up and stretched his arms over his head. "Yeah, I start teaching today. Oh my god." He yawned, then turned back towards Blaine who was still lying down. "I slept really well last night, though. I feel great."

Blaine smiled knowingly. "That's because you didn't wake up."

"I didn't?" Kurt thought for a moment, then realized that Blaine was right. "Oh my god, I didn't. That means I didn't have the nightmare."

As soon as the words were out of his mouth, Blaine sat up and pulled Kurt into a hug. "Kurt, oh my god...this is amazing."

Kurt couldn't help letting a huge smile of relief spread over his face. "I can't even tell you how happy this makes me," he admitted. "Maybe this means my brain is finally starting to get back to normal, or something." He pulled away from the hug a little bit so he could look Blaine in the eyes, but took his boyfriend's hands. "I honestly think you have a lot to do with this. Thank you."

Blaine blinked in confusion. "You're welcome? I don't really know what I did, though."

Kurt gave him a tiny smile. "You held me, you kissed me, you loved me, you made me feel safe. You've done so much for me, Blaine...I'm never going to be able to thank you enough for as long as I live."

"Be mine and only mine for as long as you live and we'll call it even?" Blaine teased as he pulled Kurt into his arms again. He kissed him and continued speaking against Kurt's lips. "I think that's a fair deal."

Kurt giggled against Blaine's lips without breaking the kiss. "You've got yourself a deal."

...

They had the apartment completely to themselves as they ate breakfast that morning. Kurt and a few other parents in the building whose children attended Friendship Valley Elementary had worked out a car pool system, so Ellie was going to school with the nice woman who lived down the hall, her daughter, and a few other kindergartners. Blaine still had some time before he had to leave for his interview and Kurt's class didn't meet until the afternoon, so they had some time to just relax and enjoy being together.

"Kurt," Blaine said after a few seconds of comfortable silence had passed, "I want to ask you something."

Kurt smiled as he swallowed a bite of french toast. "Sure, what's up?"

"Okay, how do I explain this...," Blaine was speaking more to himself than to Kurt at first. "You know how the night of a presidential election, some people throw big public election parties? Like something where people can gather and listen to the results of the election together, and then they all celebrate if the

candidate they supported wins, and they get all pissed off together if their candidate loses? That sort of thing?"

"Yeah." Kurt nodded. "I think I know what you're talking about."

"Okay, good," Blaine continued. "Anyway, I got an email last night. The local chapter of GLAAD is planning something like that next month after the vote on Prop 21. It would be the night of the day we vote, just this big family thing down at Navy Pier. All the stores and restaurants there would have really good sales and stay open late, and it would just kind of be a little last-minute way for us all to be together to show our support for this cause before we find out the results of the vote. Then later that night, after everything is finished getting tallied, everybody would come together and listen to the official proclamation of the results, when they announced if it passed or not."

Kurt seemed excited about this already. "That sounds amazing!" he said enthusiastically. "I think it would be so much fun for everybody who supported this cause to come together like this to find out the results of the vote. I think we should go."

"That's what I was getting at," Blaine said. "The reason GLAAD emailed me is because they wanted to invite me to perform at it. They're having a few local musicians who support the cause, and apparently they think I would draw a bigger crowd than any of the rest of them. That's just what they said, I'm not quite so sure about that." He rolled his eyes.

Kurt was practically bouncing up and down with excitement, and Blaine would be damned if that wasn't absolutely adorable. "Oh my god, Blaine, they're so right." He grinned widely. "Please tell me you said yes. *Please.*"

"I didn't respond back to them yet," Blaine said slowly. "Because I wanted to ask *you* something first."

He reached across the table and took Kurt's hands, not letting his gaze wander from his boyfriend's eyes as he made his request.

"Kurt," he stated. "I was wondering if you would do me the honor of singing with me at this event."

Kurt didn't say anything at first. He was just kind of staring at Blaine with his eyes wide and his mouth open and Blaine was wondering if maybe this had been a bad idea, but then Kurt responded.

"I would love to sing with you," he said softly, letting a touched smile spread over his expression. He hesitated for a moment, then added, "Why me, though?"

Blaine laughed and squeezed both of his boyfriend's hands. "Kurt, I love you, but what kind of a question is that?" he asked in response, smiling warmly at Kurt from across the table. "I hear you sing every single night, and you always sound absolutely beautiful. Just flawless. I would love for as many people as possible to have the privilege of hearing your voice. Plus...," his expression softened just the slightest bit, "I know this may sound weird, but it's always been...a dream of mine to sing with you. We went to different high schools so it's not like we could sing together in glee club all the time or anything. I just...I think it would be *so* amazing, Kurt. Especially in a situation like this. We can show everybody just how invincible we really are."

"It would be nice to have a chance at redemption after everything I've been through," Kurt admitted, nodding. "I'd like to have that moment where I can just get up in front of a whole bunch of people and just sing my heart out and not give a damn about what any of them think. And you being there with me would just make it even more special."

"So is that a yes?" Blaine asked hopefully. "Kurt, it would mean the world to me if I were able to share that moment with you."

"Yes," Kurt said with a genuine smile. "I'll sing with you, Blaine."

Blaine brought both of Kurt's hands to his lips. He happily kissed the fingertips, palms, wrists and any part he could reach, which in turn made Kurt shake with suppressed giggles.

"Thank you," Blaine said quietly when he let Kurt have his hands back.

Kurt simply smirked and reached across the table as he leaned over it. He grabbed Blaine's tie and used it to pull his boyfriend towards him for a proper kiss.

...

About an hour later, Blaine was sitting in a makeup chair at the downtown television studio while a preppy blonde girl dusted some kind of powder all over his face. He tried to compose himself, but in all honesty he was terrified. He'd never been on live TV before and for some reason his brain was filled with

recurring images of himself freezing up on camera and being unable to talk. It wasn't going to be a long interview, just a couple questions and answers, but he was still scared stiff in the makeup chair.

"You're done," the makeup girl told him without much warning, and Blaine forced himself to snap back into reality. Okay. This was really happening but he'd be okay, right? All he had to do was stay true to what he believed in and try to politely encourage viewers to support his cause. Easy enough.

He must have walked back out to the soundstage where they taped the show, but didn't even realize he was doing it. Once there, he shook hands with Brian and Amy, the two anchors who would be interviewing him, and sat down in the chair designated for him as he waited for the impending *On Air* lights to turn on.

He didn't have to wait long. Before he knew it, they were doing some kind of countdown and the cameras were being moved into position.

"Welcome back to Chicago News Daily. I'm Brian Marshall here with Amy Robinson," Brian said to the camera once they were on air, smiling that smile that all TV news people were probably required to learn how to make. In the few seconds it took him to say this, Blaine was mentally debating where to look. Should he be looking at the camera, or at Brian and Amy, or...*where?*"

"Joining us this morning is the man who has been called 'the voice of Chicago's gay community,'" Brian was saying as Blaine debated all this. The reporter's words were news to Blaine. People called him that?

It must have been Amy's turn to talk, because she gave the camera the same polite TV News Person Smile. "Please welcome local attorney and musician Blaine Anderson."

The moment was upon him. Shit. Blaine smiled at the two of them as he realized that he should probably say something now.

"It's great to be here," he said, hoping it didn't sound too forced. "Thanks for having me on the show."

"We're very excited to have you." Amy was talking to Blaine now rather than to the camera and the unseen viewers watching at home. "Now as Brian just said, you have been a very active voice in the local gay community here over the past few months."

Blaine smiled abashedly. "I don't know if I'd call myself '*the* voice' of the gay community. I think that's giving me way too much credit. I kind of just threw myself headfirst into this movement. I didn't really know what I was getting into, but I knew I wanted to do *something*."

"The issue of gay marriage has been highly debated for decades now. Other than the fact that you are openly gay yourself, did you have any other incentive that really pushed you to get involved with this particular cause?" Brian asked next.

Blaine immediately thought back to the dream he'd had the night before he came to visit Kurt and Dave down in Ohio the weekend after his birthday...the dream about his and Kurt's wedding. He still remembered the way Dream Kurt had looked at him and said *This is unbelievable, Blaine. I'm finally going to be your husband*. Suddenly he knew exactly how to answer the question.

"It started out kind of selfishly at first, actually," Blaine replied honestly. "A few months ago, I had a dream about my own wedding. And that was the first time it really hit me that, hey, I might want to get married someday. And then I went to that first rally and things started to get out of control, so I kind of just went up onstage and started singing to calm the crowd down. I didn't even really think about what I was doing. And in that moment, that's when I realized that maybe I can use my music to help spread the word about this cause."

"You've really got a lot of things going for you," Amy commented. "You're young, you're good-looking, you're likable, you've got a great voice...how do you remain so humble and down to earth while you're constantly in the public eye?"

Blaine shrugged. "It's pretty easy because that's just the way I've always been. This is an issue that obviously I'm very supportive of, and my goal is to do my best to encourage others to support it as well. I really don't see a need to be arrogant about anything there."

Before she asked the next question, Amy gave him that small, knowing smirk that Blaine recognized as the expression reporters wore when they were about to try and dig up some deep, juicy secret. Sure enough, he was right.

"Now let's get a little bit more personal...," she suggested nonchalantly, "you're such a nice, talented, handsome, dapper - I could go on and on - young man. Now that you're becoming more well-known, I'm

sure a lot of guys out there are wondering if you're single." Blaine could have sworn she winked. "Is there anyone out there who's managed to steal your heart yet?"

Blaine was suddenly painfully aware that he was blushing and grinning like an idiot and basically resembling a giddy, lovesick schoolgirl on live television, but he immediately decided that he didn't care. He knew Kurt was watching at home as he got ready to start his new job this afternoon, so he decided there was no point in being anything but honest as he answered.

"Yes, my heart has been stolen," Blaine said with a genuine smile. "I have an *amazing* boyfriend named Kurt. He inspires me in everything I do." He turned to speak to the camera, knowing full well that Kurt's gorgeous eyes were on him at that exact moment. "Kurt is the sweetest and most loving man I've ever had the privilege to know, and I love him more than anything else in the world."

They asked him a few more questions after that, but none quite so deep and personal. Blaine was suddenly more at ease after they got the more loaded questions out of the way, and he was shocked when he discovered he actually felt a little sad when it was over. When they finally went off-air, he thanked Brian and Amy and they thanked him, then he waved goodbye to some of the camera people and crew members as he made his way out of the studio. Now it was time for him to go to work.

He felt his cell phone buzzing in his pocket as he got into his car. After jamming the key into the ignition, he quickly fumbled around in his pockets before finally extracting the phone. Without even glancing at the caller ID screen, he pressed the phone to his ear to answer the call.

"Hello?" he asked breathlessly.

"Hey, Blaine. I saw your interview just now." The voice was familiar, and it was most definitely *not* one he wanted to hear.

"Oh." Blaine felt disappointment hitting the pit of his stomach. "Hi, Derek."

"Would you like to explain to me what just happened?" Derek demanded. "We dated for *how* many months? And you *never* talked like that about me."

Blaine put his phone on Speaker, then set it up on the dashboard so he could talk and drive at the same time. "Talked like what?" he asked as he pulled out of his parking spot.

"Ohhh, Kurt is *so* amazing and he inspires me *so* much and I just *love* him," Derek said in a bad imitation of Blaine's voice. "Seriously, what the hell?"

"I honestly don't know why you care, Derek," Blaine said flatly as he turned out of the parking lot onto the main road. "We're not dating anymore. Sorry for expressing how I feel about my boyfriend. Not going to lie, though, I'm pretty disappointed. I thought you'd be a lot more understanding about this."

"Well, when it happened - when you broke up with me - I'd been expecting it. I knew it was going to happen. But now that I've let it sink in...," Derek trailed off a little bit and hesitated before Blaine heard his voice through the phone again. "I'm kind of pissed. I'm not over you, okay? You had to go and dump me for that whiny little fuck who couldn't just man up and learn to fight back."

In that moment, Blaine was suddenly the angriest he'd been since he found out what Dave had been doing to Kurt. He had felt the rage building up inside him as Derek spoke, but when he said that last part Blaine couldn't take it anymore. He slammed on the brakes with dangerous force as he stopped at a red light, gripping the steering wheel so tightly that he thought he could probably rip it right out of the mount on the dashboard if he felt so inclined.

"Shut the *fuck* up, Derek," he shouted, making no effort to disguise the rage in his voice. "Don't you *dare* talk like that about the man I love. You have *no* idea what he's been through. And even if he and I weren't together, that's no way to talk about somebody who's suffered that kind of abuse." He was still clenching the steering wheel and speaking through gritted teeth. "What gives you the right to even *say* those things, anyway? You don't even *know* him!"

"I did meet him, once," Derek said emotionlessly.

Oh. That was new. Color Blaine intrigued.

"When?" he asked pointedly as traffic started moving again, wondering why Kurt hadn't mentioned this to him.

"On the courthouse steps the day they announced the verdict and you guys were all going inside. He was standing right next to me. Emily called out to him and said 'Hi, Kurt,' and that's how I knew it was him."

Okay. Blaine felt a little bit better about the situation now. That day had been so hectic; the encounter had probably slipped Kurt's mind altogether.

"And what was he like?" Blaine asked in response. "What did you think of my boyfriend, the 'whiny little fuck who can't be a man' or whatever the hell you said he is?"

He heard Derek scoff. "Why do I have to answer that?"

"Because I'm curious," Blaine said casually. "I want to know what kind of impression he gave off that made you say those things about him. If you really like me as much as you say you do, you'll be honest with me."

Derek sounded wary when he responded. "Promise you won't get all 'I told you so' or anything?"

"I'll try not to, but I can't make any promises," Blaine told him. "Shoot."

Derek sighed audibly through the phone. A few seconds passed before he actually answered.

"He's fucking *gorgeous*," Derek finally admitted. "Perfect hair, perfect skin, perfect little body. Perfect eyes that I couldn't tell what the hell color they were, but they were so goddamn beautiful. Honestly, he might even be better looking than you are. Scratch that - he *is* better looking than you are. Most beautiful man I've ever seen, that's for sure. He looked like a fucking *god*."

"I wouldn't argue with that," Blaine agreed. "Did you talk to him?"

"Yeah," Derek said. "He seemed pretty chill at first, but then I said something about how I would still be with you if it weren't for him. Then he got kind of bitchy."

"Yup, that's my Kurt." Blaine couldn't help but smile. "And I think the 'bitchiness' you're talking about was probably just him handing it right back to you. I've known Kurt since high school. He's very assertive, but he's never rude unless you're rude to him first. Then he has no problem with being, as you say, 'bitchy.'"

There was a long pause on the other end of the line. Blaine was about to ask Derek if he was still there, but finally he spoke again.

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, Blaine. What I said before was completely out of line. I wasn't thinking. I'm sure he's an amazing guy."

"Thank you," Blaine said as he pulled into the parking lot of the tall building where Carter & Perry had their law offices. "Hey, I'm at work now so I gotta go. See you."

He hung up the phone after Derek said goodbye and shoved it back into his pocket. Before getting out of the car, he inhaled a deep breath and let it out slowly. Had Derek's apology been sincere? Blaine honestly had no idea. All he knew was that talking to Derek had just left him more stressed than he'd been since he left the interview. After taking a few seconds to collect himself, he opened the door and got out of the car.

It took him a while to get upstairs because seemingly every person in the building stopped him to shake his hand and tell him what a great job he did in the interview. Blaine slapped a polite smile on his face to hide his Derek-induced stress and graciously thanked each and every one of them. It took him much longer than was probably necessary to get to his office.

At long last, he had reached the familiar door with the frosted glass window on which formal black lettering spelled out who he was: *Blaine D. Anderson, Attorney-at-Law*. Just as he was reaching for the shiny brass knob, a sudden voice interrupted him.

"Blaine. I'm glad you're here, I've been wanting to talk to you. Do you mind if we have a word?"

Blaine's heart stopped when he turned around and realized that the voice belonged to none other than Mark Perry, his boss, co-owner and partner of the firm. Suddenly Blaine was just as terrified as he'd been before his interview this morning. Nothing good could ever come as a result of your boss saying he wanted to talk to you.

Blaine heard himself say, "Sure!" in a higher-pitched tone than he normally spoke with, a sure-fire sign that he was nervous. He followed Perry down the hall to his corner office, the nice one with the back wall made entirely of windows so that people could enjoy a gorgeous view of Chicago's tall buildings that surrounded them, and the framed certificates from Harvard law school that graced the wall behind the desk.

"Go ahead and have a seat." Perry gestured to one of the chairs in front of his large desk. These chairs were a lot bigger and more comfortable than the stiff wooden ones Blaine had in his own office. Blaine hoped his boss couldn't tell how much he was shaking with nerves as he obediently sank down into the chair.

Mark Perry was not, by any means, an intimidating-looking man. He was in his early sixties and only a little bit taller than Blaine, who had always been a bit on the short side. The smile he fixed on Blaine now from across the desk was kind and almost grandfatherly, but Blaine couldn't help but feel even more

nervous. Maybe he was about to lose his job or something, and Perry was just politely trying to let him down easy. Blaine quickly racked his brain, trying to think of everything he could have possibly done wrong in his short time at the firm, and came up empty.

"Blaine, I don't think it's any secret that you've been doing a fantastic job here in your brief time at our firm," Perry began slowly. "For as young as you are, your accomplishments and the amount of respect you've managed to earn is outstanding. The Emily Jade case you just won - that gained quite a bit of national attention, you know."

"*National* attention?" Blaine asked in disbelief. "I mean, I knew the news stations here were constantly covering it, but I had no idea the rest of the country knew about it."

"Oh, yes. We've been getting mail from all over the country. People have been writing to us and saying how well you've handled such a monumental case at your young age - and how well you carry yourself out of the courtroom as well. You've always been nothing but poised and dignified when out in the public eye, and people notice that. I couldn't be more proud to have an attorney like you employed here at the law firm that bears my name."

Blaine bowed his head humbly. "Thank you, sir."

"With that being said," Perry continued, "I have an offer to make you. It's not something you have to decide just yet, but I'd like to throw the offer out there so you can think about it and decide."

"Okay." Blaine swallowed the lump of nerves in his throat and tried to appear somewhat calm.

"As you know, I'm planning on retiring at the end of the month," Perry said, and Blaine nodded. He'd announced this at the beginning of the year, so this wasn't new information. "With that being said, I've been keeping an eye out for someone to take my place as partner here at the firm."

Blaine suddenly felt like a jackhammer had replaced his heart in his chest. He couldn't possibly mean-

"Blaine, what I'm getting at is...I'd like to offer you a promotion, if you will. I would like for you to take my place as partner at the firm after I retire."

Blaine probably blinked in disbelief about ten times before he could finally manage to verbalize a response. At first he wasn't sure if he'd heard that right, but the way Perry was looking at him made it clear to Blaine that his boss was one hundred percent serious about this.

"You can't be serious," was Blaine's intelligent response. "You mean...*me*?"

Perry laughed heartily. "I mean Blaine Darren Anderson. That's you, isn't it?"

"Yeah, that's me, but...why?" Blaine asked incredulously. "I mean...I'm absolutely honored that you chose me, believe me, but out of all the incredible attorneys here at this firm...why me?"

"For all the same reasons I just told you," Perry said sincerely. "You're a very gifted attorney, Blaine. Most lawyers your age - just a couple years out of law school, they're usually pretty cocky and arrogant. You're not. You never have been. If you stay true to how you are now, I see nothing but even greater things happening for you in the future."

"Thank you so much," Blaine said with a genuine smile. "Like I said, I am *so* honored that you chose me. But...there are a lot more attorneys who have been part of this firm for *years*, probably dreaming of making partner and working really hard to be in this position that I am in right now - being offered such an amazing opportunity. I haven't even been here for an entire year yet. I'm extremely grateful that you would consider me for something like this, but I would hate to take this opportunity away from somebody who has been working towards it for a lot longer than I have."

"I realize you haven't been with us for as long as some of our other attorneys have, and I put a lot of thought into this decision. I talked it over with Andrew-," he was referring to Andrew Carter, the other partner of the firm, "and he agrees with me that *you* are the best choice for this promotion. We're both very impressed by what you've done so far, and we still see a lot of promise in you for the future. Trust me when I say that we *did* consider others for this position, but we just kept coming back to you. Please consider this offer, Blaine. Personally, I would be honored for your name to replace mine."

Blaine mentally tried the name on for size. Carter & Anderson. He had to admit, there was a catchy ring to it. And if he was being totally honest with himself, this was an incredible opportunity that was literally being placed right in front of him. Why shouldn't he want this?

Something in the back of his mind told him he needed a second opinion. Suddenly he knew exactly who that would come from.

"I don't know," he sighed. "I'd love to, really. I can't tell you enough how honored I am. But...I need some time to make up my mind. I want to discuss this with Kurt and see what he thinks before I make any big decision that affects our family, even if it's in a positive way."

"That's perfectly fine," Perry told him, nodding understandingly. "Take your time. It's nothing you need to decide right away, but like I said, I just wanted to put the offer out there."

"Thank you," Blaine said for what felt like the millionth time. "I'll let you know as soon as I can."

He shook his boss's hand across the desk and with that, the offer was officially set in stone.

...

Kurt left for work an hour and a half before it was necessary for him to be there. The choir class he'd be teaching met in the afternoons, which meant he'd have mornings off, but he tended to be unnecessarily early for things when he was nervous.

He managed to kill most of the time before his class arrived by rearranging practically everything in the tiny little classroom. This was certainly nothing like his old music classroom at Lincoln Elementary. It was a depressing square of a room in Buckley's ancient basement with fluorescent lights that cast a dull glare off of the drywall. Nothing about the room seemed inviting. Even the decrepit piano seemed out of place. Kurt warily stepped over to the instrument and pressed middle C, wincing when a horribly out-of-tune sound echoed through the room (which, as he now realized, had terrible acoustics). He had never been more thankful for the fact that he'd been born with perfect pitch; he would have to rely on that talent alone until he could get the piano tuned.

He'd brought with him a few posters of famous musicians and composers, so he hung those up on the bare walls to add a splash of color to the bleak room. The one other time he'd been in this room, he'd noticed that it didn't have a dry erase board or even an old-fashioned chalkboard, so Kurt had taken the liberty of laminating a gigantic five-line staff, which he hung on the wall behind the piano. He figured he could use dry erase markers on the laminate to label where different notes fell on the staff and whatnot, so it served its purpose as a teaching device.

When he was all finished, the room looked significantly different than it had when he'd arrived, but something about it still seemed incredibly depressing. Kurt tried to block that thought from his head as he set up twenty-four chairs, one for each student. After spending an unnecessary amount of time meticulously lining up each and every chair into perfect rows, he sank down into his own chair behind his tiny desk in the corner and stared up at the ceiling tiles which were just as blank and expressionless as everything else in the room.

There was still some time left before the class was supposed to show up. He suddenly felt the need to talk to somebody. His first choice, obviously, was Blaine, but he was at work. There was, however, one other person he could call - and she might even understand his nervousness in this particular situation even better than Blaine would.

After taking a quick glance at the time - they were an hour ahead in Ohio, so she was probably still on break if his old schedule had remained intact - he pulled his phone out of his pocket and called Rachel Berry.

She answered cheerfully on the first ring. "Hi, Kurt! I was literally just about to call you!"

"You were?" Kurt asked with a wry smile. "I'm just freaking out because it's my first day and the kids will be here in half an hour and I'm just-"

"I knew you'd be freaking out, that's why I was going to call." Some things about Rachel, including her tendency to interrupt without thinking, never changed. "I thought maybe hearing some old, familiar voices would make you feel better." She was getting excited now; Kurt could practically hear the smile in her voice through the phone. "The third grade class will be here in about two minutes. I was going to call you when they were here so I could put you on speaker and have them all say hi to you."

Her words immediately touched Kurt's heart. "Oh, Rachel, thank you. I miss them so much."

"They all miss you too, trust me," she said tenderly. "A few kids cried the first day I was here when I had to explain that you weren't coming back."

Kurt frowned. "Aww, now I feel bad," he said sadly.

"Don't feel bad," Rachel said, probably still smiling, then her tone immediately jumped to one of excitement. "Oh! Hold on just a second, okay? The kids are just now getting here. I'll put you on speaker once they all get in their seats."

"Okay!" Kurt was happier than he'd been all day. It would give him a tremendous confidence boost to be able to hear his former students' voices right before he got this brand-new choir underway.

He could hear Rachel's somewhat muffled voice on the other end of the line, calling for the class to get seated and quiet because she had somebody special on the phone who wanted to talk to them. Being third graders, this must have intrigued them, because the white noise of the students chatting on the other end of the line was immediately silenced.

There was a *beep* and finally Rachel's voice was loud enough for Kurt to hear her again. "Okay, say hi to them!" she said to him.

"Hi everyone!" Kurt said happily as he acknowledged the group of his former students on the other end of the line. "This is Mr. -"

But he couldn't even finish his sentence and say his full name before his ears were met with an excited chorus of "Mr. Hummel!" from the students on the other end of the line, in near perfect unison. The noise that followed was a mixture of excited chatter from the students that was music to Kurt's ears.

"How have you guys been?" Kurt asked, laughing a little bit.

They all said "Good!" at practically the same time again, and Kurt couldn't help but smile at how sweet they sounded. He waited a little bit for the talking on the other end to quiet down before he spoke again.

"That's nice, I'm glad to hear that. I'm all the way up in Chicago now, I got a new job teaching a choir class at a middle school here," he explained to all of them. "My very first class is actually about to start in just a few minutes. I just wanted to call Ms. Berry really quick, but she knows I miss you guys so she thought it would be a good idea to let me say hi to all of you."

This time, the response was a mixture of different things with lots of kids shouting something along the lines of "We miss you too!" Kurt couldn't stop smiling. Suddenly he didn't care about the fact that he was nervous as all hell or that this ancient building was probably stuffed with asbestos. Hearing these kids'

voices again for the first time in months gave him an overwhelming feeling of happiness that eclipsed all those second thoughts.

He talked for a few more minutes with the kids and Rachel before she told the class that they were going to let Mr. Hummel go get ready to teach. This news was met with a chorus of "Bye!"s, and Kurt gave them a goodbye of his own before he reluctantly hung up the phone.

He sat there at his desk for a few more minutes after hanging up. Before he knew it, the old-fashioned bell rang loudly to signal that it was time to switch classes. Kurt took a deep breath. This was it. In just a few minutes, twenty-four kids would walk into the music room with no idea that their lives were about to be changed.

Kurt stood by the door and greeted each of them with a smile as they entered the classroom. None of them appeared happy to be there. He pretended not to notice this and informed them that they could take a seat wherever they wanted until he got around to auditioning and assigning voice parts.

He had been mentally counting off in his head as each one entered the room, so he closed the door when the twenty-fourth and final student came in. As he made his way to the front of the classroom, it somehow didn't surprise him to see that most the kids were already flicking spitballs and rubber bands and those obnoxious triangle footballs at each other while shouting incomprehensibly. Kurt could have sworn he heard a few choice four-letter words coming out of the mouths of these...twelve year olds? The ones who weren't joining in the ruckus had their cell phones out and were texting away like nobody's business. Kurt knew Buckley had a strict cell phone policy and these kids were just probably testing him, the new guy, to see what they could get away with.

Kurt knew there was no way he'd be able to shout above the unbearable rowdiness in the small room to get the students' attention and tell them to quiet down. He strolled over to the ancient out-of-tune piano and did the first thing that came to his mind: he slammed both hands down onto the keyboard to create a loud, angry-sounding discord that immediately got the class's attention.

"Hi." He greeted them in a clear, confident voice once they'd all been scared quiet by the sudden noise of the piano. "I'm Mr. Hummel. As you've probably already figured out, this is choir."

A loud male voice immediately spoke up from the back of the room. "Yo, can we just like, call it 'music class' or something different? 'Choir' makes it sound kinda gay, and I ain't no homo."

Kurt fixed a no-nonsense stare on the student who had spoken. "Okay, let me make one thing clear. We don't use that word as an insult here. If you'd rather call this class 'music class' instead of 'choir,' I don't care. All I ask is that you please do so without being disrespectful. Got it?"

"Yeah, whatever," the student who had spoken mumbled.

"Anyway," Kurt continued in the same tone that let the class know he meant business, "whatever you call this class doesn't matter to me. You're here to learn about music. I'm going to teach you how to read it, how to write it, how to interpret it and most importantly...," he smiled for the first time since beginning class, "how to sing it."

"But what if we already know how to sing?" asked a girl in the back, whose facial expression and tone seemed to suggest that she had a serious attitude problem. "I'll have y'all know, I've been compared to Beyonce."

Kurt smirked. "I'll have *you* know that I am a *huge* Beyonce fan. I think *I'll* be the judge of that."

The entire class erupted into a chorus of "Ooooooh!" in response to Kurt's snarky reply to the girl with the attitude. This time, he simply raised his voice a bit and said, "Don't make me bang on the piano again."

That immediately shut them up.

"Thank you," Kurt said. "As I said before, my name is Mr. Hummel...I'm a bit new here to the Chicago area and obviously to this school. Prior to coming here I taught music at an elementary school in Columbus, Ohio. I grew up back in Ohio, I lived there for my whole life up until a couple months ago..."

"Why'd you come all the way out here?" one student asked. "I mean, I'm just saying. My grandma lives in Ohio and those car rides always suck. It probably sucked even more to move that far away."

Kurt inconspicuously took a deep breath. "There was a situation in my family that I'd rather not go into at the moment, and it made it unsafe for us to stay there. I decided to come to Chicago because it was far away from that situation, and also because I have a friend who lives here that offered to help me out. And now I'm here." He shrugged.

There was silence in the room. Kurt knew just by the expressions on their faces that they were probably trying to figure out what his situation had been.

"I have one major rule in this classroom. You respect me, I'll respect you, and we all respect each other. I think it's pretty simple. It's really the only rule we need to make sure things go smoothly in here. Part of that respect includes no cell phones." He glared at a girl in the back row who had been texting right out in the open. She blushed all of a sudden and shoved her phone into her purse. "If I see someone using their cell phone when I'm trying to teach, that's disrespectful to me and to the rest of the class who might be trying to pay attention. If I see it, I'll take it away. Got it?"

Nobody spoke, but the majority of students nodded to let Kurt know they understood. He was secretly proud of himself for the way he'd been handling this bunch of rough, inner-city misfits. It was certainly different from teaching elementary school in suburban Columbus, that was for sure, but he reasoned that if he kept up his respectful no-nonsense attitude, things would go relatively smooth.

"About this class," he continued. "We're going to be singing. A *lot*. And we're going to start right now. I suggest that if you have stage fright, you take this moment to take a couple of deep breaths and relax, because in just a few minutes you're all going to get up one at a time and sing for us. Every single one of you."

This seemed to be a somewhat unpopular concept, as evidenced by the tense murmur that rode through the room and one student in the back who said "The fuck, bro?" much louder than was necessary.

"I'll wait," Kurt announced as he waited for the noise to die down.

A few seconds later, the room was silent again so he could continue. "Thank you. The point of this is so that I know what kind of voice you have. I'm going to put you into three groups. These groups are your voice parts. They are called soprano, alto, and baritone." He decided to use this last category for the boys, since they were all at that awkward stage where their voices were changing and some voices were higher or lower than others. He thought it would just be simpler to collectively call the men's section the baritones as opposed to dividing it into tenors and basses.

"What's those words supposed to mean? They like, French or something?" one confused-sounding student spoke up and asked.

"Actually, they all come from Italian," Kurt explained. "Those are the names of the three voice parts we'll be having in this choir. Sopranos are female singers who can sing very high notes. Altos are female singers who sing lower notes. We're just going to call the male section the baritone section instead of dividing it

into higher and lower parts, since the boys' voices are changing and it's hard to determine exactly what part they would sing in a traditional four-part choir."

"So if all the boys are in the same group, why do we have to sing in front of everyone now?" one boy asked.

"Because I want to get an idea of what everybody's voice sounds like," Kurt said. "Are there any questions?"

There were not.

"All right, perfect," Kurt said with a smile. "Let's get started. Who would like to go first?"

As expected, nobody raised their hand.

"If nobody volunteers, I'll randomly pick somebody," Kurt warned.

All of a sudden one boy near the back of the room raised his hand.

Kurt smiled at him. "Why don't you start us off. What's your name?"

"My name's Bruno," the kid announced, obviously proud of this. "My parents named me after Bruno Mars. I can sing like him, too."

"Great!" Kurt knew that the more enthusiastic he seemed, the more enthusiastic the class would be. "Why don't you stand up and let us hear it?"

Bruno made a big show of standing up from his chair and dramatically clearing his throat as he prepared to sing. Kurt watched him with an expression that let him know he wasn't going to wait around forever and that Bruno should really start singing so Kurt could have the chance to listen to everybody today. Bruno immediately picked up on the impatient way Kurt was looking at him and began to sing.

"Tomorrow I'll wake up, do some P90X

Meet a really nice girl, have some really nice sex

And she's gonna scream out 'This is great' -!"

"Okay, that's enough!" Kurt held up his hands and immediately cut him off after that part.

Bruno looked offended. "Are you saying I can't sing?"

"No, no, I thought you had a wonderful voice," Kurt reassured him, and he wasn't lying. The kid actually wasn't bad. "Y'know, I think everyone should just sing the same song. It makes it easier when I'm trying to compare voices. Could you sing Happy Birthday for me?"

Bruno shrugged. "I'm cool with that, I guess."

He sang Happy Birthday. So did the next person to audition - the girl who had been texting, whose name ended up being Chloe. She turned out to have a pretty soprano voice. Miraculously, Kurt managed to get every student in the class to sing Happy Birthday solo. He was honestly surprised they'd cooperated enough to allow him time to get through everybody in one day. When all was said and done, the numbers ended up being even: eight sopranos, eight altos, and all eight boys as baritones.

"Thanks for being cooperative," he called to the departing students as the bell rang at the end of class - literally the second after he'd finished finalizing the voice parts. "I'll see you tomorrow."

He wandered back over to his desk chair and happily sank down into it as the last of the students exited the room. Without even realizing it, he found himself whistling Bruno Mars's Lazy Song. He kicked his feet up onto the desk and stared at the ceiling as he leaned back in his chair, feeling absolutely amazing about himself. Now that he'd gotten his first class out of the way, he was going to treat himself by relaxing and not doing anything - nothing at all.

...

Just as Blaine was expecting, Kurt beat him home. What he was *not* expecting was for Kurt to come straight to the door to greet him with a hug and a quick but passionate kiss. That was a pleasant surprise.

"Hi," Kurt said with that sweet smile that Blaine adored when they broke away. Now that Blaine had a chance to take a good look at him, he immediately noticed that Kurt was absolutely glowing. Blaine hoped that meant it had been a good day. "You did amazing this morning. I loved watching you."

Blaine had been so captivated by Kurt's beautiful smile that it took him a moment to figure out what his boyfriend was talking about. "Oh. Right. The CND interview." He flashed an embarrassed smile. "You look incredible, by the way. Good first day?"

"Yes," Kurt confirmed with a single nod, still smiling. "It went so much better than I thought it would. Granted, they have a lot to learn, but I think I managed to at least start to earn their respect."

"I'm sure they'll love you," Blaine reassured him as he wrapped Kurt in his arms and pulled him in closer. But right as their lips were about to meet, Ellie came running out into the front hallway.

"Blaine!" she shouted as she immediately wedged her way in between the two of them to give him a hug. Kurt stepped away so Blaine could hug her back. He didn't miss the happy feeling that started to overflow in his heart as he watched them. In that moment, it didn't matter that Ellie hadn't lived with Blaine her entire life. He had become just as much as a father figure to her as Kurt was. They really were a family.

"So, um...," Blaine began to speak warily to Kurt. "I called Emily before I left work and asked if she could babysit Ellie for a little bit tonight. I'm taking you out to dinner because there's something really important I need to talk to you about." He wasn't sure how Kurt would react to this news. Legally, Ellie wasn't his daughter, so he didn't know if Kurt would be upset that he'd decided to do something like this without consulting him. "Is that okay, or should I have asked you first, or...?"

Kurt shook his head. "No, that's totally fine. We're a family now." He smiled for a second, but immediately let his expression shift to one of worry. "What do you need to talk about? Is everything okay? What's wrong?"

Blaine had noticed that Kurt was the more worrisome of the two of them, and maybe he had reason to be. "No, nothing's wrong," he reassured him. "Just something that happened at work today. It's actually a good thing, but I just wanted to get your opinion on it."

Kurt shrugged, but kept a wary look in his eyes. "If you say so. What time were you planning on going?"

"We could go right now if you want," Blaine suggested. "Emily said she and Parker would be home all evening and to just stop by and drop her off anytime."

"Okay," Kurt said, quickly reaching into the kitchen to grab his wallet which was sitting on the counter. He turned to Ellie as he stuffed it in his pocket. "Sweetie, Emily's going to babysit you while Blaine and I go out to dinner, okay? He has something important he needs to talk to me about."

"I know," Ellie informed him. "I heard what he was just saying."

Kurt rolled his eyes but smiled all the same. "I know you did. Come on, let's go."

He made a move towards the door, but stopped cold when he saw the way Blaine was looking at him. What he *didn't* know was that Blaine had suddenly remembered the phone conversation he'd had with Derek earlier that day and taking time to appreciate, as Derek had called him, the most beautiful man he'd ever seen. It was the first time anyone had expressed blatant jealousy towards Blaine because of Kurt, and Blaine couldn't lie - it made him appreciate Kurt even more to know that other people wanted but couldn't have him.

"What?" Kurt asked softly, referring to Blaine's lovestruck expression.

"Nothing," Blaine said just as quietly, his loving eyes never straying from Kurt's face. "I just really love you, that's all."

"I love you too," Kurt said with a soft smile as he took Blaine's hand. "Come on, let's get going."

...

Kurt had never seen Emily's house before. He found an instant appreciation for the stylish architecture of the small but charming home. He headed up the slanted front walkway - easy wheelchair access - with Ellie and Blaine, silently admiring the exterior the entire time.

Emily answered the door just seconds after they rang the bell - seemingly remarkable considering how she had probably had to roll herself through the house, but when Kurt thought about it, he realized that the inside of the house was probably specially designed to allow handicapped access.

She didn't say anything when she answered the door. All she did was smile up at them from her chair and hold up a piece of paper.

Kurt squinted at said paper, trying to make sense of the overwhelmingly enormous amount of information written in fine print. Blaine, having had more experience reading important-looking documents such as this one, immediately got the gist of it after glancing at it for a few seconds.

"Oh my god, Emily, that's amazing! I can't believe you got it so fast!" He immediately leaned over and gave her a hug, then motioned for Kurt to join them. "Kurt, baby, come here! This is amazing!"

"What's amazing? I don't know why we're hugging. What does the paper say?" Kurt asked, hesitantly stepping forward to hug them both.

Emily smiled and rolled her chair back a little bit so that she could hold up the paper again and allow Kurt to see it. "This is a deed to the building that will eventually become Hummel House. I purchased it today. We should be able to start getting renovations done pretty soon."

Oh. Okay. *Now* Kurt understood all the excitement - because he had to admit, now *he* was pretty excited, too. He bounced up and down on his toes and clapped a little bit, smiling huge. "Oh my god, yay."

Emily laughed as Kurt leaned down to give her another hug. "He's seriously adorable," she commented to Blaine as she hugged Kurt back.

Kurt blushed and said, "Oh, stop it," at the same time Blaine responded with, "Isn't he?" and an adoring smile. After realizing they'd both spoken at the same time, they exchanged a short glance before bursting into giggles.

"Anyway...," Blaine said in an attempt to collect himself after his short laughing fit, "we shouldn't be gone long. Maybe two hours, tops."

Emily shrugged. "That's fine. I can watch her as long as you need."

"Thank you," Kurt told her with an appreciative smile. He bent down again to give Ellie a kiss on the top of her head. "Bye, sweetie. We'll be back in a little bit. Have fun."

"Okay!" She was already heading into the house. Emily turned herself around in the doorway to follow her, calling one last goodbye to Kurt and Blaine over her shoulder.

The two of them headed back down the front walkway to Blaine's car. Once they were both inside, Blaine shut his door and exhaled an audible sigh.

"Okay," he said. "Let's get going. I don't know about you, but I'm hungry."

Neither of them said a word as he drove out of Emily's neighborhood and got back out onto the main road. Kurt noticed, though, that there was something bothering Blaine. He couldn't quite put his finger on it. Blaine had told him that the reason they needed to talk wasn't anything bad, but why did he still seem so stressed out?

"Are you okay?" Kurt asked gently after a few minutes of silence. "You seem stressed."

Blaine opened his mouth to respond, then closed it after a few seconds and shook his head. "It's nothing."

"No, it's not. I've known you for ten years, Blaine. You know you can tell me anything."

"Fine," Blaine said reluctantly. "It's just...Derek called me this morning after he saw my interview on TV, and he said some things that made me upset and have been bothering me all day. That's all."

"Things like what?" Kurt asked innocently. They were stopped at a red light, so he reached for Blaine's closest hand and held it affectionately.

"Basically, he doesn't like the fact that I'm with you," Blaine explained. "He's very jealous...and I don't think he's necessarily jealous of *you*."

Kurt blinked in confusion. "But that would mean he's jealous of *you*?"

"Yeah," Blaine said. "Pretty much. He went on and on about how gorgeous you looked when you met him, but not until after he said some other things that made me very upset. I know he's my ex, and his opinion doesn't matter, but it hurts to hear people say things like that, no matter who says it."

Kurt was silent for a long time. Blaine started to worry that maybe he was starting to get upset over this, but when he finally spoke, he was smiling.

"I think," Kurt said slowly, "it's obvious that this is bothering you. And you need to do what you do best when something's bothering you. You need to sing and let it all out."

Blaine considered this. "Right here? In the car?"

"Absolutely. It's just me." Kurt picked up one of the mix CDs Blaine had in the storage bin under the passenger seat and glanced at the track listing. Blaine could practically see the lightbulb going off over his head as something on the song list caught his eye. "I *know* you know this song."

"What is it?" Blaine asked as Kurt inserted the disc into the CD player and skipped a few songs.

Kurt simply smiled at him as he finally landed on the right song. "Just wait."

Blaine knew what the song was as soon as he heard the short introduction. He smiled knowingly at Kurt and nodded before he reached out to turn the volume up and began to sing along.

"How dare you say that my behavior's unacceptable

So condescending, unnecessarily critical

I have the tendency of getting very physical

So watch your step cause if I do you'll need a miracle

You drain me dry and make me wonder why I'm even here

The double vision I was seeing is finally clear

You want to stay but you know very well I want you gone

Not fit to fuckin' tread the ground that I am walking on."

Kurt smiled to himself as he watched Blaine completely let go and just sing. He knew his boyfriend all too well, so of course he knew this would make Blaine feel better about things.

"When it gets cold outside and you got nobody to love

You'll understand what I mean when I say there's no way we're gonna give up

And like a little girl cries in the face of a monster that lives in her dreams

Is there anyone out there cause it's getting harder and harder to breathe

Is there anyone out there cause it's getting harder and harder to breathe."

"Your turn!" Blaine shouted quickly to Kurt over the very short instrumental break between the chorus and the second verse. Kurt immediately picked up and started singing where Blaine had left off. When he thought about it, this song could kind of apply to his situation with Dave, too. This only encouraged him to sing his heart out even more.

"What you are doing is screwing things up inside my head

You should know better you never listened to a word I said

Clutching your pillow and writhing in a naked sweat

Hoping somebody someday will do you like I did."

Blaine joined his voice back in with Kurt's as they sang the second chorus together. Kurt didn't miss the chills that raced through his entire body when he heard how wonderful they sounded together. He barely even noticed Adam Levine's voice coming from the car's stereo speakers and instead focused on the two of them present here. Himself and Blaine. Singing with Blaine, even in such an informal setting like this, was almost an out-of-body experience, as dumb as that sounded. Kurt could only imagine what it would be like when they sang together in front of an entire audience at this Prop 21 party thing that Blaine had been invited to perform at.

"When it gets cold outside and you got nobody to love

You'll understand what I mean when I say there's no way we're gonna give up

And like a little girl cries in the face of a monster that lives in her dreams

Is there anyone out there cause it's getting harder and harder to breathe

Is there anyone out there cause it's getting harder and harder to breathe."

During the instrumental break, Kurt launched into an impressive air guitar solo without missing a beat. Blaine smiled at him, wondering why on earth his boyfriend was so adorable. He would have joined right in with Kurt and played the hell out of that air guitar, but he had to drive. When it came time for the bridge, Kurt let Blaine sing the first few lines solo.

"Does it kill, does it burn

Is it painful to learn

That it's me that has all the control?"

Blaine backed off after he sang half of the bridge and let Kurt pick up where he'd left off. It was only a few lines, but Blaine could tell from the emotion Kurt put into his voice that he was taking advantage of this opportunity to finally let go of his anger towards his ex-boyfriend as well. Kurt sang with an angry passion that, if Blaine was being completely honest, was absolutely sexy.

"Does it thrill, does it sting

When you feel what I bring

And you wish that you had me to hold."

On the final chorus, they joined their voices once again, but this time Kurt took the upper harmony. Blaine literally shivered when he heard how well they could instantaneously harmonize together like this.

"When it gets cold outside and you got nobody to love

You'll understand what I mean when I say there's no way we're gonna give up

And like a little girl cries in the face of a monster that lives in her dreams

Is there anyone out there cause it's getting harder and harder to breathe

Is there anyone out there cause it's getting harder and harder to breathe

Is there anyone out there cause it's getting harder and harder to breathe."

Kurt let out an exhilarated sigh as he reached out to turn the music off once the song ended. "That was fun."

"That *was* fun," Blaine agreed. "And you're right, I feel so much better. Plus, is it just me or did we sound *amazing*?"

"Oh, no, we sounded amazing," Kurt reassured him. "I'm so excited for this GLAAD-Prop-21-what-the-hell-ever party thing. I mean, I was excited before, but now that I hear what we sound like together..."

He didn't even finish the sentence. All he did was smile at Blaine, who managed to pick up on exactly what he meant because it was the same thing he was thinking.

...

Half an hour later, Kurt and Blaine were sitting across from one another in a cozy little booth in the back corner of the most upscale Asian restaurant in the city. Blaine still hadn't told Kurt about his opportunity to become a partner at the firm. Quite honestly - and he knew this was stupid - but he was nervous. He didn't know how to explain it, and he didn't know how Kurt would react, plus there was the added weight of the fact that this decision would most likely change his life, and *ugh*.

He knew he was stressing himself out way more than necessary, so after the waiter arrived with Kurt's house lo mein noodles and Blaine's teriyaki chicken, he decided to finally break the news to Kurt.

"Okay," Blaine said after the waiter had left. "I guess I should tell you what I brought you here to talk about."

"Yeah, I was hoping that would happen eventually," Kurt commented sardonically, but he smiled a little bit to let his boyfriend know he was just joking.

"Okay," Blaine said again, inconspicuously inhaling a deep breath. "So pretty much, Mark Perry is retiring and he wants me to take his place as partner at the firm."

Kurt put his hand over his mouth to prevent himself from spitting out the mouthful of water he'd just sipped. He quickly swallowed before enthusiastically responding.

"Oh my god, Blaine!" He reached for both of Blaine's hands, so Blaine dropped his fork and slipped his hands into Kurt's. "This is so amazing! Why do you need to talk to me about this?"

Blaine sighed and explained to him what he'd told his boss this afternoon - that he was honored to have been chosen, but that it seemed unfair to the rest of the lawyers at the firm, some of whom had been working there for years and probably were more deserving of the partnership opportunity than Blaine was. Kurt, as always, listened attentively and didn't speak up with any advice until Blaine finished with, "So do you think I should do it?"

"Blaine." Kurt smiled and squeezed both of his boyfriend's hands. "Of course I do. I think this is too amazing of an opportunity to just throw away. You're obviously the one they want. They wouldn't have picked you if they didn't think you're qualified. If the other people who work there have a problem with it, then there's probably a really good reason why they didn't get picked. I think you should go for it."

Kurt hesitated for a bit and let his eyes wander away from Blaine's before he continued.

"But...if you really are that uncomfortable with accepting it, Blaine, then don't. This is your job, your decision. I just gave you my two cents, but at the end of the day, you should do what feels best for *you*."

Blaine smiled at him through the light of the single candle that glowed on top of their table.

"I still want to think about it, but thank you so much," he told Kurt. "You really *do* know me way too well."

"Like I said, I've known you for ten years," Kurt said, grinning proudly. "Try me."

"Okay." Blaine thought for a minute. "Who's my favorite singer?"

"That's easy. Katy Perry."

"Damn. Okay, let's just call that a practice question. Favorite movie?"

"Harry Potter." Kurt rolled his eyes. "I remember you calling me at like three in the morning after you saw the midnight premiere of Deathly Hallows Part Two. You were crying and saying your childhood was over, or something."

"God, you're way too good at this," Blaine commented with an impressed smile. "Let's try to make these a little harder. Who's my celebrity crush?"

Kurt stabbed a piece of chicken onto his fork with much more force than was necessary. "Chris Colfer," he mumbled, not meeting Blaine's eyes.

"Aww, come on, you look *exactly* like him. He's *so* hot," Blaine pointed out.

"I don't like him," Kurt muttered as he shoved that piece of chicken along with an entire forkful of noodles into his mouth. He spoke with his mouth full, which was a very un-Kurt thing to do.

"Remember when you were over at my house that one time and we got bored so I put in my *Struck By Lightning* DVD and made you watch it, and you *liked* it?" Blaine reminded him.

"Movie was good. Doesn't mean I have to like Colfer," Kurt countered. "By the way, while we're on the subject of celebrity crushes, I have two words for you."

"Oh yeah?" Blaine smirked. "What are those two words?"

Kurt smirked right back at him before striking back with the name of his own celebrity crush. "Darren Criss."

"Oh my god, *stop* it," Blaine groaned in exasperation. "I can't *stand* that guy."

"He's *amazing*," Kurt gushed shamelessly, then took a moment to study Blaine's face through the dim light of the candle on the table. "And, you know...you look a lot like him, too."

...

Later that night, Blaine was lying in bed reading as he waited for Kurt to finish up brushing his teeth after he sang to Ellie and come to bed with him. He must have gotten pretty lost in the book, because before he knew it, a familiar, warm body had crawled into the bed and was snuggling up next to him.

"Hi," Kurt murmured, sneaking his head under Blaine's arm so he could rest it on his stomach. "Whatcha reading?"

"*The Picture of Dorian Gray*," Blaine told him as he slipped a bookmark into the novel to mark his page and reached over to set the book on the nightstand. "Re-reading it, actually."

Kurt immediately picked the book back up after Blaine had set it down. "Oh, I love Oscar Wilde," he commented, studying the synopsis on the inside jacket flap. "I've read a bunch of his poems and stuff, but I never actually got around to reading this."

"I love pretty much everything he's written," Blaine said. "I just remember we had to do this project on famous European authors back in like eighth grade, and one of the people I had to research was Wilde. I remember doing research and reading that he was gay and just thinking 'Oh, cool, finally someone like me.'" He laughed. "So I decided I wanted to read a whole bunch of his stuff. And this has been my favorite book ever since."

"Hmmm." Kurt set the book back on the nightstand after he'd finished reading the synopsis. "Sounds interesting. I'll have to read it sometime."

"You should," Blaine told him. "The whole concept of innocence and virtue being given up in exchange for beauty is really interesting. I think it definitely still has resonance in today's society."

"I would agree, even though I haven't read the book." Kurt pursed his lips and shrugged.

"You'll see when you read it," Blaine said. "It really just goes to show that no matter how amazing people may seem on the outside, sometimes they're actually just hideous through and through."

Kurt smiled and got off of Blaine so he could sit up. "That reminds me," he said. "I wanted to show you that I'm *not* hideous anymore."

"What do you mean?" Blaine squinted in confusion. "You never were..."

But Kurt was already pulling his shirt up and off over his head. When Blaine got a good look at his chest, he immediately noticed what Kurt must have been talking about.

There were no bruises anymore. At all. They had all faded.

"I'm all healed," Kurt said softly, smiling as Blaine admired him. "On the outside, anyway. Emotionally, my brain is still trying to figure things out - 'why did this happen to me,' that sort of thing...it still hurts, but I

feel better when I'm with you." He tossed his shirt carelessly across the room and smiled down at Blaine, who was still lying down. "Also when I sing. You and singing. That's what never fails to make me feel better."

"I'm glad I can help, but you sing beautifully," Blaine murmured as he picked up his head to rest it in Kurt's lap. He absentmindedly reached up with one hand and gently traced over the now-flawless skin of Kurt's chest with his fingertips.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, his brain thought of a question that he'd been wondering about for a while but had never thought to ask.

"Kurt?"

"Mhm?"

"What...why *do* you sing, anyway?" Blaine asked. "I mean, you're amazing...but what made you want to do it?"

"I can't answer that without reminiscing," Kurt told him. "Do you mind?"

"Not at all."

Kurt smiled and gently began to stroke his fingers through Blaine's dark curls.

"It was my mom," he said quietly. "When I was little, she would sing to me every single night. Just like I do with Ellie. She had a *gorgeous* voice. It always helped me sleep better. I remember there were some times when I would sleep over at one of my friend's houses or whatever, and I always had trouble falling asleep. I honestly think it was because she wasn't there to sing to me.

"Then, long story short, when I was eight she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Unfortunately, they didn't catch it early enough, so she was in the hospital within weeks." Blaine could tell that Kurt's voice was shaking with suppressed tears, so he immediately sat up and wrapped his boyfriend in his arms.

"My dad and I were there the night she died," Kurt said shakily. Tears were starting to fall from his eyes now. "She was so weak, she could barely speak. I would have given anything to hear her sing one more time, but I knew that was impossible." He choked out an especially loud sob. "So I decided I would sing to

her, for once. I stood there, by my mother who was essentially on her deathbed, and I held her hand, and I sang."

Kurt had been reduced to full-out tears that made it hard for him to get another word out. Blaine held him closer and gently kissed his tears away while he tried to regain control of his emotions.

"I'll never forget what she said when I was done," Kurt finally managed to say. "She looked at me, and I could see in her eyes that she was dying, and she said, 'Kurt, sweetheart, that was beautiful. I haven't even made it to heaven yet, and I've already heard the voice of an angel.'"

"That's so sweet." Blaine pulled Kurt closer and kissed the side of his head.

Kurt had, for the most part, managed to stop crying, but he was still trying to blink away his last few tears. "I'll never forget that as long as I live," he said. "It was the last thing she ever said to me, and it's the reason I still sing today. It's all because of her."

"And you do so amazingly," Blaine murmured. He lowered his head back down so it was resting in Kurt's lap once again, but not until he had pressed a soft kiss to the center of Kurt's bare chest.

"Hey, um, I've actually been wanting to ask you something else for a while now, too...," Blaine began warily, not quite sure how to place his request.

"Anything," Kurt told him with a smile. "What is it?"

"Can you...I mean, would you sing to me? Please?"

Kurt smiled. "I would love to," he said. "What would you like to hear?"

"Oh...anything." Blaine couldn't believe he'd said yes. "You make any song sound good."

Kurt started to stroke Blaine's hair again as he racked his brain for a song. "Okay, so this is totally going to show off my inner Broadway geek," he warned.

"Perfect. I love when you sing Broadway." Blaine smiled up at him.

Kurt closed his eyes for a second and let them slowly drift back open. He returned Blaine's smile and began to sing.

"Nighttime sharpens, heightens each sensation

Darkness stirs and wakes imagination

Silently the senses abandon their defenses."

As he sang, he watched Blaine's eyes soften and a dreamy smile take over his face. He kept stroking his boyfriend's soft curls as he continued to sing, reveling in how powerful it felt to have this effect on such a perfect man.

"Slowly, gently night unfurls its splendor

Grasp it, sense it, tremulous and tender

Turn your face away from the garish light of day,

Turn your thoughts away from cold, unfeeling light

And listen to the music of the night."

Blaine closed his eyes and let Kurt's voice consume him. Amazingly enough, he was singing with the same dark, sensual quality to his voice that the Phantom himself used in the show. Blaine never would have imagined Kurt singing something like this...but then again, there wasn't much Kurt *couldn't* do with his voice.

"Close your eyes and surrender to your darkest dreams

Purge your thoughts of the life you knew before

Close your eyes, let your spirit start to soar!"

Blaine felt legitimate chills race down his spine as Kurt effortlessly hit the high note on *soar*. Honest-to-goodness *chills*. He trembled a little bit more as Kurt decrescendood softly to sing the next line.

"And you'll live as you've never lived before."

As he continued, Kurt moved one of his hands over to caress Blaine's cheek, which was already warm with a blush. Blaine seemed to heat up under his touch, and that was wonderful.

"Softly, deftly, music shall caress you

Hear it, feel it secretly possess you

Open up your mind, let your fantasies unwind

In this darkness which you know you cannot fight

The darkness of the music of the night."

Once again, Kurt struck a powerful fortissimo with the next few lines. Blaine picked his head up and rested it against Kurt's naked chest. Kurt's arms instinctively folded around the other man, holding him there even as he continued to sing.

"Let your mind start a journey through a strange new world

Leave all thoughts of the life you knew before

Let your soul take you where you long to be!"

Kurt met Blaine's eyes directly before he softly sang the next line. The way Kurt was looking seemingly into his soul was almost too much for Blaine, who felt like he was about to melt in his boyfriend's arms.

"Only then can you belong to me."

He paused for a bit longer than the song usually required, keeping his eyes locked on Blaine's before he continued.

"Floating, falling, sweet intoxication

Touch me, trust me, savor each sensation."

As he sang the *touch me* line, Kurt reached for one of Blaine's hands and brought it to his chest, right over his heart. He was still looking at Blaine with that soul-melting gaze and Blaine knew that if he attempted to speak, no words would even come out.

"Let the dream begin, let your darker side give in

To the power of the music that I write

The power of the music of the night."

Blaine knew that in the real song, there was quite a bit of instrumentals before the Phantom finally sang the last few lines, so to fill the time that that would take up he reached for Kurt's face and gently pulled him down into a kiss. It was passionate, and almost desperate, tongues caressing tongues and soft moans falling from each of their mouths. Blaine let his hands shamelessly wander over Kurt's chest, mapping out the obvious-but-not-overstated musculature beneath the pale skin.

Blaine finally, reluctantly broke away so Kurt could finish the song. He kissed him quickly one more time and breathed, "Sing, my angel of music," against Kurt's lips - stealing the Phantom's line from earlier in the show, but he deemed it appropriate for the present moment.

Kurt smiled and kept his eyes on Blaine's as he finished the song.

"You alone can make my song take flight

Help me make the music of the night."

A heavy silence hung in the air even after the last note left Kurt's lips as Blaine tried to come up with a way in which to respond to what he'd just heard. Kurt had been so sensual and erotic and just plain sexy and all he'd been doing was *singing*. Granted, he had been shirtless while doing so, but still. Blaine couldn't even imagine what Kurt would be like when they were doing things that were actually *supposed* to be sexy.

"Kurt," Blaine finally managed to say. The other man's name fell from his mouth as a moan of surrender as he attached his lips to Kurt's once again.

"Did you like it?" Kurt asked, smiling without breaking the kiss.

"Are you kidding me?" Blaine murmured, finally pulling back so he could look Kurt in the eyes. "Kurt Hummel, that was *sexy*. *You* are sexy. I didn't like it, I loved it."

Then, without even giving Kurt a chance to respond, Blaine brought his head down and began lavishing Kurt's entire chest with little licks and kisses. Kurt tipped his head back and moaned deeply when he felt Blaine's mouth close tentatively around his nipple and gently suck it to hardness. Blaine knew they probably shouldn't go much further than this tonight, since Kurt himself had just admitted earlier that he still wasn't completely emotionally healed yet. Blaine knew that the last thing he wanted to do was force Kurt into something he wasn't exactly ready to do again.

Besides, if Blaine was being completely honest with himself, he wasn't even sure if *he* was ready for...*that* just yet.

He was perfectly fine with this, though, and Kurt seemed to be as well. He moved his mouth over to the other nipple and sucked on that one as well. He loved the way his own name fell from Kurt's perfect lips as a breathless sigh as he did so.

"You like that?" Blaine murmured against Kurt's skin as his tongue traced down to the younger man's stomach, which he then proceeded to kiss.

"Yes," Kurt moaned. "I like it when...oh, god, there's no way I can finish that sentence without sounding like a whore."

"No, go ahead. I know you're not a whore." Blaine winked at him. "Tell me. I want to know what you like." He had really wanted to say *I want to know what turns you on*, but decided against it lest he freak Kurt out and make him think he wanted to go all the way tonight or something.

"Fine," Kurt sighed. "I like being licked. Oh, god, that sounds so dirty." He reached up to hide his flushed face with his hands, but Blaine could see that the blush spread all the way down to the middle of his chest.

"Hmmm. Like this?" Blaine let his tongue drag along an expanse of perfect, smooth skin on Kurt's stomach.

"Yes, like that...*oh*." A guttural moan escaped Kurt's throat as Blaine did this. "I don't know. For some reason I just really like the way a man's tongue feels against my skin and it actually kind of turns me on a lot and *oh my god I sound like a whore, I need to stop*."

"Shhh. You're fine." Blaine gave him a sweet kiss on the lips to reassure him. "I'll just file that away for future reference. You taste amazing, by the way."

Yeah, okay, Blaine had been getting the feeling that Kurt wasn't quite ready for things to go much further, so he had forced himself to stop. In all honesty, though, he'd found Kurt's weird little kink to be absolutely sexy. He would definitely have to remember that.

"Thanks." Kurt giggled and blushed again before his face became serious. "So...*that*...just got me thinking. And I'm sorry for awkwardly bringing this up, but I think it's something we need to talk about." He hesitated for a second. "Do you think...we should...maybe start getting more into the physical side of our relationship?"

Blaine responded with a question of his own. "I think the more important question here is, are *you*? I don't want you to feel forced to do anything you're not ready for, Kurt. I would never be able to forgive myself."

"I honestly...don't know if I'm ready to do anything *too* intimate right now," Kurt admitted. "Like I said, I'm still a little emotionally fragile from all the shit that went down before. But I'm open to experimentation. Getting to explore each other a little bit, if you will."

Blaine was suddenly overwhelmed with relief. "That's perfect," he said. "I'm actually not sure if I'm ready yet, either. But I'd love to get to know your body, if you'll let me. I mean...you're beautiful." He ran his hand lightly over Kurt's chest. "But...I can't say I've never thought about it, though."

"Thought about what?" Kurt asked, although he had a pretty good idea of what he thought Blaine meant.

It was Blaine's turn to blush. "Making love with you," he admitted. "What it would be like to be inside you, or to take you inside me. I would love to share that with you, Kurt. Someday when we're both ready."

"I've thought about it too," Kurt said softly. "I would love to do that with you someday, Blaine. Be close to you in that way. I can't think of anything more perfect."

"Me neither." Blaine kissed him softly. "But for now, I think we need to take our time and work up to that. We still have so much to learn about each other...I mean, I learned something new tonight..." he leaned down and licked across Kurt's collarbone, causing the younger man to draw in a sharp intake of breath. "But that's probably just *one* of the things that drives you wild, and I can't wait to find out what the rest of them are."

"You'll find out in due time." Kurt laughed as he reached over to turn off the lamp on the bedside table.
"Thank you for talking with me about this, Blaine."

"Oh, you're absolutely welcome." Blaine lay down and wrapped his arms around Kurt, pulling him closer.
"Now I don't know about you, but I'm exhausted."

"So am I," Kurt admitted. He turned his head to give Blaine one more kiss on the lips. "Goodnight. I love you."

"Love you too, Kurt," Blaine whispered. He drifted off into sleep with the taste of Kurt still on his tongue.

Chapter Fourteen

The following Monday, Kurt and Blaine enjoyed a nice, slow, easy morning. Ellie had already left for school with the car pool group, Kurt's class wasn't until the afternoon and Blaine didn't have to go into work as early as usual today. Later on, after they were both done with work, they were planning on meeting up with Emily to help her start renovating the building that would become Hummel House. This was Kurt's favorite kind of day. He was looking forward to spending time with so many of his favorite people and not having to worry about anything.

"I'll just meet you and Ellie over at Hummel House, okay?" Blaine reassured Kurt before he stepped out the door. "I'm just gonna head over there right after work."

"Okay." Kurt smiled and gave his boyfriend a quick kiss. "See you then. Have a good day."

And with that, Blaine was out the door and Kurt had the apartment to himself.

This was always his *least* favorite part of the day. After Ellie was on her way to school and Blaine had left for work, Kurt always had a few hours to himself before he had to go teach his class, since it only met in the afternoons. He never knew what to do with himself for those few hours. Ever since everything had happened with Dave, Kurt hated being alone. He liked knowing that there was someone else there with him - it made him feel safer. Now that nobody was with him, he was suddenly aware of the fact that he was completely alone.

He decided to turn on the TV just for a comforting sound that would drown out the otherwise deafening silence. After finding the remote between the couch cushions, he flipped to one of the music channels. According to the scrolling crawler at the bottom of the screen, they were in the middle of showing a playlist composed of "the most loved videos of all time." Kurt smiled to himself as he watched for a few seconds and realized that the video they were currently showing was Michael Jackson's classic Thriller.

Kurt turned up the volume on the TV so he could hear it from the bedroom while he got dressed and ready for the day. He danced back through the hallway and sang along loudly without a care in the world. He felt like a teenager again.

That this is thriller, thriller night. Cause I can thrill you more than any ghost would ever dare try. Thriller, thriller night. So let me hold you tight and share a killer, diller, chiller, thriller here tonight!

He kept singing to himself even once he got to the bedroom and closed the door. He knew there was really no point in privacy when he had the place to himself, but it was a habit he'd had ever since he and Finn had shared a room back when their parents had first decided to move in together. The volume on the TV was so loud that Kurt could hear it pretty well even with the door shut. He didn't stop singing the end of Thriller as he slipped out of his flannel pajama pants and pulled on a pair of black boxer briefs.

But right as he opened his closet to look for a pair of pants, he heard an all-too-familiar beat coming from the television as a new song began.

Kurt immediately dropped the pair of black slacks he'd just taken out of the closet and raced out to the living room wearing nothing but the nondescript white undershirt he'd slept in and the underwear he'd just put on. The remote was exactly where he'd left it on the table by the couch; he picked it up and stared at it in confusion for a few seconds before his eyes landed on the button he was looking for. Blaine had one of those fancy expensive TVs that could be rewound and paused, so Kurt pressed the Rewind button on the remote and skipped back to the beginning of the video that was now playing.

All the single ladies, all the single ladies. All the single ladies, all the single ladies. All the single ladies, all the single ladies. All the single ladies, now put your hands up...

Kurt smirked to himself as he lip-synched the lyrics along with Beyonce. He let go of everything, and he danced.

...

Blaine had been absentmindedly staring at his shiny black BMW for about thirty seconds when it finally hit him.

Keys. He needed keys. It would be a little hard to go anywhere, let alone open the car, without keys. He'd left his up in the apartment.

Blaine mentally facepalmed himself as he turned around and headed back into the building. At least he wasn't in that big of a rush this morning. The only thing of any importance he had going on today was a meeting at ten. It was nine. Even with the tail end of Chicago morning rush hour traffic it only took him about twenty minutes tops to get to the law offices. The morning had been nice and relaxing so far. Blaine loved days like today, he just hated his tendency to forget the most obvious things. Like car keys.

He rode the elevator back up to his floor. As he walked down the hall towards his door, he could have sworn he heard some loud song being blasted from behind one of the doors. The closer he got, the more he realized that it was coming from behind his *own* door. What in the world was Kurt...

Blaine started talking the second he opened the door, which was mercifully unlocked. "I got all the way down to my car and realized I didn't have my keys so I...*oh, sweet Jesus.*"

Nothing could have prepared Blaine for the sight that greeted him when he stepped into the living room. Beyonce's Single Ladies video was playing on the television, and Kurt was standing there *dancing* to it. Not only that, but he was wearing the same shirt he'd slept in along with a pair of tiny, tight black boxer briefs that left very little to the imagination, thank you very much. *This is the greatest Monday morning of my life.*

But the second he saw Blaine, Kurt immediately froze in place. His eyes went wide and his face turned a deeper red than Blaine had ever seen before. "Blaine, oh my god."

Blaine could feel a blush heating up his own face as well. "No...uh, carry on," he stammered, trying not to make it obvious that he was staring at Kurt's long legs and imagining what they would feel like wrapped around him. "I mean, unless you want an audience. I don't mind sticking around if you're gonna be doing this."

Kurt blushed even harder, if that were possible. "I...uh, I don't have pants on."

Blaine shrugged. "That's the best part."

Kurt stared at him for a few seconds, blinked, and raised one eyebrow. "You want to watch?"

"I could go into work way earlier than necessary and sit in my office doing nothing for half an hour, or I could watch my sexy boyfriend dance in his underwear around my living room," Blaine pointed out. "Honestly, Kurt, which option do you think any self-righteous gay man is going to pick?"

After a short silence, a smile grew on Kurt's face. He braced his hands against Blaine's shoulders and guided him back to the couch. "Sit."

Blaine let Kurt gently push him into a sitting position. Kurt wasn't looking, so Blaine allowed himself to unabashedly check his boyfriend out as he turned around and walked back towards the TV. Kurt had deliciously long legs that went on seemingly forever, leading up into strong, muscular thighs and the most

fantastic ass Blaine had ever seen. In fact, the underwear Kurt had on was so tight that it rode up on him a little bit, exposing the bottoms of his cheeks.

Wow. Okay. Blaine was kind of hard now.

As if that wasn't enough, Kurt was making a big show of sticking his ass out as he bent over and fiddled with the buttons on the TV so he could rewind the video and start the song over. Blaine knew and Kurt knew that he could have just used the remote to restart the song, but of *course* Kurt had to do it like this. He knew exactly what he was doing to Blaine. Kurt smiled to himself as he finally found the button he was looking for and pressed it to rewind the video. It was fun to see Blaine get so flustered and know that it was all because of him.

Kurt licked his lips and kept his eyes locked on Blaine's as he turned around and the song began to play.

Blaine was paying no mind to Beyonce and the girls dancing on the television. He couldn't take his eyes off of Kurt. The way Kurt was moving...there were no words. He shook his hips vigorously and rolled them in almost hypnotic circles that left Blaine practically drooling. Not only that, but Blaine couldn't help noticing the bulge that was starting to tent the front of Kurt's boxer briefs.

Dancing for him was making Kurt hard. Blaine blinked once and swallowed.

Kurt didn't take his eyes off of Blaine the whole time. Blaine tried to return his eye contact, but he found it hard not to look at the rest of his body - particularly, his lower half. Blaine's eyes widened as he realized there wasn't much of Kurt that he *hadn't* seen at one point or another. He'd seen him shirtless quite a few times by now, of course, and now here he was wearing next to nothing below the waist. Hell, Blaine could already see part of his ass.

He knew he had Kurt and his glorious body all to himself. It was only a matter of time before Blaine got to see the rest of him.

When the song was over, Kurt stood in the middle of the room trying to catch his breath. His hair was messy and his shirt clung to his chest with a thin sheen of sweat. Merely looking at him made Blaine even more hard.

Blaine reached for the remote and clicked off the TV.

"Come here," he said to Kurt. His voice was low and saturated with lust.

Kurt stepped forward towards the couch. Blaine reached out towards him with both hands; Kurt took his hands and settled himself over Blaine so he was straddling his lap with one leg on either side of his waist. Neither man said a word for a few seconds; they stared at each other through half-closed eyes with their faces dangerously close.

"Kurt," Blaine breathed, placing his hands on the other man's waist, "that was *beautiful*."

"Yeah?" Kurt asked with a breathless smile. He let his lips brush against Blaine's with the lightest touch as he spoke. "You liked it?"

Blaine thrust up against Kurt so his boyfriend could feel just what he'd done. "You tell me."

"...Oh." Kurt let out the softest little moan before placing his hands on either side of Blaine's face and kissing him deeply.

Blaine could tell right away that Kurt was desperate. This was strikingly evident in the way he gently forced Blaine's lips apart with his tongue almost immediately and let Blaine swallow every quiet moan and whimper he made. Blaine kissed him back and reveled in how wonderful it felt to let Kurt taste him like this.

Then, all of a sudden, there was a beautifully unfamiliar kind of friction down below. Kurt, still hard, was grinding down against Blaine without detaching his lips from the kiss. It was Blaine's turn to moan. He did so directly into Kurt's mouth as Kurt kept rolling his hips against Blaine's with a slow, steady rhythm. Blaine let his hands wander away from Kurt's waist, back down to his ass to give it a firm squeeze.

"Oh," Kurt sighed, barely breaking away from the kiss. "Oh, *Blaine*."

"It should be illegal to have a body this fantastic," Blaine said in a husky whisper as he caught Kurt's lower lip gently between his teeth and ran his tongue over it.

Kurt giggled against Blaine's lips. "Hey, you're the partner of the most prestigious law firm in the state. You know a lot more about the legality of things than I do." His voice was low and breathy and Blaine would be damned if that didn't just turn him on even more.

"Not yet," Blaine managed to choke out as Kurt began pressing soft, sweet little kisses down his jawline. He'd accepted the promotion, but he wouldn't officially become partner until the end of next week. "I *do* know that you are sexier than any other human being has a right to be."

Kurt pulled his mouth off of Blaine's skin. He pursed his kiss-swollen lips and shrugged. "I try."

After he said this, he leaned back in and kissed Blaine again. The statement was punctuated with another unexpected roll of his hips against Blaine's.

Blaine couldn't take it much longer. Being kissed like this and feeling Kurt hard against him was too much to take in at once. As much as he wanted to continue this, he knew he had to stop before things went much further. He abruptly broke the kiss.

"Keep this up and you'll make me come in my pants," he told Kurt with a shy smile. "And, um...I don't think it's very becoming for partners-to-be to wear jizz-soaked pants to work."

Kurt laughed and got off of Blaine, but not without giving him another quick kiss.

"This is why I love you," he said. "I'll let you get going. This was fun, though." He winked.

"Oh *god*, yes. This was *very* fun," Blaine confirmed as Kurt walked him to the door. "We should do this another time."

"I definitely enjoy being a part of your pre-work routine," Kurt giggled as he gave Blaine a kiss goodbye. "See ya later, babe."

Blaine pulled open the door and shot one last seductive glance at Kurt over his shoulder. "Later."

Kurt was about to shut the door behind his boyfriend when suddenly he remembered. "Blaine!"

Blaine, who hadn't even managed to turn completely away from the door, turned around. "Yeah?"

Kurt reached over to the key hook beside the door. He grabbed Blaine's car keys and pressed them into his hand. "You forgot again."

Blaine blushed but managed to smile. "What would I do without you?"

"You'd forget your keys," Kurt said pointedly. He playfully slapped Blaine's ass and winked again as he turned away from the door and headed into the apartment without shutting it behind him.

Blaine couldn't take his eyes off of Kurt as he disappeared into the apartment. More specifically, Blaine couldn't take his eyes off of Kurt's ass. He was swinging his hips as he slinked into the living room and back down the hall towards the bedroom. There was a sexy, happy confidence in the way he walked. Blaine couldn't see his face, but he knew damn well that Kurt was smiling.

Blaine smiled to himself as well as he shut the door and headed down the hall to the elevator. Once he was alone and the machine was making its descent to the ground floor, however, he realized that he still had a bit of a problem that he needed to take care of.

He decided to solve this problem by stopping in the men's bathroom that was just off the lobby on the first floor. There was nobody else in here, but he locked himself into a stall anyway and yanked down his khakis - belt, boxers and all.

Then Blaine did something that he hadn't allowed himself to do since high school. He got himself off while moaning his then-best-friend, now-boyfriend's name.

"Kurt. *Oh*. Oh, Kurt. *Kurt...*!"

When he was spent, he pulled his pants back up and exited the stall. He washed his messy hand, fixed his disheveled clothes and exited the bathroom as if nothing out of the ordinary had just happened.

...

It took Kurt a while to recover from the amazing events of the morning. He couldn't stop smiling to himself as he lazily finished getting dressed and ready for the day. There was no doubt in his mind that what had happened between him and Blaine this morning was the most wonderful sexual encounter he'd ever had. He'd never felt so *wanted*. And being wanted was an absolutely fantastic feeling.

But there was so much more to it than that. In his previous relationship with Dave, every sexual experience had always been purely physical. Kurt knew that his now-ex-boyfriend had been infatuated with his body and had no interest in the real meaning of making love. And Kurt had accepted that, because it was all he'd ever known in a relationship. Things were different now that he was with Blaine. He knew

that Blaine not only wanted him but he truly, deeply *loved* him as well. And being loved for himself felt just as amazing as being wanted for his body, if not *more* amazing.

Thinking about all this caused the concept of making love with Blaine to find its way into Kurt's mind. And thinking about *that* did unexplainable things to Kurt's rapidly palpitating heart.

All of a sudden he found himself aching for Blaine. Kurt knew he was at work, sitting in some important meeting with a bunch of other lawyers. That didn't mean Kurt wasn't allowed to want him right there with himself. If Blaine were here with him, Kurt decided, they didn't even have to do anything like they'd done this morning (although Kurt wouldn't have objected to that). Simply being near him, feeling the warmth of his body and the sensation of being protected that came along with being held in his arms, would be enough.

Without even thinking, Kurt pulled his phone out of the pocket of the pants he'd eventually put on. He dialed Blaine's work number as opposed to his cell, knowing that Blaine was in his meeting and wouldn't be able to talk now anyway.

"Hello, you've reached Blaine Anderson at the law offices of Carter & Perry." The prerecorded voice on the recording belonged to Businesslike Lawyer Blaine. "Please leave your name, number and a message at the tone and I will return your call as soon as possible. Thank you." *Beep.*

"Hello there, Blaine Anderson." Kurt was smiling as he began his message; he knew that Blaine would be able to hear his smile in the tone of his voice. "I know we just spent a bit more time together than usual this morning, but I just wanted to call and say hello."

He paused.

"I haven't been able to stop thinking about you," he confessed. "You made me feel *amazing* this morning. I never got the chance to properly express my gratitude, so thank you." He laughed. "So yeah. That's all I wanted to say. I'll let you get back to doing whatever it is that partners-to-be at big powerful law firms do. See you later, love you. Bye."

Kurt was still smiling as he hung up the phone and slipped it back into his pocket. Unfortunately for him, the easy part of his day had just ended.

...

He realized for the first time that his day was getting progressively more difficult when he was at work later that afternoon.

"You guys," he sighed exasperatedly to his class after going over the progression of whole and half steps for at least the fifth time. "This is *not* the hardest thing to do. We're going to be doing things in here that are a lot more difficult, believe me." The piano had been tuned over the weekend, so he quickly crossed the room and situated himself behind the instrument so he could play up the scale. "*Do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti, do.*"

A tall boy named Andre who sat in the back row spoke up. "I can sing that, but all that stuff about whole and half steps is really confusing."

"Yeah," agreed one of the altos, whose name was Christina. "I don't get that at all."

"Who else is confused?" Kurt asked the class collectively.

Almost every student hesitantly raised his or her hand, but not without glancing around the room to see who else was raising their hands as well.

Kurt inhaled deeply through his nose. This was a concept that the fourth graders back at Lincoln had understood at the end of one class period, and it was taking these kids eons to understand it.

"Okay." He turned the piano around so the students could see the keys. "It's a little bit easier if you can see it. You hear this note?" He played middle C. "Let's use that as *do*. Now the black key directly next to it...", he played the C-sharp key to which he was referring, "that doesn't fit with our scale. That's only a half step up, so that can't be *re*. We need a whole step between *do* and *re*."

"You already *told* us that," Andre pointed out rather rudely. Kurt was surprised. The kid had barely said a word during class up until today, and now here he was mouthing off.

"You were the one who said you were confused, so I'm showing you this to help you," Kurt reminded him. "Anyway. Now the next whole step up from *do* is this white key." He played the D directly above middle C. "See how the black key is in between *do* and the next white key? We don't want that. *Do* and *re* are separated by whole steps. Whole steps mean there's one key in between the two notes." He played the two notes in succession: *do-re*. "Hear how that sounds?"

"Well *duh*, I can hear it. I'm not deaf," Andre said caustically. "I just don't *get* it. Just cause I can *hear* it doesn't mean I *understand*."

"Let's move on to the next two notes and see if that helps," Kurt suggested, not calling attention to the way the boy had just spoken to him. "Now *re* and *mi* are also separated by a whole step. That means we're going to play the next white key up, instead of the black key that's in between them." He played the E that was being used as *mi*, then played *do-re-mi* all together.

"*Do, re* and *mi* are all separated by a whole step each," he said. "Now *mi* and *fa*, that's a different story. Can you see how this key...", he played the E again, "is right next to this key?" He played the F next to it.

"No," Andre said coldly.

"Would you like to move closer to the piano so you can see?" Kurt offered politely but firmly.

Andre stood up and strutted down the aisle in between the chairs. He stood on the other end of the piano and looked at Kurt expectantly.

"As I was saying," Kurt continued, "*mi* and *fa* are the first two notes on the scale that have a half step in between them." He played the corresponding notes on the piano. "Can you tell how that sounds different than the whole steps? That's because the notes for *mi* and *fa* are always directly next to each other. See how there's no note in between them?" He played those two notes again, then *do-re-mi-fa*. "*Do*, whole, whole, half. Is it starting to make a little more sense?"

Andre stared blankly at the piano and shook his head.

"No," he said. "I just don't fucking get it, okay? You can explain it all the hell you want, but I don't get it. I don't even feel like tryin' to understand it no more."

He turned around and headed back to his seat. Before he did that, though, he reached on top of the piano and knocked over the pile of sheet music that Kurt had stacked there. Pages upon pages of music fluttered to the floor around the piano.

Kurt was about to reprimand him, but glanced at the clock and decided there was no point in doing so. The bell signaling the end of class was about to ring any second now. He would deal with Andre in just a bit.

"I know this can be a tough concept, but you guys have *got* to try and open yourselves up to learning it," he insisted. "I believe in you all. Each and every single one of you. You all have talent. I *know* you can do this."

He couldn't have timed it more perfectly, because just then the bell rang.

"Have a good afternoon," he told the class as they began packing up their things and heading out the door.

Andre walked past him all in a rush, obviously trying to get the hell out of there. Kurt wasn't going to let that happen.

"Hey, Andre, come here. I want to talk to you."

Kurt walked over to sit behind his desk. To his surprise, Andre awkwardly trailed behind him instead of trying to leave.

"You can pull up a chair so you don't have to stand," Kurt offered.

He took a seat in his own desk chair and waited for Andre to pull over one of the classroom chairs for himself. Once they were both seated, he took a long look at the obviously troubled boy.

"Is everything okay?" Kurt asked with concern. "You've always been more on the quiet side, I've never seen you act like this before."

Andre was silent for a long time. Kurt was about to open his mouth again and say he didn't have to talk about it, but then the boy finally spoke up.

"I get kinda obnoxious when I'm real upset about something," he mumbled. "This weekend was pretty rough. That's why I was kinda not myself today."

"Okay," Kurt said gently. "Is there anything you want to talk about? Anything in particular that's really got you down?"

He honestly didn't expect Andre to say anything. And for the longest time, he didn't. When he *did* speak, his voice was even quieter than before. He didn't look Kurt in the eyes.

"My older brother got shot this weekend," he said.

His words took all the breath right out of Kurt, whose eyes widened as he attempted to think of something - anything - that would bring the boy comfort. He blinked rapidly a few times.

"I...I'm so sorry," he whispered.

Andre shrugged. "It was just in his shoulder so they said he's gonna be okay. He's in the hospital now but I think they're gonna let him go sometime in the next few days. But still." He sighed. "I dunno. It just makes me really mad that some motherfucker was trying to hurt my brother."

Kurt would usually have a problem with one of his students using language like that, but this kid was clearly upset. He kept on listening intently.

"Marcus is one of the coolest guys you'd ever meet," Andre continued quietly. "He smiles all the time and he's always real friendly to everyone. He never did nothin' to hurt anyone. But I guess some dude thought it would be all right to drive by and shoot him. And I've been real upset about it, so I kinda took it out on you because I was frustrated and I didn't get what we were doin' today. I'm sorry, Mr. H."

"No." Kurt's voice was barely above a whisper. He shook his head. "No, *I'm* sorry. I can't even imagine..."

"Lots of kids here have had stuff like that happen to them," Andre told him. "I'm not the only one who's related to someone that's got shot. And me and Marcus got lucky with that. Other guys've gotten killed from being shot like he did. None of us at this school got it easy. And the rest of the teachers here...none of them notice. Or they pretend not to notice. They figure it's all just a part of our lives now and we just gotta live with it. They don't know how hard 'living with it' really is. They don't seem to care that lots of us get bad grades, but the reason that happens is because they don't care if we learn shit. None of them would've even *tried* to explain confusing shit like that half-half-whole step thing you were tryin' to teach today. They would have just given us worksheets about it and left us there to figure it out for ourselves while they go and have a smoke. But not you. You actually *tried* to help us get it. You're pretty much the only teacher at this fuckin' school who actually *gives* a shit."

Kurt discreetly sucked in a deep breath as he tried to take in what he'd just heard. He couldn't even believe what this boy was saying, but then again he knew there was no way Andre was lying. None of the kids here had ever really known what it was like to have a teacher who genuinely cared about them and wanted them to understand things.

"Sorry for talkin' so much," Andre mumbled after a short pause. "This stuff's just been really bothering me lately and it's nice to just let go of it, y'know?"

Kurt nodded. "I know exactly how you feel," he said. "Sometimes it's just nice to vent."

"And that's the other thing," Andre said. "None of the other teachers here would just sit there and let a kid talk like you're doing now. If one of us has a problem that we want to talk about, the teachers just send us to the guidance counselor. And she don't give a fuck about us, either. Today when you were saying all that stuff about believing in us and how you *know* we can do this...none of us've ever heard a teacher say something like that before."

It was Kurt's turn to be silent for a long time. In all honesty, he had no idea how in the world he could respond to that.

"I mean it when I say that," Kurt reassured him. "I really do. Every single one of you is amazing in your own way, and my goal as a teacher is to help you see that. And if you need to talk about something...anything...I want you all to feel comfortable coming to me and knowing I'll listen."

"Thanks, Mr. H," Andre said quietly but sincerely. "It's just nice to have someone to talk to. And I know I'm not the only one. Lotsa other kids here feel the same way. But then I start talking like this and I can't stop because there's so much shit I'm pissed off about, and I feel like I'm wasting your time."

Kurt smiled. "Andre, don't worry about it. This is *not* a waste of my time," he said. "You remind me a lot of myself, actually. My mom died when I was eight, and after that I kind of kept everything to myself. I never talked to anyone about it. Then all of a sudden it just came pouring out one day, and it felt really good to get everything off my chest."

"Yeah, that's kinda how I feel now." For the first time that day, Andre smiled. "I better get to class now. Can you write me a pass?"

"Sure." Kurt tore a Post-It note from the pad on his desk and quickly wrote him a pass to excuse him from being late to his next class. He dashed off his signature at the bottom and handed it to Andre. "There you go."

"Thanks." Andre smiled appreciatively and stood up to put his chair back.

"No problem. I really am sorry about what happened with your brother," Kurt said gently. "If there's anything I can do for you and your family, please let me know."

Andre nodded. "You're pretty cool, Mr. H. It's nice to know someone actually gives a damn about us here."

He was about to head towards the door, but Kurt saw him hesitate. After standing there for a few seconds, he headed across the room towards the piano and knelt down to pick up the papers he'd knocked over at the end of class.

Kurt wasn't sure what possessed him to call over to him, "Hey, Andre, you don't have to pick those up. I can get it."

Andre shrugged. "It's all good, Mr. H. I already got them all anyway."

"Thank you," Kurt told him as he put the stack of music back on top of the piano. "Take it easy, Andre."

"Later." Andre waved back at him as he headed out the door.

Once he was alone, Kurt leaned back in his chair and stared up at the ceiling. His brain still couldn't process the conversation he'd just had. It blew his mind to think about that *he* was the only teacher in this building who truly cared about his work and wanted to see his kids succeed.

He smiled to himself without even realizing it. Here he was trying to teach these kids about half steps and whole steps, and instead he was changing their lives.

...

Ellie liked kindergarten. Her teacher, Mrs. Carmichael, reminded her a lot of her old teacher back at Lincoln in Ohio. Granted, it wasn't the same. Her daddy still didn't teach at this school, and the kids were nice but it wasn't the same as being back with her old friends. But she'd still managed to befriend a few of the other kids in the short time she'd been her. They'd all been together for the whole year already, so it was hard for her at first. But soon enough she found her place, and she could honestly say she was happy here.

Every afternoon, Mrs. Carmichael had the class do a different art project. Today she had set out different colors of construction paper and crayons so the kids could make cards for their mommies. Mother's Day

was just a few weeks away, she'd said, and what mother wouldn't love a homemade card from their son or daughter on that special day?

Ellie got a sinking feeling in her stomach the second Mrs. Carmichael said "Mother's Day." She hadn't had a problem like this since she'd started at this school, but *now* what was she supposed to do? She loved Daddy and Blaine so much, but all the other kids got to make cards for their mommies. Ellie didn't have a mommy.

She went over to Mrs. Carmichael once all the other kids were starting to work on their cards. The teacher smiled kindly at the little girl when she saw her approaching.

"Hi, Ellie. Is everything all right?"

"I can't make a Mother's Day card," Ellie said quietly. "I don't have a mommy."

"You don't have a mommy?" Mrs. Carmichael asked, seemingly surprised.

Ellie shook her head. "I live with my daddy and Blaine. Blaine and my daddy are boyfriends. So they're both kind of like my daddies."

Mrs. Carmichael seemed shocked to hear this, as most people usually were, but at least she was nice about it. Not everyone was nice when they heard Ellie had two daddies.

"That's perfectly fine," the teacher said. "You can still make a card, if you want. It doesn't have to have anything to do with Mother's Day."

Ellie smiled. "Okay. Thank you."

She picked a piece of pink construction paper and a box of crayons and headed back to her seat. Once she was seated, she folded the paper in half to make a card.

The boy who sat next to her - Ellie couldn't remember his name - turned as she was looking for a crayon to use. "I heard you talking to Mrs. Carmichael," he said. "You mean you really don't have a mommy?"

"Nope." Ellie shook her head and took a blue crayon out of the box. Just the other day she'd heard Blaine telling her daddy that he had pretty eyes. *Right now they look blue, but they always seem to change colors,* he'd said. *Sometimes they look hazel, sometimes they look green. I think it's beautiful.*

"But you *have* to have a mommy," the boy insisted. "My big sister says that all babies come from mommies. So when you were a baby and you were born, you came from a mommy."

Ellie had been carefully writing on the front of her card. She wasn't quite sure how to spell Blaine's name, so she just guessed. The front of the card read *Daddy + Blan*.

"I have two daddies," she insisted, then frowned at the card. It didn't look right. She drew a line through *Daddy + Blan* with the black crayon, then flipped the folded paper over to the other blank side so she could start over.

The boy wasn't giving up. "I'm serious," he said. "My sister said so. All babies have mommies. You have a mommy, too. It's impossible for a baby to be born without a mommy."

It could be worse, she figured. He could be saying mean things about the fact that she had two daddies. Some people were like that. Some people called them mean names. This boy wasn't doing that, at least.

"If I have a mommy, how come I don't know her?" she asked. "I've always had two daddies. I don't remember ever having a mommy."

"That's because she probably gave you to your daddies when you were a baby," he insisted. "Sometimes mommies do that. I think it's called being adopted."

Ellie shook her head. She knew what being adopted was. Her friend Parker was adopted. His mommy Emily and his other mommy Renée, who Ellie didn't know because she died, had adopted him when he was a baby. Ellie knew *she* wasn't adopted. Why else would she look so much like her daddy?

"I don't want to talk about this anymore," she said quietly, and turned back to her card.

She drew three figures on the front. One was tall and had brown hair. That was Daddy. Next to him, she drew a little girl, also with brown hair. That was herself. She drew them in such a way that it looked like her daddy was holding her hand. Then, on the other side of herself, she drew another figure that was

slightly shorter than her daddy but still taller than her. She gave him a head of curly black hair and drew his arm down connected to her own so they could be holding hands, too. That was Blaine.

After finishing the picture on the front, she opened the card to write on the inside. She took a few minutes to think about what she wanted to put on the inside of the card, but finally settled on three simple words.

I love you.

Underneath that, she wrote her name and tried to draw a heart but it didn't come out very good. Then she closed the card and looked at the picture on the front.

She thought the picture itself looked okay, but she still thought she should write something. It didn't take her long to decide.

When she was all done, the front of the card consisted of Daddy, herself and Blaine all holding hands. Above their heads were the words *To my daddies*.

...

Kurt couldn't help but notice that Ellie was unusually quiet that afternoon as she ate her favorite after-school snack - graham crackers topped with Nutella, which was a favorite of Kurt's as well.

"Good day at school?" he asked, trying to get her to say something. Anything.

"I made something for you and Blaine," she said quietly. "It's in my backpack. You can get it. My hands are messy." She held up her Nutella-covered fingers to prove it.

Kurt picked up his daughter's purple Hello Kitty backpack and pulled out the first thing that caught his eye once he unzipped it: a folded pink piece of construction paper.

It looked like some kind of card. On the front were three crayoned people who he assumed to be himself, Ellie and Blaine. The words *To my daddies* were floating above their heads. Kurt's heart pounded just a little bit faster when he read that.

He opened the card and couldn't help but smile when he read his daughter's simple but sweet message. "Aww, thank you, sweetheart. I love you too."

"All the other kids were making Mother's Day cards for their mommies," Ellie told him. There was a short silence before she asked the last question Kurt ever would have expected.

"Do I have a mommy?"

Kurt choked on his own breath a little bit.

"What did you say?" he asked.

"This boy at school today told me I have to have a mommy because all babies come from mommies," she said quietly. "I was just wondering if I have one, too."

Kurt closed his eyes and exhaled deeply. Of course she had a mommy. He just didn't quite know how to explain the whole process of surrogacy to her since she was still so young. But then again, she would be seven in a few months. She was getting older and starting to understand more things.

Plus there was also the fact that he kind of hated himself now for not having tried to explain this to her earlier on.

"Are you done eating?" he asked, glancing at her empty plate. She nodded.

Kurt stood up and grabbed a napkin so he could wipe her messy hands off, then threw the napkin away and scooped her up in his arms. "Come here. I want to show you something."

Ellie giggled as Kurt carried her through the apartment. "Daddy, where are we going?"

"To the bathroom," Kurt said. Once they were there, he turned on the light and shifted Ellie so he was cradling her against his side with one arm. This way they could both easily see themselves and each other in the mirror.

"Okay," he said. "Look at my eyes."

Ellie looked at her father's eyes reflected in the mirror. "Blaine says you have pretty eyes," she told him.

"So do you. Look at yours."

Ellie looked at her own eyes in the mirror. Sure enough, they were the exact same color as her daddy's.

"My eyes look like your eyes," she pointed out.

"They sure do. Now smile."

Ellie smiled at their reflection. She looked at her daddy's smile, then at her own, then back at her daddy's.

"See how our smiles look a lot alike?" Kurt asked. Ellie nodded.

"That's because I'm your biological dad, and you have some of my DNA in you," Kurt explained. "But it takes two people to make a baby - a daddy and a mommy. Two daddies can't make a baby together, and two mommies can't do it either. If two daddies want to have a baby together, like we did-," he knew that she knew that he was referring to Dave when he said *we*, "then we need to find a mommy that can have the baby for us. The baby has to have DNA from both the mommy and the daddy, so one of the daddies has to donate some of his to the mommy, which is called a surrogate."

"How do they do that?" Ellie asked.

"There's a special procedure they have to do in the hospital where they take the DNA from the daddy and put it into the mommy so the baby can be formed." Kurt really should have taken more time to think about how to explain this. "So when the baby is born, it looks like both the daddy and the surrogate mommy."

Kurt looked at the two of them reflected in the mirror for a few more seconds before he spoke again.

"Look at your nose, then look at my nose," he told her. "See how yours is thinner on the sides? You got your mommy's nose."

Ellie studied their reflection for a little bit before she nodded. "Yeah, I can see it."

"You *do* have a mommy," Kurt told her. "Does everything make a little bit more sense now?"

Ellie nodded. "I guess so."

"If you have any more questions about anything just ask me, okay?"

"Okay." Ellie smiled, then giggled with realization. "Look, it's your smile."

"And it looks beautiful on you." Kurt set her down on the floor so she could stand on her own, then kissed the top of her head. "Are you ready to get going? Blaine's getting off of work soon and we're going to meet him over at Hummel House so we can help Emily start fixing it up."

"Yeah," she said. "I want to go."

...

It was the first time Kurt had ever seen the old building. From the outside it still looked dilapidated, but Emily and some other volunteers had been there all afternoon starting renovations on the interior. It already looked promising on the inside, which made Kurt happy. Actually, just the fact that Emily was *doing* this for people like himself made him happy.

It didn't take long to find her once they got there. Emily was in the large front lobby of the building, applying a brand new coat of paint to the bare drywall. Her dark hair was pulled back into a messy ponytail and she was wheeling herself along the length of the wall, painting up as high as she could reach.

When she saw Kurt, she immediately dropped her paint roller onto the plywood that would eventually be covered by some decent type of flooring. Kurt smiled and headed over to give her a hug.

"Hi!" She seemed genuinely excited to see him. "Thanks so much for coming to help. It really means a lot to me that you're here."

"Oh, no problem, it means a lot to me that you're doing this," Kurt said with a smile. He stole a quick glance over his shoulder to check on Ellie. She and Parker were sitting against the wall on the opposite side of the room, busying themselves with some coloring books Emily had thought to bring. "Didn't take long for Ellie to find something to do. What can I do to help?"

"Well, there are a few other people doing different things in different areas, but I just started painting in here a few minutes ago," she said. "You want to help me out and get everywhere I can't reach? There's more rollers and buckets right behind you."

Kurt turned around and picked up a paint roller, then got right to work filling in the areas above where Emily was painting that she couldn't reach from her chair.

"Blaine texted me, he's on his way," he told her. "But while he's not here, can I ask you something?"

Emily looked confused. She shrugged one shoulder. "Sure."

"Do you think...," he stepped closer to her and lowered his voice so Ellie couldn't overhear him on the other side of the large room. "Do you think I should tell Ellie who her mother is? She asked me about it today...about having a mommy. You're a mom, I thought you'd understand. I already explained the whole concept of surrogacy, but do you think I should tell her *exactly* who her mom is?"

"That depends," Emily said. "Would you be able to get in contact with her?"

"Yeah, I have her number," Kurt said. "She's an old friend, but we've kind of lost contact over the years and I feel terrible about that. She gave birth to my *child*, for crying out loud."

Emily thought about this for a long time before she spoke.

"I think you should call her, first," she told Kurt. "She deserves to know that her daughter was asking about her. Then maybe find out if she'd be interested in maybe meeting Ellie, or maybe she *doesn't* want to do that for whatever reason. It's up to you."

Kurt nodded. "Okay. I think I'll call her tonight."

They painted in silence for a few minutes before Emily spoke again.

"Kurt, if you don't mind me asking...how did it happen? How did you just stop talking to her?"

"She had to move out of Ohio for her job," Kurt explained. "She decided it would be best if she didn't have any contact with Ellie because she didn't want to confuse her at such a young age. Still, though, I feel bad. I feel like *I* should have at least made the effort to stay in touch with her."

Emily opened her mouth to say something, but before any words could come out the door opened and in walked Blaine.

"Hello," he greeted the four of them in the room as Kurt walked over to give him a kiss. "Am I interrupting anything?"

"Nope," Kurt told him with a smile, knowing full well that he would explain everything to Blaine later. "Get a roller. We're painting."

...

Later that evening, Kurt sat alone in his and Blaine's bedroom with the door closed. Ellie and Blaine were out in the living room watching a movie on TV, and he'd excused himself so he could make a phone call. His daughter and boyfriend had been nonchalant about it, probably assuming he was going to call the parents of one of his students or something. Neither of them knew what he was really up to. He hadn't told them yet.

Well, he'd given Blaine a brief rundown of what Ellie had asked him regarding her mother. He *hadn't* told Blaine that he was planning on contacting said mother.

He scrolled through his contact list until he found the right number. Kurt stared at it for a while, then squeezed his eyes shut and pressed Call.

While the phone rang on the other end of the line, Kurt held his breath and remained completely still. Finally, after what felt like years, someone picked up.

"Hello?"

"Hi, Santana?" Kurt hadn't heard his old friend's voice in years. "Hi, it's Kurt. How are you doing?"

"I'm doing good," she said. "How 'bout yourself?"

Kurt sighed. There was no point in lying to her. She'd find out about the real reason for this phone call eventually, no doubt about it.

"I'm actually kind of stressed out, and there's something I need to talk to Brittany about," he told her. "Is she around?"

"Yeah, hold on just a second." Kurt heard a muffled sound from the other end of the line, then Santana shouting, "Britt!" followed by the sound of approaching footsteps. A few seconds later, Santana's wife was on the line.

"Hey, Kurt."

"Hi, Brittany." He felt a sudden relief at hearing her voice; he wasn't *as* stressed as he had been. "Listen, I'm so sorry for calling really late, but it's important. Ellie was asking about you."

There was a pause before Brittany responded.

"She was? What did she say?"

"I guess some kid in her class told her that all babies have mommies, and she came home wondering who *her* mommy was," Kurt explained. "I...I didn't know if you were okay with her knowing who you were, so I wanted to ask you."

"Ask me if you can tell her about me? Sure, why not?" Kurt could hear the nonchalant shrug in her voice.

"I know, I know, but I feel bad, Britt. I kind of lost contact with you over the years."

She laughed. "Kurt, it's okay. I didn't want to stick around and add even more confusion into her life. Besides, working for Santana Lopez Designs is not an easy job. I haven't had a day off in months, and we travel constantly."

"And people say working for their spouse is easy," Kurt cracked. Santana and Brittany, who lived in New York, were legally married. The former was a fashion designer; the latter, who had failed almost every class in high school, had managed to get her act together in college and was now a business executive for her wife's company.

"Yeah, well, I won't bore you to death with details on that," Brittany said. "Go talk to your daughter. Let me know how she reacts."

"Okay," Kurt promised. "It was nice talking to you."

"Nice talking to you, too." He could tell Brittany was smiling. "Bye, Kurt."

He said goodbye, hung up the phone, and sat on the bed without moving for a few seconds before he got up and left the room.

"Hey," Blaine said once Kurt returned to the living room. "Everything okay?"

"Everything's fine," Kurt said. "Can I talk to you guys, though?"

Blaine reached for the remote and turned the TV off, then patted the space in between himself and Ellie on the couch. "Have a seat."

Kurt settled himself between his daughter and his boyfriend, then took a deep breath before he began to talk.

"Blaine, you already know what I'm going to tell Ellie. You were there when all this happened," he said, then turned to his daughter. "I was just talking to your mommy on the phone."

Ellie blinked. "You were?"

And Kurt began to tell her everything. He told her that her mommy, Brittany, had been his friend in high school. She had had a girlfriend named Santana, but Santana went to college in New York after high school while Brittany stayed back home to take some of the classes she still needed to pass at Columbus State Community College. The two had maintained a healthy long-distance relationship, often with one of them driving the ten-hour distance to visit the other.

When Kurt was still very young - just twenty years old and still in college himself - he and Dave, with whom he was living, decided they wanted to have a baby together. They'd been together for two years, and they thought they were ready. So they had gone to Brittany together and asked if she would be their surrogate. She agreed, and nine months later Elizabeth Anne Hummel-Karofsky (or just Hummel, as she currently went by) was born.

Brittany transferred to the Ohio State University after two years of community college to complete her degree. After graduation she moved to New York to be with Santana, who was establishing herself as a fashion designer, and got a job with her girlfriend's design company. The two were legally married a few years later, and to be honest Kurt hadn't been in much contact with either of them since.

"So does everything make a little bit more sense now?" he asked Ellie once he was done explaining all this to her. "You know who your mommy is, and you know how surrogates work."

Ellie nodded sleepily. "I get it now, but that was a lot of new stuff to learn," she yawned. "I'm tired now."

"Come on." Kurt picked her up off the couch; Ellie leaned her head against her father's shoulder as he carried her to her room. "It's actually really late. You need to get some rest."

Blaine watched with quiet awe as Kurt tenderly carried his daughter to her bedroom. He absolutely adored seeing the way he was with her. It occurred to him that this was the way he'd always wanted his family to be.

...

"I am a terrible father," Kurt said monotonously as Blaine crawled into bed beside him.

Blaine looked at him like he was insane. "Kurt, don't even say that. You're a *wonderful* father."

"I know, but if I'm so wonderful, then why did I keep my daughter from knowing her own mother for six years?" Kurt murmured as he let himself settle into Blaine's arms.

"It was for the best," Blaine whispered soothingly. "She wasn't going to raise her, and you both knew that. I think she had the right idea with wanting to keep a distance so as not to confuse Ellie even more."

"I just hope I'm doing the right thing," Kurt sighed.

Blaine kissed the top of his head reassuringly. "You are. You waited for her to come to you. You didn't go out of your way to confuse her and tell her she has a mother even though she's only known two fathers for her whole life."

"Yeah, I guess." Kurt rested his head on Blaine's stomach and thought for a moment. "Did I tell you that one of my students today told me I was the only teacher in the school who gives a shit?"

"No, you did not tell me that," Blaine murmured. "I'm not surprised he would say that, though. You love what you do, don't you?"

"I do," Kurt mused. "I just remembered that. Hearing someone say that...it made me feel amazing. And thinking about it now, after beating myself up over his whole Ellie/Brittany thing...it makes me feel like I'm doing something right."

"You do lots of things right," Blaine said softly. "You're perfect."

Suddenly it hit Kurt how exhausted he was.

"No, I'm not," he argued, fighting a yawn.

"Yes, you are. You're also tired, I can tell."

"I'm exhausted. Today wore me out." Kurt moved up so he could snuggle against Blaine's chest.

"Get some sleep," Blaine said gently. "Can I get a kiss first?"

Kurt turned his head and let his lips fall onto Blaine's in a short, sweet, perfect kiss.

"Goodnight, Blaine. I love you," he whispered drowsily. "And thanks."

"I love you too, Kurt," Blaine told him. "But...for what?"

"Just...thanks."

Blaine giggled quietly and kissed the top of his head. "You're welcome."

Kurt closed his eyes, but for whatever reason he found it hard to sleep that night.

Chapter Fifteen

It was Thursday, which meant that today was Kurt's turn to drive Ellie and all her little car-pool buddies to school. None of them paid any mind to him as they chattered away in the backseat about whatever it is that kindergartners like to discuss. This didn't really bother Kurt, who sometimes found it comforting to just drive without feeling the need to keep a conversation of his own going. He pressed the button for the radio and turned the volume down so at least he had his own form of background noise.

He caught the tail end of Ke\$ha's new song on the station the radio was currently tuned to - Kurt couldn't believe she'd lasted this long, and her music had gotten progressively worse over the years if that were even possible. This was not exactly the type of music that was suitable for a car full of six-year-olds, even if it *was* radio-censored. Kurt sucked in a breath through his teeth and flipped the dial to another station before any of the kids managed to hear many of Ke\$ha's genius lyrics that glorified hooking up with a crackhead.

He'd landed on a morning news program. Kurt decided there was no harm in keeping it here - he hadn't gotten to catch the news this morning since he'd had to leave earlier than usual to drive the kids to school, and he always liked to know a little bit of what was going on. After only a few seconds of listening, his ears immediately perked up when he realized what the reporter was talking about.

"...the proposed amendment, if passed, would legalize same-sex marriage throughout the state. The vote on that, as you know, is next week, and on the night of the vote - that's Tuesday the fourth - Chicago's local chapter of GLAAD is hosting a family event at Navy Pier from seven p.m. until midnight. Anyone who supports the cause should definitely come and check that out. There's going to be a number of musical performances by some well-known local artists including Blaine Anderson - and we've heard rumors that he's going to be performing with a very special guest..."

"Daddy, that's you!" Ellie called happily from the backseat. Kurt couldn't believe she'd actually been listening. Actually, what was even more difficult for him to believe was the fact that the local media had discovered that *he* would be performing with Blaine. He turned his attention back to the reporter's voice on the radio.

"...and of course we'll keep you updated if we find out that it *is* in fact Kurt Hummel that Blaine will be singing with. I know a lot of people have been dying to get to know his boyfriend ever since Blaine first mentioned him in his interview with Chicago News Daily a few weeks ago. Now onto the bad news...it's

been confirmed that some very *unwelcome* guests will be making an appearance at the GLAAD event. The Westboro Baptist Church posted on their website this week that they will be showing up to protest the event and the possible passage of Proposition 21. The infamous group is known for its strict anti-gay, anti-American views-"

And Kurt immediately turned off the radio before she could say any more. His grip on the steering wheel was so tight that his knuckles were bone pale and his hand was shaking. His whole *body* was shaking, seething with rage and concern. How *dare* they...

"Daddy, who are the people who are coming?" Ellie and her friends had stopped talking as abruptly as Kurt had turned off the radio. Her voice was so innocent that it nearly broke Kurt's heart. How was he supposed to explain such hatred to his own daughter?

Kurt closed his eyes as he stopped at a red light, took a deep breath, and opened them again.

"It's a very...*very*...bad group of people." It took immense concentration to keep his voice from quavering. "They are incapable of doing anything except spreading lies and hatred everywhere they go."

The light turned green. Kurt moved his foot to the accelerator and proceeded through the intersection without saying another word.

He couldn't even wrap his mind around it. Here he was - *so* excited to sing with Blaine at this huge event that would hopefully commemorate the passage of the amendment, thinking this would finally be a chance at redemption for the harassment and abuse he'd suffered his *whole life* - and *those people* had to decide that they were going to show up and ruin it. He couldn't catch a break.

In the backseat, one of Ellie's friends whispered to her, "I don't think your daddy likes these people very much."

Kurt never turned the radio back on. The short remainder of the car ride was spent in silence.

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Blaine looked around the inside of his office. It seemed so empty and bare even though he wasn't going anywhere. He was moving down the hall to Mark Perry's big corner office after his last day at the firm, which was today. Tonight, there would be a combination retirement party (for Perry) and promotional

party (for Blaine) hosted by Andrew Carter, who would be Blaine's new business partner. It was still incredibly difficult for Blaine to wrap his mind around all this.

He'd stayed late yesterday to pack some things up so that it would be easier when he moved everything down the hall tomorrow morning. Now, as he looked around the semi-bare room, he realized that this symbolized how far he'd come. Here he was, just twenty-seven years old and about to become the partner of one of the most prestigious law firms in the state. He knew he'd have a lot of responsibility on his shoulders now, and he'd come to accept that fact, but still. Everything that had happened to him over the past few months - winning the Emily Jade case, becoming one of the leaders in the push towards gay rights, *finally* being able to call Kurt his own - it all still seemed so surreal.

His phone buzzed in his pocket and snapped him out of his trance. Blaine immediately started to worry when he glanced at the screen and noticed it was Kurt calling. Kurt had probably just dropped all the kids off at school...why would he need to call? Blaine hoped everything was okay. Maybe he just worried too much.

But then when he answered the phone, it was very evident from Kurt's voice that something *was* wrong.

"Blaine...I just heard...the radio...," Kurt mumbled in a shaky voice immediately after Blaine had said hello. "Oh...oh god, I can't..."

Now it definitely sounded like he was crying. Something grabbed at Blaine's heart. He hated hearing Kurt so upset and knowing he couldn't be there to comfort him, hold him in his arms, kiss his tears away.

"Shhhh. Kurt, calm down," Blaine whispered soothingly. He sat down on the edge of his empty desk. "What did you hear on the radio? What's wrong?"

He heard Kurt draw in a trembling breath. "T-they said that Westboro Baptist is coming to the GLAAD event. Y'know, the group that protests at military funerals and Lady Gaga concerts? They're going to be there, protesting Prop 21. Protesting *us*."

He choked a little bit on a sob. Blaine couldn't believe what he'd just heard. It took a few seconds to sink in.

"And...and I'm sorry for calling and bothering you at work, but I'm just really upset because I thought this was *finally* going to be a chance for me to get some closure." Kurt wasn't crying as much now, but he still sounded broken. "I have been through *so much* in my almost twenty-seven years on this earth, Blaine. I

thought I was due for a shot at something amazing. I thought I'd be able to stand on a stage with the man I *love*, singing about struggling and being invincible with him, in front of thousands of people that supported it. But...but now I'm going to look out into that crowd and see a bunch of 'Death Penalty for Fags' and 'You're Going to Hell' signs." He sniffed a little bit and Blaine heard a sound in the background that sounded like he was pulling a tissue out of a Kleenex box.

Blaine ran one hand nervously through his hair. It was glaringly obvious how upset Kurt was about this, which only broke Blaine's heart even more when it occurred to him that there was absolutely nothing he could do about it.

"Kurt, I want you to listen to me very carefully," he said gently. "I'm just as upset about this as you are. Believe me, I am. I wish I could force every single one of those douchebags to go away." He sighed. "But...they have the right to be there, Kurt. As long as they don't physically hurt anyone, what they are doing is legal, constitutionally protected free speech. There's nothing we can legally do to make them go away. Believe me, people have taken these guys to court before...and Westboro wins every time."

Kurt made a broken sounding little noise. Blaine closed his eyes for a second before he continued speaking. "But with that being said, Kurt, just because they're going to show up does *not* mean we have to let them get to us."

"How can we do that?" Kurt's voice was only slightly tear-choked now. "Those people are reincarnations of Hitler, but with colorful posters."

"Listen to me," Blaine said gently but firmly. "Next Tuesday, you and I are going to get up there on that stage. We're going to share our story and then we're going to sing. Together. And we're not going to give a *fuck* about who's in that audience - if they're for us or against us. Because you and I, Kurt...we know we love each other, so what more do we need?"

When Kurt responded, Blaine could tell from the sound of his voice that he was smiling a teary smile. "I love you so fucking much, Blaine Darren Anderson."

"I love you so fucking much, too." Blaine smiled. "Do me a favor? Go listen to our song. Pay special attention to the lyrics we're going to be singing, especially now after we've found this out about Westboro. Do that for me, okay?"

He heard Kurt take a deep breath. "Okay. I'll listen to it."

"Thank you," Blaine said gently. He hesitated for a moment and his voice trembled with emotion when he spoke again. "I...I love you, Kurt. I won't let anybody hurt you. You're *perfect*, and I don't want these bastards to make you feel any less than that."

"I'm not going to let any of them make me feel that way." Kurt's voice was quiet but firm. "Love you too, Blaine. I'll see you later."

"Bye," Blaine whispered, and hung up the phone.

He stood up from the desk and closed his eyes. He didn't move for a very long time. As he'd told Kurt, he was upset about this too but there was nothing he could do about it. And that killed him. Yes, Blaine knew the group had the legal right to show up and protest at the event, but he had a very difficult time accepting it.

After a while, he opened his eyes and picked up his phone again, this time scrolling through it until he found the music player app. He thumbed through the minuscule list of songs he kept on here - most of his music was on his iPod, but that was at home. Still, he needed some inspiration. Now that Kurt had told him about the Westboro thing, Blaine decided it wouldn't be a bad idea to add one more song to the set list for his performance.

...

Kurt had decided to leave the apartment and head over to the school earlier than usual. He still had some grading to get done, but he'd left the what-notes-go-where-on-the-staff quizzes that the class had taken yesterday at school rather than taking them home to grade. He decided that since he had nothing better to do, he would get those finished up so he could get them back to the kids today.

Upon arriving at Buckley, Kurt realized he had one of two options. He could sit down in his empty classroom all alone and grade the quizzes, or he could take them up to the teachers' lounge where at least there would be other people around. He opted for the second. Despite his best efforts to brighten up the bland classroom with posters and whatnot, Kurt still couldn't help but feel like he was trapped in some kind of solitary confinement room when he was alone there. He took the stack of quizzes off his desk, then immediately left the classroom and locked the door behind him before heading up to the teachers' lounge.

Kurt had never really been in here before. He didn't really have much reason to come here, considering that he only taught in the afternoons so it wasn't like he was at the school all day. He took a seat at one of the empty tables by the windows and got to work.

Grading was a relatively simple process with something like this. All he really had to do was make sure that all the lines were labeled correctly - *C* on the ledger line below the staff, then *E-G-B-D-F* - as well as the spaces - *D* below the staff, then *F-A-C-E*. There was really only one right or wrong answer. Kurt was happy to realize, after he'd gotten through the first few papers, that most of the kids seemed to be doing well. The most anybody got wrong was maybe one or two.

"Does that say what I think it says?"

Kurt immediately looked up when he heard the sudden voice. Standing next to the table was Tracy Mitchell, one of the sixth grade math teachers. He'd only met her once before. She was tall, looked older than her thirty-two years, and had the gravelly voice of someone who had been smoking for a long time.

He glanced down at the quizzes on the table to see what she might have been referring to. "What do you mean?"

"That grade." Tracy pointed with one sharp fingernail to where Kurt had written *Great job! A+* on the quiz that lay on top of the pile. "Last time I gave out a grade that high was...gosh, I don't even know, it's been years. I don't even know if I *have* given out anything that high ever before."

Kurt shrugged. "They all have A's so far." As if to prove his point, he marked another perfect score at the top of the paper he'd just finished grading.

Tracy just stood there looking at him for a few seconds, then pulled out another chair from the table and sat down next to him.

"Would you mind filling me in on your secret? My class average is a 70% right now. I just don't know how to get through to them. I've given them worksheet after worksheet..."

Kurt suddenly flashed back to the conversation he'd had with Andre after class last week. *They just give us worksheets about it and leave us there to figure it out for ourselves while they go and have a smoke. But not you. You actually try to help us get it.*

"Well...", Kurt capped up his pen and set it down on. "Have you tried maybe asking them what they're having trouble with, then explaining those concepts in depth a little more?"

Tracy narrowed her eyes and shook her head. "I never even thought about that."

Well duh, how else are you supposed to figure out what the students are having trouble with? It seemed so obvious. Kurt resisted the urge to roll his eyes. He didn't need to be unnecessarily rude to her. She seemed like a nice enough lady, even if she might not have been the best teacher.

"Just try doing that. Sometimes just a little more review over a specific topic can really help kids start to understand it. If you just give them worksheets, you can't expect the class to know how to do them if they don't understand the material."

"It's that simple, huh? I can't believe I never thought about that. Thank you, Kurt." Tracy gave him an appreciative smile. "Are you coming to the union meeting tonight? I *know* I'm not the only teacher who feels this way. A lot of us who teach in the inner city have similar problems...maybe you could talk to everyone there and tell them what you just told me."

But Kurt just squinted at her in confusion. "There's a union meeting tonight?" he asked in response, because he honestly hadn't known.

"Yes, they sent out a reminder yesterday to all members...you didn't get it?"

Kurt shook his head. "I never got anything. I haven't even heard if I'm *in* the union yet. I filled out a membership application when I first started teaching here but I haven't heard back from them yet."

Tracy raised one eyebrow, then shook her head. "That's weird. All teachers in the district should be in the local union. I can't believe you haven't heard back from them yet."

"This is probably a stupid question, but is this bad?" Kurt asked. "That I'm not in the union yet, I mean. Is there anything really important that I'm missing out on? I was a member of the local teacher's union back when I taught in Ohio, but I don't know much about the union here, if they afford us the same benefits and whatnot."

"Oh, just better health benefits, more vacation time and paid leave, more pension and wage compensation," Tracy rattled off flatly.

Kurt resisted the urge to slap himself. "Oh. Duh. I don't know why I thought there would be different benefits or something." He shook his head. "Do you know anyone I can contact to check on the status of my application?"

Tracy pulled her cell phone out of her purse and pressed a few buttons before holding it so that Kurt could see the screen. "This is the union president. He teaches at Bishop High School just down the street. I would give him a call and see what's up."

Kurt studied the contact information that was displayed on the screen. Someone named Sean Jeffries and a few phone numbers. Kurt pulled his own phone out of his pocket so he could at least save one of the numbers and call it later.

"When do you think would be a good time to call?" he asked Tracy.

She went back to the main screen on her phone to check the time. "You could call right now, if you want," she suggested. "I used to teach at Bishop. Everyone - staff and students - has the same lunch period."

"Is it lunchtime there now?" Kurt asked.

"If they've kept the schedule the same from when I taught there, then yes. But even if it's not, you could still just leave him a voicemail and he'll call you back."

Kurt shrugged. "It's worth a try," he mumbled, mostly to himself, because this was kind of important and now he really just wanted to talk to this guy and figure out what was up. He gave Tracy an appreciative smile. "Thank you."

"No problem! Thank *you*." She smiled at him, then stood up and left so he could talk on the phone in peace.

Kurt took a deep breath, let it out, and dialed the number. He pressed the phone to his ear and listened to it ring a few times before there was finally an answer.

The voice that spoke on the other end of the line was thin and nasally. It almost reminded Kurt of what that annoying AV kid back in high school, Jacob Ben-Israel, used to sound like. The man offered no greeting, only an introduction. "Sean Jeffries."

Kurt forced himself to use his Polite Teacher Voice. "Hello, Mr. Jeffries, my name is Kurt Hummel. I teach at Buckley Middle School."

There was a second of silence before the other man spoke again. His voice held a tone of recognition, but Kurt couldn't tell if he sounded pleased or disappointed to hear his name.

"Oh! Yeah, Hummel. I know the name. What can I help you with?"

He seemed friendly enough, Kurt decided. Without hesitation, he decided to just go for it.

"Someone told me you were the president of the local teachers' union. I was just calling to see if you could by chance tell me the status of my application for membership? I submitted it over a month ago and I still haven't heard back from anybody."

"Hold on a second, please." Kurt could hear the muffled sound of footsteps from the other end of the line, then something that sounded like a door being closed before Sean Jeffries spoke again. "I'm sorry. Kurt Hummel, right?"

"Yes, that's me," Kurt confirmed.

Another hesitation. "Kurt...um, several of the other union leaders and I discussed your application, and we decided that your...lifestyle may make some of the other members uncomfortable. I'm sorry, but your membership request was not accepted."

Kurt blinked. Maybe he'd heard him wrong. "I...I'm sorry, but what do you mean by my *lifestyle*?" he asked, although the sinking feeling in his stomach told him that he probably already knew the answer.

"We have quite a few members of the union who hold conservative views, and we were concerned that including an openly homosexual member might make them less likely to want to be a part of things. Participation would decline and the union would fall apart from the inside out. We made our decision based on what we thought was best for the union as a whole."

His use of the royal *we* suddenly annoyed Kurt beyond belief. Kurt clenched his teeth and attempted not to scream into the phone.

"Mr. Jeffries, excuse me for being blunt, but this seems entirely unfair." Kurt tried to make his voice level and calm. "Why should I have to miss out on all the important benefits afforded to union members? This...this can't be right."

"I'm sorry, but it's perfectly fair." Kurt was also becoming extremely annoyed with the constant *I'm sorrys*. Sean Jeffries sure didn't *seem* to be sorry. "Your...boyfriend is that one lawyer, right? The one who's in the news all the time? Talk to him about it. I'm sure he'd be able to explain the legality of our decision. We did our homework, Kurt. What we're doing is perfectly legal."

Kurt was practically seething by this point. He hadn't missed the disapproving way the union president had said the word *boyfriend*. With that, it was perfectly clear that Sean Jeffries was one of the conservative members who would have felt uncomfortable with including Kurt in the union.

"Denying certain people access to better wages, better fringe benefits and more pension is legal?" Kurt asked flatly.

"Organizations are legally able to deny membership to homosexuals. There was a Supreme Court case about it or whatever." All of a sudden Sean Jeffries sounded downright rude. "I teach science, not social studies. Like I said, talk to your boyfriend about it. He seems like a smart enough guy. He probably knows."

This time when he said the word *boyfriend*, it came off as a sneer.

"Oh, I will," Kurt informed him with as expressionless a tone as he could manage. "Thank you for your time."

Then he did something he'd never done before in his life, because when he was a little boy his mother had told him that hanging up on people was rude. Kurt Hummel hung up the phone as Sean Jeffries was beginning to utter a syllable of response.

He was going to talk to his boyfriend, all right.

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"...and then he told me it would 'be best for the union as a whole.' I mean, what kind of BS is that?"

Blaine could tell Kurt was seething with rage. He wasn't exactly shouting, but there was enough fervor in his voice that he may as well have been. He made air quotes when directly quoting things that this Sean guy must have said, and also switched his voice to speak in what Blaine knew was probably a perfect imitation of his tone.

A short silence hung in the air as Blaine let this all sink in. Kurt sighed and turned away from Blaine to pace back across the kitchen towards the refrigerator. Blaine heard him let out a quiet sigh.

"I'm so sorry, Blaine. This is supposed to be your big night, what with your promotion and all that - but I've just been whining and complaining all day." He pulled a can of Diet Coke out of the fridge, cracked it open and took a long sip before he continued. "I just feel bad. Today was supposed to be all about *you*." He turned his gaze towards the kitchen counter, suddenly feeling unworthy of meeting Blaine's eyes.

Blaine crossed the kitchen in two strides and took the pop can out of his boyfriend's hand. He placed it on the counter and took Kurt's hands in both of his.

"Kurt, will you look at me?" he asked gently.

Kurt slowly raised his eyes up to meet Blaine's.

"Today isn't about me. Today - and every day, for that matter - is about *us*. Growing and sharing and learning and loving together. Yes, I have an important ceremony tonight, but today is just as much about you as it is about me. I want us both to be equals in this relationship, and I think we're doing a pretty good job of that so far. So please don't ever feel like you're not important, or that your feelings don't matter. Do you understand me?"

The gentle yet firm tone Blaine used was entirely reassuring. Kurt nodded.

"Now with that being said," Blaine continued, "you have every right to be upset about this. *I'm* upset about this. You need to be in that union, Kurt. The benefits are too crucial to pass up."

"But they said they were legally allowed to prevent gay people from joining," Kurt mumbled. "And they said there was a Supreme Court case about it or something. He said to ask 'my boyfriend.' I could tell from the way he said it that he wasn't too thrilled with the idea of me being in the union."

Blaine pressed his lips together in a tight line. "You know, I actually wouldn't be surprised if there *was* a decision made by the SCOTUS about something like that," he admitted. "I'm going to look into that for you right now, actually." He reached out to open his laptop, which was sitting closed and charging on the kitchen counter.

Kurt glanced at the clock. "Blaine, not now." He gently pulled his boyfriend's hand back from the computer. "It's after six and your ceremony starts at seven. We should start getting ready. I appreciate that you want today to be equally about both of us, but this is a big deal for you and I'm not going to let you miss it." He smiled.

"When we get home, then. Tonight, Kurt, I promise you I'll look into that case and see if this guy even really knows what he's talking about." He leaned in and gave the younger man a soft kiss on the lips before pulling back to look him in the eyes. "And if you'll let me, I'm ready to fight this for you if we have to."

Kurt's heart started to beat a little faster when Blaine said that. The thought of Blaine arguing something like this for him gave him a small but potent thrill.

"I wouldn't want anybody else to do it," he said with a breathless smile.

Blaine returned his smile and gave him another kiss, this one longer and lingering. When he pulled back, he held Kurt's gaze for a moment longer before he finally made himself turn away and leave the kitchen. He decided that if he *had* to go to this ceremony tonight, he should at least start getting ready.

But he hadn't made it out of the kitchen before something bright and pink on the refrigerator caught his eye. Blaine immediately stopped in his tracks and reached out to take it off and see what it was. He'd always been the type to attach every single important paper in his life to the fridge for easy access, so he wouldn't have been surprised if this pink piece of paper had been up there for a while and simply gotten overlooked in the rest of his clutter.

"What's this?" he whispered to Kurt with a tiny smile on his face. It looked like a card. On the front were three stick figures - one tall with brown hair, one that looked like a little girl who also had brown hair, and one with curly black hair. It didn't take long for Blaine to realize that the three figures were supposed to be Kurt, Ellie and himself. Above their heads, in clumsy kindergarten handwriting, were the words *To my daddies*.

"Ellie made it in school last week." Kurt smiled and stepped up behind Blaine. He wrapped his arms around the shorter man's waist and rested his chin on his shoulder. "I meant to show it to you, but it somehow got mixed in with some of my papers from school and I just found it again today."

Blaine suddenly felt relieved that at least the card hadn't been hanging up all week and he'd just failed to notice it. He opened it up and was immediately touched when he read the three simple words on the inside.

I love you.

Underneath that, she'd written her name and drawn something that Blaine assumed was supposed to be a heart. Blaine was suddenly overcome with emotion. He blinked through the screen of tears that blurred his vision as he looked at the card again, and suddenly it seemed so real, so obvious even though it wasn't legally set in stone. His *daughter* had made this.

"Blaine?" Kurt murmured as he nuzzled his face against his boyfriend's neck.

Blaine cleared his throat before he spoke, but his voice still trembled. "Y-yeah?"

"I haven't brought this up to Ellie yet, but how would you feel about adopting her? If both of you are okay with it, I would love for you to be her legal father."

He'd picked up his head so he could look at Blaine straight on. As Blaine looked back at Kurt, he knew there was no denying the truth in his beautiful eyes. Kurt *wanted* this, there was no doubt in his mind.

"I would love that," he whispered.

Kurt simply smiled and opened his arms up to Blaine. Blaine stepped into his embrace and let Kurt hold him there. Suddenly all the worries and troubles of the day - this whole sudden mess with Westboro coming next week, Kurt's unhappiness with the whole union situation - seemed to be diminished.

"Daddy! Blaine! Are we leaving soon?"

Ellie skipped out into the kitchen, clearly excited about leaving. She was wearing a pretty lavender dress with a darker purple bow as a sash around the waist. Her hair was still in the pigtails she'd worn to school.

Kurt laughed and let his daughter take his hand. She held onto his fingers and swung his arm back and forth.

"Sweetie, you look very pretty, but you didn't have to start getting ready just yet. We don't have to leave for forty-five minutes."

"I know. I just wanted to put on my new dress." She let go of Kurt's hand. "I need help with my hair, though."

Without even thinking, Blaine spoke up. "I'll help you, if you want."

"Okay!" He was happy to see that Ellie seemed to like this idea. She smiled and took Blaine's hand and he let her lead him back to the hall bathroom. He turned over his shoulder to look at Kurt, whose smile signified that he was absolutely touched.

Blaine flicked on the light once they got to the bathroom. Ellie was still short enough that only the top half of her head was visible in the mirror. She began attempting to pull the elastics out of her hair and frowned in frustration when one of them got stuck.

"Here, let me help you with that. We don't want to get it tangled." Blaine gently took one of her pigtails and gently eased the hair elastic out of it without resorting it to too much of a tangled mess. He did the same on the other side and combed out her hair once it was completely down. Ellie had pretty hair. It was soft and hung down to a few inches below her shoulders. It was the same exact shade of brown as Kurt's. She had so much of her father in her, and she was beautiful.

Blaine knew Kurt kept a small container of hair accessories for her in the cabinet under the sink, so he got that out and opened it up to sort through it. He found a few sparkly clips and used those to pull her hair back off her face. The final product was simple but gorgeous. Blaine gently combed through her hair again and picked her up so she could see herself.

"You like it?" he asked, but she already had a huge smile on her face so he assumed that meant she did.

"I love it!" she said happily as Blaine set her down. "I look so pretty! Thank you!"

What happened next seemed so natural. Ellie gave him a hug, and Blaine instinctively hugged her back.

"You look beautiful, sweetheart," he told her sincerely. "By the way, your daddy showed me the card you made for us in school."

"Do you like it?" she asked hopefully.

"I love it," he told her with a smile. Then, without even realizing what he was saying, "I love *you*, too."

She gave him the sweetest little smile. Blaine noticed, once again, that it was identical to Kurt's. Then she gave him another hug.

"I love you, Blaine. You make my daddy and me both really happy."

Blaine gently tightened his arms around her as he hugged her back. He didn't think his heart had ever been so touched in his life. In that moment, suddenly there was no doubt in his mind. They were sharing this together as father and daughter.

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"And now, ladies and gentlemen, it's time for us to be out with the old, in with the new." There was laughter from everyone in the room. "I'm going to turn it back over to my former business partner and good friend Andrew Carter, who will tell you a little bit about the man who will be taking my place."

Mark Perry stepped off the stage to a standing ovation as the employees and families of Carter & Perry - now Carter & Anderson - stood up from the tables where they were seated and applauded. Kurt gave Blaine an expectant smile as they both took their seats again; Blaine returned his smile but blushed and looked at the floor. He wasn't used to such a high amount of praise from such a distinguished community of law professionals. He'd been humble his entire life, so it had taken him a while to adjust to the spotlight he'd suddenly thrust himself into over the past few months. He was still getting used to it, as was evidenced by the shy smile he gave to everyone who turned to gawk at him.

Andrew Carter was on the stage at the front of the room now. He was a tall, thin man in his forties and spoke with a loud, clear voice.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I'm about to introduce you to a young man who is making huge strides in the world of the law. He's already making a name for himself at less than thirty years old and I'm honored to

say that he will be joining me as partner at the law offices of Carter & Anderson." There was a smattering of applause; Carter smiled politely while he waited for it to die down.

"Blaine Darren Anderson was born February 5, 1994 in Westerville, Ohio. Even from an early age, his friends and family could tell that he had a knack for arguing with people." Blaine noticed Kurt giggling at that; he shot him a playful smile before they both turned their attention back to what Carter was saying.

"But he didn't just argue for the sake of arguing. He did it to prove a point, and he was good at it. He attended Dalton Academy for Boys where he was the captain of the mock trial team, president of speech and debate club, editor-in-chief of the school newspaper and the lead soloist of the school's a capella glee club. In 2012 he graduated as valedictorian of his class."

"Overachiever," Kurt whisper-giggled teasingly. Blaine couldn't resist giving him a quick kiss on the cheek.

Carter proceeded to describe how Blaine then went on to study pre-law at Ohio State, graduated in the top five percent of his class, and then continued on to law school where he fared very well and passed the bar exam with flying colors the very first time he took it. But Blaine wasn't listening. His mind had wandered back to Kurt and his whole debacle with the local teachers' union. If Kurt was serious about fighting this, there was a possibility that it could end up going all the way to the Supreme Court. Andrew Carter could ramble on and on about every single little victory Blaine had achieved in his lifetime, but he had not the slightest clue what was going on inside his new business partner's head.

Thankfully Blaine managed to snap back into reality at the perfect moment, right as Carter was saying, "And now without further ado, I'd like to introduce you all to the extraordinary young attorney I've just told you all about. Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Blaine Anderson."

There was a huge round of applause, which Blaine took as his cue to get up and go to the stage. He started to stand up from his seat, but before he could get too far Kurt gently grabbed him by the shoulders and gave him a kiss. It was short but sweet and passionate, and when they pulled away Blaine could see how proud Kurt was of him. It was clear as day in those beautiful eyes and in the way he smiled. Blaine loved seeing the way Kurt looked at him like that, but what he loved even more was the fact that Kurt seemed to have no reservations about kissing him so suddenly and publicly like that. Every eye in the room had turned towards Blaine right when Andrew Carter had said his name, and there was no doubt in Blaine's mind that Kurt had noticed. It didn't matter. Kurt was so strong, so fearless, and Blaine felt like he was walking on air as he made his way up to the stage.

Blaine's smile was genuine as he shook hands with Carter and Mark Perry once he was standing onstage. But he couldn't help looking out into the audience and seeing all those people clapping for him and cheering him on. That gave him all the renewed confidence in the world, but of course he couldn't help but let his gaze wander over the crowd until he found Kurt and Ellie.

Blaine knew it sounded cliché in his head, but their smiles were the brightest in the room.

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It was late. Kurt had put Ellie to bed almost an hour and a half ago and gotten himself ready to go to sleep, but he was still waiting for Blaine to come to bed. He knew Blaine had said he would look into that case when they got home, but the longer he stayed out in the kitchen on his laptop, the more Kurt started to feel bad. He didn't want Blaine losing sleep over this.

He padded out to the kitchen in his t-shirt and flannel pajama pants after he'd brushed his teeth. Sure enough, Blaine was still up, sitting at the kitchen table and staring intently at his laptop. His hair was falling out of its gelled coif back to its natural curls, and he must have taken his contacts out because now he was wearing the brown-framed glasses that Kurt never really saw him wear much. The tiniest little hint of five o'clock shadow was making an appearance on the bottom half of his face. He looked exhausted.

"Blaine?" Kurt said gently. He crossed the room and wrapped his arms around his boyfriend's shoulders. "Baby, come to bed. It's late, I can tell you're tired."

"Hold on. I think I found what I'm looking for." Blaine's tone was eager and impatient. He sure didn't *sound* tired.

For the first time since coming out into the kitchen, Kurt looked at the computer screen. "What's this?"

"It's a database of virtually every single Supreme Court case that's been argued in the United States. This website was my best friend in law school," Blaine explained. He scrolled down the page before clicking on a link. "Ah. Here we go. *Boy Scouts of America v. Dale*. This might have been the case that Sean Jeffries guy was referring to when he said all that stuff about them having the legal right to exclude you from the union for being gay."

Kurt rested his chin on Blaine's shoulder and studied the screen. "Hmmm, we'll see. What was it all about?"

Blaine began reading aloud. "Facts of the case: the Boy Scouts of America revoked former Eagle Scout and assistant scoutmaster James Dale's adult membership when the organization discovered that Dale was a homosexual and a gay rights activist." He paused to check out how Kurt was reacting to this first sentence. The younger man's beautiful eyes were narrowed in disbelief at the computer screen. Blaine continued.

"In 1992, Dale filed suit against the Boy Scouts, alleging that the Boy Scouts had violated the New Jersey statute prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in places of public accommodation. The Boy Scouts, a private, not-for-profit organization, asserted that homosexual conduct was inconsistent with the values it was attempting to instill in young people.' Okay, really, Kurt, tell me how this makes sense." Blaine turned away from the screen to look Kurt, who had taken a seat in the kitchen chair next to him, in the eyes. "Seriously? It's basically saying that just because this dude was gay, that he didn't have good values. They didn't think he was capable of instilling good values in the Boy Scout kids, *because* he was gay. But in reality, most people would probably agree that acceptance and tolerance are good values. It almost seems like a bit of a hypocritical double standard to me."

Kurt bit his lip. "I can only imagine where this is going."

Blaine skimmed the rest of the page as he scrolled through it. "Basically it's describing the process of how the case went to court...I won't make you listen to all that because it's not too exciting...ah." He stopped scrolling and started reading again. "The main question of the case was whether or not organizations such as the Boy Scouts had the right to forbid some members from joining based on their sexual preference."

"*Preference*," Kurt muttered. "I hate that term. Like we *prefer* to be mistreated."

Blaine studied the screen for a few more seconds. "The court voted five to four in favor of the Boy Scouts." He read to himself for a few more seconds before resuming reading aloud. "Chief Justice William Rehnquist wrote for the Court...that a gay troop leader's presence would, at the very least, force the organization to send a message, both to the young members and the world, that the Boy Scouts accepts homosexual conduct as a legitimate form of behavior.' Aw, come on, Rehnquist. I used to think you were pretty cool for a conservative." Blaine rolled his eyes.

"God forbid they send a message of acceptance to young people," Kurt murmured. He drummed his fingers on the table, not meeting Blaine's eyes for a few seconds, but suddenly he looked up at his boyfriend.

"I want to fight this." His voice was quiet but firm in his decision.

Blaine blinked. He closed his laptop and folded his hands on the table, looking at Kurt straight on and speaking with a tone that meant business.

"Kurt, I want you to listen to me. This was a decision made by the Supreme Court of the United States. We can't argue this in a state court. It's unconstitutional for the states to overturn decisions made at the federal level. Which means..."

"We would have to take it all the way to the Supreme Court," Kurt said quietly.

Blaine nodded. "That's absolutely right. Believe me, Kurt, I *want* to fight this for you. I want it more than anything in the world. I just want to make sure you understand how big this is."

"I understand," Kurt asserted quietly. "The Supreme Court, though...that's a pretty big deal. Are you sure I'm not overreacting with all this? Maybe I should just accept the fact that they won't let me join the union and be done with it."

Blaine shook his head. "No. It's too much of a risk, Kurt. You *need* to be a part of that union, and they're denying you access to some pretty important benefits. Plus, this decision is a bit outdated. I think it's about time we try to get it changed."

Kurt looked at Blaine in quiet awe. For the moment Blaine was not his boyfriend, but rather his attorney. Seeing Blaine in his professional element like this was fascinating to Kurt for whatever reason.

Suddenly he felt the need to address the elephant in the room. "But what about...us?" he asked hesitantly. "If this went all the way to Washington, it would definitely get quite a bit of public attention. It wouldn't be too hard for people to figure out that my attorney is also my boyfriend. Won't people see that as a conflict of interest or something?"

"Nope!" Blaine smiled. "I mean, yeah, they might see it as a conflict of interest. But legally speaking, there's nothing that says we can't do it. Even married attorneys are allowed to represent their husbands or wives in court. I think as we remain professional about it and don't start making out in the courtroom or whatever, we should be fine."

"Okay." Kurt nodded. "How would we go about doing this?"

"Let me handle that. It's going to involve an enormous amount of paperwork and I don't want to dump that all on you. Normally if someone wants to take their case to the Supreme Court, they first have to lose in a state court. We can skip that step because the objective of our case is to get them to repeal a decision they made years ago, and that can't be done on the state level. I'll fill out the paperwork we need to submit it, and we'll see where it goes from there." He gave Kurt a little smile.

Kurt's heart was racing. He never would have dreamed he'd be doing something like this, let alone with Blaine by his side, but he was still thrilled. He knew he couldn't have been the first gay man excluded from something since that Boy Scouts case. Getting this ruling overturned would be monumental in the push for gay rights.

"Thank you for doing this for me, Blaine," he said softly but sincerely.

Blaine took Kurt's hand and held it lovingly in both of his own as he spoke. "I can't promise you they'll accept the case. The Supreme Court has this whole committee that reviews each potential case and determines which ones get to go in front of the judges. I can't guarantee they'll pick ours. But I promise you I'll do my best to get it there. And if they *do* accept it, I will work my ass off to make sure I win this for you."

The way Blaine was looking at Kurt while he spoke so intensely was almost too much. Kurt couldn't respond verbally; he simply stood up, smiled at Blaine, and reached down to pull him up too so he could wrap him in a hug.

"Thank you," Kurt whispered again as Blaine hugged him back.

Blaine pulled Kurt closer against him. "I'm going to fight this for you, baby," he swore in a gentle murmur.

Kurt pulled back slightly from the embrace so he could look into Blaine's eyes. "The fact that you're doing this means the world to me." He gave Blaine a quick, soft kiss, then broke away and smiled at him. "Come on. Let's go to bed."

Blaine allowed himself to be led through the apartment to their bedroom. He definitely felt better about himself now that he had a clear plan in his mind of how he was going to help Kurt. He knew Kurt had been upset today about a few different things, but at least now Blaine knew there was something he could do about it.

Kurt pulled down the covers on the bed and lay down on his side, facing Blaine. Blaine crawled into bed beside him but immediately pulled Kurt on top of him.

"What are you doing?" Kurt giggled.

Blaine shrugged a little bit. "I don't feel like going to sleep just yet."

They began to kiss, very slowly, drawing out each rise and fall of the other's lips. Before long there were tongues involved and soft moans falling from one mouth into another. They broke away just twice - once so Blaine could lift Kurt's shirt up and off over his head and another time so that Kurt could do the same. When both of their shirts had been carelessly flung to the floor, Kurt attached his mouth to Blaine's neck and began kissing, then sucking, then biting.

Blaine knew he should have been concerned about the fact that he would start his career as partner of his law firm tomorrow with a hickey on his neck, but quite frankly he didn't care. It thrilled him to know that Kurt was marking him, making him his own. On top of that, there was also the fact that he could tell Kurt was getting turned on by all this. There was a beautiful kind of friction as Kurt began to roll his hips gently against Blaine's, letting him feel his arousal. Blaine suddenly noticed that his own pants seemed to be getting a little tighter.

But the further down Kurt moved on his body, the more wary Blaine became. Yes, he wanted to go further and yes, Kurt's lips felt wonderful against the bare skin of his chest, but there was something he had to tell Kurt before things went much further. It wasn't something Blaine was necessarily proud to admit, but he knew Kurt deserved to know.

"Kurt."

The younger man abruptly stopped kissing down Blaine's chest and looked up into those warm twin pools of hazel.

"Am I doing something wrong?" Kurt moved back up so he was straddling Blaine's waist again and gently began rubbing his chest. "I...I'm sorry..."

"No, no, you're fine," Blaine reassured him gently. He suddenly felt terrible that Kurt would feel like *he* was the one at fault here. "There's just something I need to tell you."

Kurt nodded understandingly. "Okay."

Blaine opened his mouth, closed it again, then squeezed his eyes shut and shook his head. The thought of actually *verbalizing* this made him self-conscious. "God, I feel so pathetic."

Kurt raised one eyebrow. "You have a half-naked man lying on top of you, and you feel pathetic?"

"It has nothing to do with you, I promise. You're doing amazing," Blaine said soothingly. He reached up with one hand and gently caressed Kurt's cheek; Kurt leaned his face into Blaine's touch and smiled softly.

"It's just...I've never...done anything like this before," Blaine finally forced himself to whisper. He turned his head to hide his blushing face.

Kurt blinked. "You're..."

"A virgin," Blaine admitted. The word tasted stale in his mouth. He could only imagine what Kurt was thinking. What kind of man hadn't given it up by the time he was twenty-seven? And then there was Kurt, who definitely had some experience, considering that he'd been in a relationship for eight years prior to coming here. At least he would know what he was doing. Blaine had not the slightest clue.

"Why are you so embarrassed to admit that?" Kurt asked softly. He gently stroked one hand through Blaine's hair, brushing the dark curls back off of his face.

Blaine was suddenly so much more at ease than he ever thought he'd be after making this confession. He should have known Kurt would never judge him. The warm affection in those beautiful glasz eyes said more than words ever could.

"I haven't had too many boyfriends. You know that," he said quietly. "I didn't date anyone in high school, then college and law school took up seven years of my life. Occasionally I would go out on a few group dates, but that was literally it. I just didn't have time for a boyfriend. I was never exclusive with anybody, and the thought of hooking up with some random person who I don't have feelings for has always been a huge turn-off for me."

Kurt nodded. His heart was touched to see Blaine baring his soul so completely to him like this. "I understand completely. Go on."

"After I got my degree and started working, I started dating my first boyfriend. We lasted for a grand total of two months. The same pattern kind of continued with the few other guys I dated. We would just kind of fizzle out after a couple months, and I never got very far...physically...with any of them. I don't know. I guess something in the back of my mind was telling me to wait until I was *sure* I was with the right person."

"There's nothing wrong with that. Absolutely nothing wrong." Blaine wasn't sure why, but he could have sworn he heard Kurt's voice break. Almost like he was trying to hold back tears.

"I don't regret that I waited for you, Kurt, because I love you and what I feel for you is much, *much* stronger than anything I've felt for anybody before. But...I guess I was just scared to admit it because I didn't know what you would think of me. I was so afraid you'd see me as this pathetic little virgin who never got any because he couldn't get it up, or something stupid like that. I don't know." Blaine sighed. "And there you have it."

Kurt didn't say anything. He'd been trying not to think about it as Blaine told his story, but hearing Blaine talk about waiting for the one he loved made him feel utterly ashamed. Memories of Kurt's own horrific first time bombarded his brain, as if they were trying to mock him. *He was sensible enough to wait for the man he truly loved. You were just a deplorable little slut who was so desperate to get it in because you wanted somebody to want you.*

He crawled off of Blaine and sat up straight, curling himself into a little ball with his knees hugged to his bare chest. He kept his face down, but Blaine could see his shoulders shaking. He was crying.

"Kurt..." Blaine sat up and wrapped his arms around Kurt's trembling form.

He lifted his head up and looked at Blaine with bloodshot eyes. His cheeks were shiny and streaked with tears.

"No, no, you're not pathetic, Blaine." He shook his head and wrapped his arms around his torso, as if he were trying to hold himself together. "Waiting for your true love is a very honorable thing to do. You want to see 'pathetic'? *I'm* pathetic. What *I* did was pathetic."

As terrible as he felt for Kurt, Blaine had to admit he was intrigued. "What do you mean?"

Kurt had managed to stop crying, but his voice was still shaky. "I never told you about my first time?"

Blaine shook his head. "No. Do you want to talk about it?"

Kurt closed his eyes for a second. "I've never told anyone. I'm so ashamed."

He remained silent and still for a moment. Blaine was about to tell him that he didn't have to talk about it if he didn't want to, but then Kurt opened his eyes and began to speak.

"It was two weeks after graduation. I was barely eighteen." He paused to swallow the lump of nerves that was making it hard for him to breathe. "Dave and I had been together for a few months. We were in the backseat of his truck. It just...it kind of happened out of nowhere, actually."

Blaine took one of Kurt's hands and gently rubbed it with his thumb. Kurt looked at him out of the corner of his eye before speaking again.

"Blaine, this isn't exactly a pleasant story to listen to, but I'm going to tell it to you straight, not sugar-coating anything. If you want me to stop, just tell me and I won't say anything else."

Blaine nodded. "Okay. Same goes for you. If you feel uncomfortable talking about this at any point, you don't have to go on."

Kurt gave him the tiniest smile, but his eyes were still sad. Despite the painful memories that had started to haunt his mind, he was incredibly reassured by the fact that he could tell Blaine anything.

"I knew next to nothing about sex. Only the general specifics of how to do it, and that was about it. I thought I was ready. The thought of waiting until I'd found the person I really, truly loved with all my heart...that never entered my mind. I was just so sick and tired of being hurt and bullied. I wanted someone to *want* me. I don't think he really knew what he was doing either - wait, I *know* he didn't know what he was doing - which just made the whole thing worse."

Blaine had the feeling this wasn't headed in a good direction. Still, he knew this was something Kurt had been keeping inside for *years*. It would do him good to finally have a chance to talk about it.

"We were both so inexperienced. He didn't even think to stretch me out - oh, yeah, that's the other thing...he just kind of made it clear that he would be the one on top. I remember having the feeling that I didn't really have a say. He wanted to be on top, so he was going to be on top. So like I said...he didn't prepare me at all, we didn't have any lube...nothing. But I guess that's kind of understandable when you

consider the fact that neither of us *knew* that you were supposed to do these things. And he didn't really give me time to mentally prepare myself before it finally started happening."

Blaine unwillingly tightened his grip on Kurt's hand without thinking. "Kurt, I hate to have to say this, but are you saying..."

Kurt knew exactly what Blaine was thinking. He shook his head.

"No. It was completely consensual. Like I said, I wanted to do it just for the sake of being wanted. But...the *only* thing I can remember thinking in that moment...I was wondering how something that was supposed to be so beautiful could hurt so much."

He turned his face away. Blaine could see a fresh tear glistening on the corner of his eye. When it slipped out and fell down his cheek, Blaine gently kissed it away.

"It felt good to him, of course. He kept telling me how tight I was and that he could keep doing it all day. I just remember closing my eyes and waiting for it to be over. Trying to think about anything but the pain. He started going harder, faster, making it hurt even more. I remember I screamed because it hurt so bad. He thought I was screaming in pleasure. He sped it up even more and told me how hot I sounded when I screamed like that. It was like he was taking pleasure from my pain."

Blaine's heart was breaking for the man he loved. Kurt should have had a perfect, beautiful, maybe-slightly-awkward-but-that's-to-be-expected-with-two-teenagers first time. Kurt deserved soft kisses and gentle preparation and silk sheets and rose petals and *love*. Not this. Nobody deserved this. Not Kurt.

"And then I remember I just screamed, 'No! Stop it! This hurts!' before he could cause me any more pain. By that point, I was crying. I'd been crying for a long time. Either he hadn't noticed, or he hadn't cared.

"He pulled out of me, and that's when I first noticed that I was bleeding. Not too much, just a little bit, but still. I was *bleeding*. He didn't ask how I was feeling, didn't apologize, nothing. He just sat there and got himself off until he came. I was sitting there naked, feeling *so* embarrassed, and vulnerable, and ashamed. I glanced back into the trunk and found this ratty old blanket he had back there, so I wrapped myself up in that instead of going to the trouble of putting all my clothes back on. Then when he was done pleasuring himself, I asked him politely if he could please take me home."

Blaine scoffed. "Did the asshole at least have the decency to do that?"

Kurt nodded. "Surprisingly, he did. I didn't want to come up and sit in the front seat next to him so I stayed in the back and lay down across the whole backseat, holding the blanket around me. I remember looking up out the window at the stars and just thinking about how much I hated myself. I thought for sure he was going to break up with me over it, which just made me feel worse because I was so needy and couldn't stand the thought of being alone."

"But obviously that didn't happen," Blaine admitted solemnly.

Kurt shook his head. "Nope. He was *proud* of himself, actually. He went around telling all his buddies that he fucked Kurt Hummel. I don't know why he thought they'd be interested, though. To all his friends, I was still just the disgusting little fag who deserved to be shoved up against the lockers. And soon enough, his friends decided they didn't want to associate themselves with him anymore. We didn't have sex for a long time after that, and the next time was comparatively better because we'd both learned our lesson the first time. But no matter how many times we did it, even though it didn't hurt quite so much as that first time, I never *felt* anything. And what I feel with you...even though we haven't taken that step yet...I know how potent and strong my feelings are for you, Blaine. I only wish I would have waited for you like you waited for me."

Kurt blinked a couple times to get rid of his last few remaining tears. Then, with a newfound confidence, he turned to face Blaine straight on and took both of the other man's hands, never letting his eyes look anywhere but straight into Blaine's.

"When you're ready," Kurt swore to him in a low voice, "I want to make love with you, Blaine. And I'm going to make your first time everything that *my* first time was not. You deserve perfection and I'm going to do my best to make that happen for you."

Blaine pulled Kurt all the way into his arms and just held him there. Neither of them spoke for the longest time. Finally Blaine pulled back slightly so he could look at Kurt straight on.

"It's so hard for me to pick what I love most about you, but I think this might be it," he whispered. "You have been hurt so much in your life, Kurt. And you could be bitter and resentful about it, but you're not. You take that hurt and that pain and you turn it into something beautiful. Compassion. Love. You are the most genuine, selfless person I've ever met. And...and I love you more than I could ever put into words."

His voice grew softer and softer but never wavered in its firmness. Kurt looked at him for a moment longer, then sighed breathlessly and gave him a kiss. There was so much he wanted to tell Blaine, so he attempted to say with his lips what he couldn't put into words. They moved together once again, Blaine pulling Kurt on top of him as he lay down.

"Kurt?" he asked all of a sudden, breaking the kiss.

"Yes?"

Blaine looked up into those beautiful eyes. "For our first time...I want to take *you* inside. You would know a lot more about what to do than I would, what with me being all inexperienced and whatnot." He blushed.

Kurt smiled and kissed his boyfriend's blushing cheek. "We'll do it however you want," he said. "Also, I thought I should tell you...I went to the clinic last week. I got a bunch of awkward tests done to make sure I don't have anything...I just wanted to be on the safe side since I've been with someone else. I'm all clean. We have nothing to worry about."

Blaine just allowed himself to look at Kurt for a second. This beautiful man was literally doing everything in his power to make sure Blaine was happy and their relationship ran smoothly. He didn't know how on earth he'd gotten to be so lucky as to have Kurt all to himself.

"See? That's exactly what I was just talking about," Blaine murmured with a smile. "Always looking out for others. Thank you for doing that, by the way. I'd rather be safe than sorry, so I feel better knowing that."

"You're welcome." Kurt smiled and gave him a kiss. It was sweet and simple and didn't last very long before he pulled back slightly and placed one hand on Blaine's chest.

"I want to try something," he whispered. "Now that you say all those things about me being selfless and compassionate and whatnot. I want to make you feel *so* good." He let his hand run lazily up and down Blaine's chest a few times.

Blaine swallowed, both nervous and thrilled to see what Kurt would do next. "Okay."

"Have you ever been touched by a man?" Kurt asked innocently. His hand moved down the other man's body, slowly and deliberately, until his fingers were lightly stroking the bulge that tented the front of his pants.

Blaine couldn't quite remember anything that had ever felt so wonderful in his life, and Kurt was simply stroking him through his clothes with the lightest touch of his fingertips. It took him a few seconds to remember how to talk.

"N-no," he admitted. "Like this, like what you're doing now, yes. But never...*actually* touched. I'm a virgin in every sense of the word." He blushed yet again and decided to accept the fact that his face would be permanently red in situations like this.

"Shhh," Kurt whispered. He smirked a little bit; his face was dangerously close to Blaine's. Blaine couldn't help but stare right at Kurt's lips as he spoke. "You talk too much. Just lay still and let me take care of you."

Blaine closed his eyes and allowed himself to be kissed. Kurt's fingers kept on stroking him for a few more seconds, but suddenly he felt the other man's hand slipping beneath the waistband of his pants. Blaine shivered with pleasure when he felt himself in the warmth of Kurt's hand. He couldn't breathe.

Kurt kept on kissing him. His lips and hand moved with the same steady rhythm. Blaine couldn't help but emit a guttural moan straight into Kurt's mouth as he kissed him back. He couldn't believe what was happening. He was being touched by Kurt Hummel, the man he'd spent almost a third of his life longing for. He was glad Kurt was still on top of him, holding him down, because otherwise he felt like he might just float away.

Blaine forced himself to break the kiss when it was absolutely necessary that he breathe. Kurt's eyes were dark with lust and desire and love all at the same time. Just *looking* at him was almost enough to push Blaine over the edge.

"*Kurt*," he moaned. "I...I'm gonna come, Kurt."

Kurt kissed him one more time. "Come for me, Blaine. Just let go."

There wasn't anything Blaine could do but exactly as Kurt said. Kurt stroked him through his climax and watched him come undone as Blaine came into his hand. When he was finally spent, Kurt pulled his hand out of Blaine's pants. It was shiny and sticky with come.

Blaine couldn't take his eyes off of Kurt as he attempted to catch his breath. He'd never come so hard in his life, and there was a *lot* of come on Kurt's hand...

But Kurt simply smirked and stuck each of his fingers into his mouth one at a time. Blaine would be damned if *that* wasn't enough to turn him on again. Kurt kept that little smirk on his face as he twisted his tongue around each of his fingers and licked them completely clean.

"You're delicious," he murmured as he lowered his face down to Blaine's and kissed him again. Blaine trembled as he realized he could taste himself in Kurt's mouth. They kissed for a long time, and when they broke away Blaine could barely speak.

"Kurt," he whispered. "That...was wonderful. *Thank* you. I...I want to return the favor. I want to make *you* feel good, too..."

"I won't argue with that," Kurt whispered teasingly as he flipped the two of them over so that Blaine was on top of him.

Blaine started off with a slow, gentle lick from the nape of Kurt's neck up to his cheek. He hadn't forgotten about his boyfriend's little kink, and to his delight Kurt emitted a breathy little sigh as Blaine's tongue caressed his skin. He kept lavishing him with little licks, down onto his collarbone and shoulders as his hand moved further south on Kurt's body. He tried to be patient and take it slow, but he'd waited too long for this moment. He slipped his hand under Kurt's waistband right away.

Kurt's eyes had been slowly drifting closed, but they flew wide open when Blaine wrapped his hand around him. He whimpered quietly, sighing with pleasure as Blaine's hand moved up and down his hard length.

"Mmmm, you're a big boy," Blaine observed, letting his lips brush Kurt's as he kept stroking up and down, up and down. "I can tell just from touching you. I like."

Kurt blushed and smiled a little bit. He had to admit, it was true. He was surprisingly well-endowed for someone of his slight build. He picked his head up to close the small distance between them and gave Blaine a kiss that was surprisingly innocent, considering what else was going on.

Blaine loved the fact that he could feel the heat from Kurt's blush as they kissed. He'd started moving his hand faster, creating more friction, and he swore he could live on the noises Kurt was making and the way Kurt said his name.

Somehow, he could tell when Kurt was close. Maybe it was the way he started panting for air as he tried to catch his breath. Maybe it was the way Kurt suddenly gasped, "Oh, Blaine..." sounding needier than ever. That was the only verbal warning Blaine got. Suddenly Kurt's eyes fell closed and he came into Blaine's hand with the softest, sexiest little moan falling from his lips.

Blaine couldn't believe how gorgeous Kurt looked all strung out as he climaxed. His eyes were closed, his kiss-swollen lips were parted and his hair was beautifully disheveled. Blaine didn't take his eyes off of Kurt as he removed his hand and sucked the come off of his fingers, just like Kurt had done for him. He couldn't even believe how incredible Kurt tasted.

Somehow they fell into a kiss even as they were both trying to collect themselves and remember how to breathe. Both reveled in the fact that they could taste not only themselves but each other in the kiss.

When they pulled away from the kiss, they simply looked into each other's eyes for what felt like a perfect eternity. The mutual love they each saw in the other's gaze was enough to bring them together again into yet another passionate kiss.

Kurt's mind wandered slightly as he kissed Blaine. He thought about what Blaine had said - the thing he loved the most about Kurt being the way he turned his pain into something beautiful. He only hoped that when the time came, he could do the same when he made love to him.

And Blaine was doing the same thing for him, in a way. He hadn't exactly had it easy, either. He'd faced just as much discrimination and intolerance as Kurt had, and yet tonight alone he'd agreed to argue a case for him in front of the highest court in the nation and legally adopt his daughter. And next week, they would get onstage together and sing, ignorant protesters with colorful signs be damned.

He knew it was crazy to think, what with all the pain he'd had to tolerate in his life thus far. It didn't matter. Kurt let his lips turn up into a smile as he kissed Blaine and thought the words he never thought would enter his mind.

I'm lucky, he thought happily. Lucky, lucky, lucky.

Chapter Sixteen

He had talked it all over with Blaine this morning, and now everything was a simple phone call away. Kurt's hand was practically shaking with excitement as he scrolled through the contacts list on his phone.

Today was going to be one of the most important days of his life, he already knew it. Neither Kurt nor Ellie had school, since it was Election Day and every district in the area had the day off. In just a little bit, he would head to the polling place with Blaine so that they could do what Blaine had been trying to get people to do for months - vote Yes On 21. Tonight was the big celebration where they'd be singing together. And Blaine, who was going to work a little bit later than usual today because he had to go vote, would be stopping at the post office on his way to the firm to mail the gigantic stack of paperwork regarding Kurt's potential case to the Supreme Court in D.C.

Oh, and then there was this phone call he was about to make. Kurt bit his lip in an attempt to stop himself from squealing with excitement as he called the number he'd been looking for.

It rang once, twice, three times. Kurt mentally facepalmed himself when he realized that the person he was trying to call lived in the eastern time zone, which was an hour ahead. She was probably at work.

After the fourth ring, when Kurt was expecting to hear a not-here-call-back-later voicemail recording, a familiar female voice finally answered. "Hello?"

Kurt stopped chewing his lip and finally allowed himself to put on a genuine smile. "Brittany, hi! I hope I didn't bother you at work."

"No, you're fine!" Brittany replied cheerfully. "Today's one of our few days off, so we're at home relaxing."

"I'm off today, too. Blaine's not, though." Kurt had already explained the whole situation that ultimately resulted in his living with and becoming romantically involved with his best friend, so Brittany knew what was going on. "Actually, he's kind of the reason why I'm calling."

"Oh no, what's wrong? He isn't being mean to you like Dave, is he?" Brittany still had the same innocent naivete she had possessed in high school. Kurt thought her concern was charming.

"No, no, nothing like that. I promise, it's good news," he reassured her.

"Okay, good. You sound excited." Kurt could hear a relieved smile in her voice.

"I am," he said happily. "Blaine and I have been talking. And we decided that if she's okay with it, he's going to adopt Ellie and become her legal father."

Finally. The exciting secret he'd been keeping over the past week and a half or so was finally off his chest. He felt his smile growing even bigger.

"Oh my god, Kurt!" Brittany squealed. "This is so exciting! I'm so happy for you...now this will make you guys kind of like an official family."

"Thanks," Kurt giggled. "We wanted you to be the first to know. We thought it was only fair, seeing as how you're her biological mom. She and Blaine are out in the kitchen eating breakfast now, and after we get off the phone I'm going to go out there and Blaine and I are going to bring it up to her."

"That's so sweet. Really. I always thought you two would be amazing dads," Brittany replied sincerely.

Kurt smiled. "Thank you so much," he told her appreciatively. "That's not all, though. When I was talking to Blaine this morning, we were thinking about maybe coming home at the end of the month, over Memorial Day weekend."

"Home," Brittany repeated. "You mean..."

"Back to Ohio," Kurt clarified. "We were just throwing the idea around, we haven't made any definite plans yet. But...we were thinking, if you and Santana don't have anything going on, maybe you guys could come down, too. I would love for you to meet her."

Brittany immediately picked up on who he meant by *her*. "Oh, Kurt, are you sure?"

"I'm positive," he confirmed. He paused for a moment, then when he continued, his voice was softer.

"I haven't seen my mother since I was eight. I'll never see her again," Kurt said quietly. "Ellie will be seven in August. I want her to be able to know her mom. I only got to spend a precious few conscious years with my own. Plus, do you remember what happened with Rachel in high school? How she found out who her mother was so unexpectedly and out of the blue, and it created a little bit of unnecessary drama? I don't

want that to happen to my daughter. I want her to know you, but I want to ease her into it and not just have it randomly happen like it did with Rachel."

Brittany was quiet for a long time. Kurt thought for a second that the call had been disconnected somehow.

"Santana was supposed to have a show in Cleveland over Memorial Day weekend, but it got canceled just last week. We were planning on heading to Ohio anyway," Brittany said finally. "I...I'd like to meet her. I'm not saying I should be a constant presence in her life, because you and Blaine...*you* two are her parents. *You* two are raising her. Not me. But I think it would be nice for her to at least know who I am...plus, like you said, this will prevent a lot of potential drama down the road."

"Okay." Kurt nodded understandingly, then realized she couldn't see him through the phone. "We haven't made any definite plans yet, because like I said this was just something we started talking about this morning. I'll let you know when we figure things out, and we can work out a time and place to meet up."

"Sounds good." He could hear her smile through the phone. "I'll let you get going. You have some pretty exciting news to break."

"All right. It was nice talking to you," Kurt told her. "I'll see you in a few weeks."

He was positively giddy as he hung up the phone. He couldn't quite put his finger on it, but suddenly he was starting to get a really good feeling about...well, everything.

His smile was still on his face as he sauntered out into the kitchen and gave Ellie and Blaine both a kiss on the cheek before taking his usual place at the table. They were both almost done eating, so he decided he would just grab something on their way out the door so as not to hold them up.

"You certainly seem happy this morning," Blaine observed, sneaking a knowing smile in his boyfriend's direction.

"I am *ecstatic*," Kurt clarified. He smiled at his daughter. "How are you, sweetie?"

"I'm kind of happy we don't have school," she admitted with a tiny smile.

"Oh, so am I. Trust me, teachers have that feeling sometimes, too." He laughed a little bit. "Hey, but listen. There's something really important that Blaine and I want to talk to you about."

Blaine smiled at Kurt and reached across the table to hold his hand. Ellie did not let this go unnoticed.

"Are you guys gonna get married?" she asked, with an almost hopeful edge to her tone.

Kurt immediately blushed as soon as the words were out of his daughter's mouth. Blaine squeezed his hand, winked at him, and told Ellie, "Not yet."

(And Kurt couldn't lie to himself, he was thrilled by the way Blaine had said *not yet*. That left the door open for the possibility of that happening someday).

"Blaine and I have been talking lately," Kurt began carefully. "We were wondering how you would feel about him adopting you?"

Ellie blinked in confusion. "How can he adopt me if I already live with him and he's already my daddy?"

Blaine absolutely adored the way she called him *my daddy*. He couldn't help but smile as he responded.

"In this case, 'adopting' you means that we would fill out some paperwork and have me become your legal father," Blaine explained. "It would pretty much make us an official family. It's a pretty simple court procedure, I can take care of everything...you and your dad don't have anything to worry about."

"Having a lawyer in the family comes in handy, doesn't it?" Kurt stage-whispered to her, and Ellie giggled.

Blaine smiled at both of them. "Would you be okay with this?" he asked Ellie.

She nodded. "I already feel like you're my daddy, so I think we should just make it happen for real."

"All right. We'll make it happen for real." Kurt leaned over and kissed her on the forehead. "There's one more thing. Do you remember when I told you about your mommy?"

"Yeah," Ellie said. "I think her name is Brittany. Right?"

"Very good," Kurt told her. "So this morning, Blaine and I were talking about maybe driving back down to Ohio over Memorial Day weekend in a few weeks. We could spend some time with Grandpa Burt and Grandma Carole and Blaine's mom and dad, too. Brittany and her wife Santana will also be in Ohio that weekend. Would you like to meet them?"

Ellie looked like she was trying to process what Kurt was saying. "I can meet my mommy?"

"Of course you can! I thought it would be a good time for you to meet her. You're old enough to understand the situation now, and you had just been asking about her," Kurt explained. "But if it makes you uncomfortable or you're not ready, you don't *have* to meet her. She won't be upset. She understands that this is totally new to you."

She thought for a moment, then smiled the tiniest bit. "I think it would be nice to meet her."

"Okay." Kurt smiled. "I think it would be nice for you to meet her, too."

"But you and Blaine will still be my daddies, right?" Ellie asked.

"We will *always* be your daddies," Kurt reassured her.

Then, all of a sudden something occurred to him. He glanced at Blaine in shock.

"Blaine, I just thought of something," he said warily. "What about...Dave? He's still technically named as her legal father. She can't have three parents."

Blaine shrugged. "No problem. There are some situations where it's not necessary for the other legal parent to consent to someone else adopting their child. One of those situations is if he's in prison for anything related to family violence, which he is. The court can easily remove his name and we don't need to get his consent."

"Okay, good." Kurt breathed a sigh of relief. "I didn't want to have to deal with that possible legal mess. I've already got enough to worry about with this union case possibly going to the Supreme Court."

Blaine's expression immediately lit up. "That reminds me!"

He stood up and walked over to the counter on the opposite side of the kitchen, picked up a large stack of paper that was sitting there, and carried it back to the table. He placed it in front of Kurt.

"Whoa," Ellie breathed in disbelief when she saw how big the stack of paperwork was. "That's a lot of papers."

"Seriously, Blaine, this is like a book," Kurt mused as he thumbed through the stack. "I can't believe you made it through all this in a week and a half. I would have wanted to kill myself."

"This is what it takes to submit something all the way up to *the* Supreme Court," Blaine explained. He'd been working tirelessly on getting this all filled out over the past ten days or so, even spending a few brief days representing Kurt in local appellate courts as the state reaffirmed the national decision - a step that was optional in this particular case, but Blaine wanted to do *everything* to make sure this happened, and he knew he'd rather be safe than sorry. He'd met with the lawyer who would be representing Sean Jeffries and the rest of the union - and this other guy seemed all too ready to take this all the way to the national level. He had seemed *excited* about this, with the whole bring-it-on, cocky attitude. He was pretty confident in the fact that the court would stick with the decision it had made in the Boy Scouts case, but Blaine knew that wouldn't happen if *he* had anything to do with it.

"So their special committee thing will get this and review it and decide whether or not we get to argue it?" Kurt asked.

Blaine nodded. "Right. I'd say we should probably hear back from them by the end of the month. The timing actually works out perfectly, because if they accept our case, our court date would most likely be in July or August. You wouldn't have to take much - if any - time off from work."

"That's good," Kurt said. "If we get to argue it, how long do you think it would take?"

Blaine thought for a moment. "The original Boy Scouts case took almost exactly two months back in 2000. Court processes today tend to move a little bit more quickly, and cases like this, where we're trying to repeal an existing decision, usually don't take as long to decide as the original case did. So with that in mind, I would say we're looking at...maybe a few weeks? A month, tops."

"Daddy, why is Blaine so smart?" Ellie asked as she tried to wrap her little mind around all this.

"Sweetie, I ask myself that every day. This man is *freakishly* intelligent." Kurt smiled at Blaine, then addressed him. "I can't believe we're doing this."

"Is that a good thing or a bad thing?" Blaine asked with a teasing smile.

"Oh, no, it's a good thing." Kurt glanced at the front of the top page, where Blaine had printed the name of the case: *Hummel v. Jeffries*. It was all so official-looking and he couldn't help but smile. "I just never thought I'd be a part of something like this."

"We just need to legitimize it." Blaine flipped open the packet to the very last page. "I need you to sign this."

Kurt couldn't believe that there was only one page in this entire monstrosity of a packet that he had to sign. He glanced at the page in confusion. "Am I the petitioner or the respondent?"

"Oh, sorry. You're the petitioner," Blaine explained. He handed Kurt a pen.

Kurt positioned the pen over the line that read *Signature of Petitioner*, squeezed his eyes shut and dashed off his signature. When he opened his eyes, he was surprised to see that every single letter of *Kurt Hummel* was perfectly legible in his large, flamboyant cursive.

"I can't help but get the feeling that I just signed my life away, but it feels amazing at the same time." He gave Blaine a sincere, appreciative smile. "Thank you for doing this for me."

"You're welcome." Blaine returned his smile and leaned down to give him a soft, quick kiss on the lips. "All right, so we've just gotta get this in the mail this morning and we'll wait and see if we hear from them."

Kurt nodded. "Okay. Do you know where you're sending it?"

"Yup!" Blaine grinned and reached behind himself to grab a large manila envelope that was on the counter. Kurt noticed that it was already stamped and addressed to the Supreme Court of the United States in Blaine's neat, all-caps handwriting.

"Oh my god, this is actually happening," he murmured as he handed Blaine the gigantic paper stack to put in the envelope.

"And you're sure you want to do this?" Blaine double-checked.

"Yeah, absolutely," Kurt said. "It's just a little unbelievable. Why?"

Blaine shrugged. "Just making sure." He slipped the papers inside the envelope and sealed it up. "All right. You ready to go?"

"Okay, wait. We're voting, then we're going to the post office, then I'm dropping you off at work. Did I miss anything?"

"Nope, that's right. Just don't forget to pick me up tonight." Blaine smirked at him.

"Oh, how could I forget you?" Kurt teased flirtatiously. Since Blaine's law firm was on the way from the apartment to Navy Pier, where GLAAD was hosting its event tonight, they both thought it would be easier for Kurt to drop Blaine off in the morning and then pick him up so they could drive there together.

"I didn't think you would." Blaine winked and tossed Kurt his car keys.

Kurt caught the keys one handed and gave Blaine his signature sassy smirk. (Kurt really ought to have that look patented, Blaine thought).

"So you can remember *my* keys, but you can't remember your own?" he joked.

Blaine's mind immediately flashed back to two weeks ago when he'd come back up to get his keys and had ended up walking in on Kurt dancing to Single Ladies. He blushed. "That was partially your fault," he mumbled with a smile.

"Daddy, what happened?" Ellie asked out of curiosity.

Kurt didn't exactly think that it would be appropriate to describe to his daughter what happened next. "Blaine forgot his keys a few weeks ago, and he came up to get them and he caught me...watching a Beyonce music video. That's all."

Ellie turned to Blaine. "You like Beyonce?"

"I do now. Come on, let's get going. I want to get there before the polling place gets too crowded." Blaine suddenly seemed a little too eager to goad everybody out the door.

"Blaine!" Kurt called after him, and Blaine turned around to see his boyfriend waving the envelope with the Supreme Court documents. Blaine had put it back down on the counter after sealing it and forgot to take it out the door.

"Don't even say it," Blaine giggled as he snatched the envelope out of Kurt's hands. "And once again, I blame you for putting those images in my head and distracting me."

"Oh, stop. I didn't do anything," Kurt teased. He grabbed onto Blaine's hand and the three of them were on their way.

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The last thing Blaine expected was to be treated like royalty, but that's exactly what happened.

"Oh my god, that's him!" The voice came from within a large group sitting outside the polling place with *Yes On 21* signs.

Another voice from the group called out to him. "Blaine Anderson! It's so amazing to finally see you!" The man who had spoken dropped his sign and rushed up to shake Blaine's hand. "Thank you for everything you've done for the gay community."

"Oh! Um, you're welcome." Blaine smiled sheepishly, not used to having so much attention lavished on him by random strangers. "I'm happy to do whatever I can."

He, Kurt and Ellie all turned to head into the building, but they didn't make it inside before Blaine overheard one person saying to the rest of the group, "Oh my god! That was Kurt Hummel with him, wasn't it? They are adorable together!"

Blaine knew Kurt must have overheard, but his boyfriend simply gave him a teasing smile once they were in the building. "One would think you're a politician or something."

"Oh, hell no. I don't even want to think about taking public office anytime soon." Blaine rolled his eyes, but he smiled when he took in the large number of people who had showed up. "This is fantastic. And people complain about low voter turnout in America."

"If you *did* take public office, I would vote for you." Kurt smiled and took Blaine's hand. "And speaking of voting, let's do this."

Once they got themselves signed in, they were directed to two polling stations right next to each other. Kurt held onto his daughter's hand to make sure she didn't get lost in the huge crowd and used his free hand to select his choice for each issue. He saved Proposition 21 for last and couldn't help smiling to himself as he selected *yes*.

When he was all finished, he shared a knowing glance with Blaine out of the corner of his eye. They smiled at each other as they both pressed the large, red *Cast Vote* button at the same time.

"That felt *amazing*," Kurt couldn't help but gush as they left the building. "I hope it passes, if for no other reason but for you. You've done such a fantastic job promoting it, Blaine. I think it would be amazing to see all your hard work pay off."

Blaine smiled and ducked his head to hide his blush as he slid into the passenger seat of Kurt's car. "Thank you, but I'm not just doing this for me," he said. "And I'm not the only one who's been working for this. This is part of a struggle for equality that has been going on for decades. If it wins, the victory will be *way* overdue."

Kurt kissed his cheek. "You're too humble. Give yourself some more credit. For this particular issue, you've done a *lot*."

Suddenly Ellie spoke up from the backseat. "That one guy was right, Daddy. You and Blaine *are* adorable."

"Aww, thank you." He gave her an appreciative smile as he turned to back out of his parking space. Then, just out of curiosity, he asked, "What makes you say that?"

She shrugged. "I don't know. You just make each other really happy and you always smile a lot when you're with each other."

Blaine couldn't help but steal a glance at Kurt, who was smiling as he attempted to focus on driving through the crowded parking lot.

"Kurt makes me happier than anyone in the world," he murmured absentmindedly with a loving look in his eyes.

"You are too sweet." Kurt reached over and squeezed his hand when he stopped at the stop sign marking the single exit of the parking lot. "Do you have the envelope?"

"Right here!" Blaine pulled the large envelope out from the crack between the seats where he'd placed it for the time being.

"All right, cool." Kurt flipped on his turn signal and turned out onto the main road. "And the post office is right on the way from here to your building. Works out well."

This got Blaine chatting excitedly about Kurt's potential case for the rest of the drive to the post office. He was saying a lot about how he might be able to win this just as easily as he'd won Emily's case because it all came down to the simple matter of acceptance under all circumstances. Kurt couldn't help but smile as he listened to his boyfriend babble away about how the general public really didn't know what was going on in these unions and if they did, they'd be appalled that someone had been denied the right to join and thus prohibited from accessing all the important benefits. Kurt loved seeing Blaine like this. It showed him just how passionate his boyfriend was about his work, and it proved to Kurt that Blaine had every intention of throwing his entire heart and soul into this case for him.

When they got to the post office, Kurt pulled up to one of the curbside mailboxes outside the building so they wouldn't have to get out of the car. Blaine handed him the envelope, assembly-line style, and Kurt immediately reached through the open window to drop it in the large blue box.

"All right," he said, exhaling a deep breath. "We voted. We sent in our case. Now all we have to do is wait."

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Kurt enjoyed a wonderful afternoon with his daughter. After dropping Blaine off, he'd taken Ellie out to lunch at the cute little sidewalk bistro-cafe that had those fruit smoothies she really liked. From there they'd headed to the vintage movie theater, the one that still had the old-fashioned marquee out front, to see the latest Pixar computer-animated cartoon. After the movie, Kurt was in the mood to splurge and

Ellie was in the mood to shop, so he took her on a little shopping spree downtown so she could pick out a few new outfits. By the time they finished out their afternoon with some ice cream sandwiches Kurt had bought at the Jewel-Osco on Archer Avenue, it was almost time to pick up Blaine again.

"Maybe we shouldn't have had that ice cream just now," Kurt mused, half to himself and half to Ellie as they got in the car for the last time. "We haven't had dinner yet. You're not hungry, are you?"

Ellie shook her head. "Not really."

"Okay, good, me neither. If we get hungry later on, we can eat down at Navy Pier. They have tons of restaurants around there, I'm sure we'll be able to get food."

"But what about Blaine?" Ellie asked from the backseat. "He hasn't had anything to eat yet. We always all eat dinner together. What if he's hungry?"

Kurt had to giggle at that. His daughter's concern for his boyfriend was absolutely endearing. "Sweetie, Blaine will be fine. Don't worry, he's not going to starve."

"I just don't want him to be hungry when you guys sing tonight," she said thoughtfully. "Are you nervous, Daddy?"

Kurt shrugged. "Honestly, I haven't been thinking about it too much. I figure if I dwell on it, then I'll just freak myself out. So I've been focusing on having a fun time with my favorite girl today, instead." He had just stopped at a red light as he'd been speaking, so he turned around to smile at his daughter and squeeze her hand.

Ellie gave Kurt a smile in return that was, as always, identical to his own - with the exception of the upper tooth she'd just lost two days before. "Today was really fun. Thank you so much, Daddy."

"You're so welcome." He gave her another tiny smile before turning back around to proceed through the intersection. The office building that housed the law firm of Carter & Anderson was only about another block away, so once there he pulled into the lower-level parking garage and maneuvered the car into a spot as close as possible to the doors that led into the building.

Kurt put the car in Park and took his foot off the brake as he pulled out his cell phone and called Blaine. His boyfriend answered after the first ring.

"Hello there." Kurt could hear the smile in Blaine's voice.

"Hey!" he greeted him cheerfully. "Are you ready to go? We're in the parking garage on the first level."

Blaine gave what sounded like an apologetic sigh. "Actually, I'm running just a teeny bit behind - I'm so sorry," he said sincerely. "I just have a few more things to finish up. Would you mind waiting just about ten more minutes?"

Kurt was about to say that he did not mind, because they still had plenty of time, but Blaine spoke again before Kurt got a chance. "Actually, you guys could come upstairs, if you want. Have you ever seen my new office?"

"Your amazing, new, partner-of-the-law-firm corner office? No, I have not," Kurt told him with a smile. "We wouldn't be getting in your way, would we?"

"No, not at all," Blaine reassured him. "Come on up and check it out. I promise it'll be cooler than sitting in the car down in that parking garage. The view of the city from up here is *amazing*."

"Okay! We'll be right up." Kurt said goodbye and hung up the phone, then turned around towards Ellie. "You wanna see where Blaine works?"

"Yeah!" she said excitedly.

Kurt grinned to himself as they got out of the car and headed into the building. Once inside, they rode the elevator up to the fifty-third floor, where Blaine was immediately there to greet them.

"Hi!" He greeted them both with a hug and a kiss on the cheek. "How was your afternoon?"

"It was so much fun!" Ellie said right away. "Daddy and I went to lunch, then to the movies, then he took me shopping and then we got ice cream."

"That sounds awesome!" Blaine responded enthusiastically. He took both of their hands, lacing his fingers through the spaces in between Kurt's, and directed them towards a set of fancy-looking dark wooden doors. "We're just going right in here."

Kurt stared in awe at the point-blank black lettering that spelled out *Carter & Anderson, Attorneys at Law* on the frosted windows of the doors. Even before he stepped over the threshold, the doors themselves were a reminder that he was stepping into somewhere important. The law offices took up the entire floor of the building, minus this little hallway where the elevator emptied out. Kurt couldn't help but think that being allowed access to this place was a special privilege.

Once they stepped inside, though, things seemed a lot more casual than he'd been expecting.

"Hi, Sheila. These two are with me," Blaine politely informed a secretary at her desk just inside the door. She had been talking on the phone, but she smiled and waved to signal that it was okay for them to go in. Kurt, who had stopped in front of the desk with the expectation that he would have to sign something, ducked his head to hide his blush as he let Blaine guide him through the office.

Once they had made it through the main part of the office, they were headed down a long hallway where some of the attorneys had their individual offices. This hallway, though, contained mostly meeting rooms lining both sides. The only two offices came at the very end. On one side of the hallway was a doorway that read *Andrew W. Carter*. Directly across from that, on the opposite side of the hall, was a door that read *Blaine D. Anderson*.

Blaine pulled his door open and ushered them inside as if it were his own home. "Feel free to make yourself comfortable and check the place out. I just need to finish up some documents."

Kurt was immediately struck speechless when he stepped inside the large room. Simply put, his boyfriend's office was incredible. A huge bookshelf full of thick legal volumes lined the wall adjacent to the door and across from Blaine's desk. There was a large amount of open floor space, part of which was taken up by a few armchairs and a coffee table - almost like a miniature waiting area. A few more chairs - these ones wooden and cushioned - were in front of Blaine's gigantic desk. An official-looking nameplate on the front of the desk identified him as Blaine Anderson; the wall behind the desk was decorated with various law school certificates, Blaine's official degree being right in the center. But none of this was as incredible as the wall directly across from the door, which was made of nothing but floor-to-ceiling windows that stared directly out into the middle of the city.

"This is incredible," Kurt murmured breathlessly as he headed across the room to join Ellie, who had immediately raced over to look through the large windows. "It almost feels like you're hovering in midair, right in the middle of all these buildings."

Blaine smiled as he took a seat in the large chair behind his desk and resumed filling out whatever paperwork he'd been in the middle of. "It's almost calming, in a weird way. People normally think of the city as being so busy, but up here it's sort of peaceful. You're not down in the middle of everything, all the hustle and bustle, but you still get a pretty incredible view."

Kurt simply gazed out the window in quiet awe. He was so proud of Blaine. And he couldn't help but feel a sense of pride for himself, too - his boyfriend was this incredible big city lawyer who was taking steps to change the world as he knew it. From this room on the fifty-third floor, Blaine was doing things that many people couldn't even dream of. He'd earned every single square inch of this extravagant office space.

But then something else occurred to Kurt. He turned away from the window and towards Blaine at his desk.

"Does it ever get lonely up here? Up in this big office all by yourself?"

Blaine looked up from his paperwork and shrugged. "Not really, no. A lot of the times I have people in here with me. Clients coming for counsel, other lawyers coming in to talk about things...and even when I *am* by myself, I'm usually busy so I don't really notice that I'm all alone."

"Hmmm." Kurt wandered away from the window, over towards Blaine's desk. Something immediately caught his eye and he smiled.

"Cute picture." He reached out to pick up a framed photograph on Blaine's desk. There was nothing formal whatsoever about the picture inside the frame - it was a random, just-for-fun shot that he and Blaine had taken just for the heck of it one afternoon. Blaine was behind Kurt, his arms wrapped around the younger man's shoulders and his lips pressed to his cheek. Kurt's eyes were wide open, his head turned slightly towards Blaine, and he was laughing.

"It inspires me," Blaine said simply as Kurt set the photograph back down on his desk.

Kurt took another glance at the picture. "What about it inspires you?"

Blaine shrugged again. "Your smile," he said as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

Kurt raised one eyebrow. "My smile?"

"Yeah," Blaine said. He brought his eyes up to meet Kurt's beautiful glasz gaze. "What you've been through, Kurt...it takes a lot out of you. Both physically and emotionally. A lot of people who have been in your situation probably find it tough just to be able to smile. But...I look at you, and especially in this picture...you have this beautiful vivacity in your eyes, Kurt, and I love that. Even after everything that happened to you, you're still able to smile like that. A *real* smile. And I figure that if you can learn to smile again after being hurt in the worst possible way...then I should be able to do anything. What you went through is more difficult than even the toughest legal case I'm going to come across here at work. But you made it, and you can still smile. You're a survivor, Kurt."

Kurt blinked a few times, unsure of where to even begin in response to that.

"You put that smile there, you know that?" His voice was weak with emotion.

Blaine blushed and smiled a gorgeous smile of his own as he humbly bowed his head. He still couldn't believe he was deserving of such perfection.

"I'm done, by the way," he said after a few seconds of silence.

Kurt seemed slightly confused at the non sequitur. "Done...?"

Blaine didn't say anything, just simply smiled and handed Kurt the paperwork he'd just been filling out.

Kurt stared at the front page for a while, trying to make sense of the enormous amount of information, but gasped excitedly when he saw his daughter's name. "Oh my goodness, these are for Ellie!"

Ellie, upon hearing her name, skipped across the room towards the desk where her father was standing. "What's that?" she asked, nodding towards the papers Kurt was holding.

"This is the paperwork we need for Blaine to adopt you," Kurt explained with a smile. "You're still okay with that, right? You would have to take on his last name. You'd be Ellie Hummel-Anderson."

She nodded. "That's okay. Blaine is my daddy too so I should have his name."

Blaine smiled as Kurt handed him back the paperwork. "Not going to lie, this stuff was *so* much easier to fill out than all the Supreme Court paperwork I worked on for like a week," he explained. "Don't be a lawyer if you don't at least have some tolerance for filling out important documents."

"A.K.A. Kurt Hummel should never be a lawyer," Kurt commented sardonically, then let his expression change to one of gratitude. "Seriously, though, Blaine...thank you so much. For everything. Where does the adoption process go from here?"

"I just need to submit these to the local courthouse once you sign some things and say you consent. Then they'll go through and review it and give us a date to come in for the official hearing. We'll all go to court that day and the judge will bang his gavel and make an official proclamation that this girl...," he nodded once at Ellie and gave her a tiny smile, "...is Elizabeth Anne Hummel-Anderson and that her legal parents are Kurt Hummel and Blaine Anderson. The whole court process itself will be very short, I promise." He grinned. "What do you say?"

Kurt smiled and leaned down to give him a kiss.

"I would say that I have the absolute best lawyer anyone could ask for, and that I'm so excited for everything this is going to bring our family." He gave him another quick but passionate kiss, then smiled. "And tonight will only be the beginning."

...

Once the three of them arrived at Navy Pier, Kurt couldn't help but notice hundreds of colorful signs. At first his heart sank, thinking they were all ignorant protesters from Westboro Baptist. But the more he looked around, the more signs he noticed with slogans like "All You Need is Love" and "God Doesn't Hate" and "God Makes No Mistakes." Suddenly he was filled with a new sense of hope.

"I can't believe it." Blaine had already noticed the signs, too. "Some people must have organized a counterprotest. This is incredible."

Kurt was so touched. His hand flew to his heart. "If I'm being honest, this makes me feel *so* much better about everything."

"You never had anything to be nervous about, Daddy," Ellie reassured him. "Your voice is pretty. You and Blaine are gonna sound so good."

"Thank you." He leaned down and kissed the top of her head affectionately, then straightened up and turned to Blaine. "All right. What's the game plan?"

Blaine glanced towards the makeshift stage that had been set up, where some local band was playing a song about change and diversity. "We're the last people to perform, so we don't have to be there for a while. Then, after we're done, we go back into the audience because the governor is here. He's going to come onstage and do the official proclamation of the results, whether Prop 21 passed or not. Then we all either celebrate or get really sad, depending on the results."

Kurt nodded. "Sounds good. Ellie, are you hungry yet?"

She shrugged. "A little bit."

"She and I made the mistake of having ice cream before we came to pick you up," he explained to Blaine. "I completely forgot we hadn't eaten dinner yet. Do you want to get something to eat?"

"Actually, I had a late lunch at work today so I'm not too hungry," Blaine said. "But if you guys want to stop and get something, we can. I'll just get something small."

They walked a little bit down this stretch of sidewalk, glancing over the little vendors' carts that were selling food. Ellie pulled Kurt to a stop in front of a cart for a local pizza joint.

"Can I please get a piece of pizza?" she asked.

"Sure," Kurt said. "That actually sounds really good right now." He turned to Blaine. "Are you okay with pizza? You can go get something else if you want."

Blaine shrugged. "This is fine. My treat." Before Kurt got a chance to protest, he stepped up in front of the register and pulled out his wallet. "What do you guys want?"

"Oh. Um, I'll take a slice of pepperoni, and Ellie just likes plain cheese," Kurt told him.

"Two slices of pepperoni and one cheese, please," Blaine said to the man working behind the small counter. He handed Blaine three plates with slices already on them and accepted Blaine's exact change without saying a word.

"Ellie, what do you say to Blaine for the pizza?" Kurt asked his daughter once they were away from the cart.

She swallowed the bite she'd been chewing, then smiled up at him. "Thank you!"

Blaine was about to respond, but before he could open his mouth a familiar female voice interrupted his train of thought.

"Blaine! Kurt! Ellie!" The enthusiastic voice belonged to Emily, who had been a few people in line behind them at the pizza cart. Parker was with her, keeping pace beside her chair as she rolled herself out of line and over to them. "How are you guys? It's so great to see you!"

Kurt couldn't explain why, but he was so happy to see her again. He leaned down to give her a hug. "Oh my goodness, hi. I feel like I haven't seen you in forever."

She gave them both a sweet smile. "Really, the biggest reason I came here tonight was because I wanted to hear you guys sing. What time is your set?"

"We don't start til nine," Blaine told her.

"We?" Kurt asked in response. "You're singing by yourself, first. I'm only coming onstage for the last song."

"*Our* set starts at nine," Blaine repeated for emphasis, squeezing Kurt's hand. "He's way too humble, and he's been nervous all day for no reason. He's got a beautiful voice," he added to Emily.

"I can't wait to hear for myself. Kurt, I'm sure you're going to sound amazing," Emily told him with a sincere smile. "Hey, I was just about to take Parker over to the kids' area. One of the local party stores set up one of those big jumpy castles and a rock wall and a whole bunch of other stuff. If Ellie wants to come with us, I could take her off your hands for a little bit and let you two have some time alone," she offered.

Kurt didn't see anything wrong with this. He looked at Ellie. "Sweetie, do you want to go with Emily and Parker over to the-"

But Ellie wasn't listening to him, because she was already too excited from what Emily had said. "There's a jumpy castle?" she asked Parker excitedly.

"Yeah! Wait til you see it, it's ginormous!" Emily's son, as usual, had a smile on his face. Kurt didn't think he'd ever seen that kid look sad, even though he'd already lost one of his parents at such a young age.

Emily smiled at Kurt and Blaine. "I have my phone on if you need to call. How about if we meet back up by the stage around eight fifteen?"

"That's fine," Kurt said. He leaned down and kissed the top of his daughter's head. "Elizabeth, be careful and make sure you stay where Emily can see you, okay?"

"Okay!" He could tell she was anxious to go jump around in the bouncy castle.

Emily turned her chair around and smiled at them over her shoulder. "You boys go have fun. We'll see you in a little bit."

Kurt smiled to himself as he watched them leave. Emily was wheeling herself after Ellie and Parker, who had run off holding hands.

Blaine must have noticed, too. He wrapped an arm around Kurt's waist to pull him closer "Aww, how cute is that?"

"They are absolutely adorable." Kurt was still watching their three retreating figures.

"*You* are absolutely adorable." Blaine turned so he was facing Kurt and kissed the tip of his boyfriend's nose.

"Oh, stop," Kurt giggled, ducking his face to hide a blush. Secretly, though, he loved that they could be so openly affectionate here. GLAAD had billed this as a family event, and there were families off all shapes and sizes here - families with a mother and a father, families with two mothers, families with two fathers. There was also, understandably, a large amount of gay and lesbian couples without any children holding hands and even openly kissing. Seeing all this made Kurt's heart so happy, especially for the families here with two heterosexual parents. The fact that these parents were open-minded enough to bring their children here and let them see that there was nothing wrong with a healthy, loving relationship between two people of the same gender...it gave him so much hope.

But all of these musings were forgotten when he looked at Blaine again. The way Blaine was smiling at him made Kurt's train of thought crash and burn.

"What?" Kurt asked softly, unable to believe that it was possible for such an incredible man to be looking at him like this. He knew he'd never forget the way Blaine looked in this moment, with his golden hazel

eyes and radiant smile illuminated with the glow of the gorgeous lakeside sunset on this warm spring evening.

"Nothing," Blaine said quietly. "I'm just so happy to be here with you."

Kurt had not the faintest clue how to respond to his boyfriend's simple but powerful statement. The only response he could give Blaine was a kiss, right there in the middle of everybody on crowded Navy Pier. And for once in his life, he realized, he was kissing a man right out in the open, and he felt safe.

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Roughly two hours later, Kurt was trying desperately hard not to reduce himself to an emotional wreck.

They were in the row directly in front of the small stage, which really wasn't a stage at all - more of a large open space set up to accommodate the various musical performances of the evening. There was a huge crowd surrounding the area - and now that Blaine was performing, the audience was larger than it had been all night up to this point.

He was with Ellie, Emily and Parker. Blaine's set had just started. He had started off his set with the cover that had driven this sudden rise to notoriety, Man in the Mirror, and was now accompanying himself on guitar while he sang an upbeat, acoustic version of How Far We've Come by Matchbox 20. After this, he would call Kurt up onstage with him, and who knew what would happen from there.

Too soon, there was applause. The song was over. Kurt cheered enthusiastically and tried to ignore the growing knot of stage fright that was forming a huge lump in his throat.

As the crowd applauded, Blaine smiled appreciatively as he stepped to the side to put his guitar away and take a swig from a bottle of water. His smile was even bigger as he returned to the mic to address the crowd.

"Thank you guys so much," he said appreciatively. "I'm having a great time so far tonight, and hopefully when we hear the results of the vote here in a little bit, we'll be able to see that we *have* come far."

The audience went crazy. Blaine giggled and waited for the applause to die down.

"This next song is really special to me, and I think it has great significance for tonight," he said. "And with that being said, I wanted to share this moment with somebody who has a very special place in my heart, so I won't be singing this solo.

"I get asked a lot of the time...people always ask me who inspires me. And there's really only one person that comes to mind when I get asked that question." He smiled. "And that's my boyfriend, Kurt Hummel."

The crowd *awwwwed* in near-collective unison. Emily squeezed Kurt's hand, but he was too numb with emotion to really feel anything.

Blaine was smiling that brilliant, just-for-Kurt smile he always got whenever he talked about his boyfriend. It never left his face as he continued speaking.

"Kurt is...words can't even describe him. He's been hurt by so many people in his life, but what I love most about him is that he has this almost magical ability to transform his pain into something wonderful. He has the most beautiful heart and soul of anybody I've ever met." Blaine was looking straight at Kurt with nothing but tenderness and love in his eyes, even as he addressed the whole crowd.

"I can't tell his story. I would never be able to do it justice. Only he can tell you about what he's been through. And once you hear it straight from him, I guarantee you'll feel inspired, too." Blaine smiled warmly. "So, ladies and gentlemen, it is my absolute honor to welcome to the stage...Mr. Kurt Hummel."

There was a deafening white noise as the crowd erupted into applause, but the only sounds that stood out to Kurt were enthusiastic cheers from Ellie, Emily and Parker. He turned around and gave his daughter and friends a touched smile before stepping forward to join Blaine.

Blaine immediately stepped forward as well to meet Kurt halfway. He took his boyfriend by the hand, absolutely adoring the way Kurt's excited smile lit up his entire face. Once they were situated in the center of the makeshift stage, he pressed a kiss to Kurt's cheek and handed him the microphone before stepping back to let his boyfriend have the moment in the spotlight he deserved so much.

Kurt took the microphone and smiled breathlessly as he stared out at all those people - there had to be at least a thousand of them - all cheering. For *him*. If this wasn't redemption for all the shit life had given him thus far, nothing was.

But then he caught sight of the fleeting, dapper smile Blaine was shooting his way. That was redemption, too. Everything about this moment was.

"Oh my gosh. Hi, everybody!" he greeted the crowd cheerfully. They responded with more excited applause.

"I can't really believe this is happening right now...well, like Blaine said, I'm Kurt Hummel and I'll be singing this next song with him. But before we do that, I wanted to tell you all a little bit about myself, so you can see where I'm coming from and get a better understanding of why this song we're about to sing has so much relevance in my life as of late."

He paused for a second. The audience was fixated on him with nothing but the most rapt of attention.

"I've known Blaine for about ten years now. We met in high school. When I first met him, I was dealing with this ignorant jock at my own school who always picked on me for being gay. Even though Blaine went to a different school, he helped me stand up to this kid and stuck by my side through everything. He was an amazing friend, but I had to admit...I was ready to move past friendship with him. I had a pretty big crush on him, but I was so afraid to tell him how I really felt. I thought there was no way in hell he'd ever have the same feelings like that for me, and I didn't want to ruin our incredible friendship, so I kept my mouth shut.

"Around the end of senior year, the jock who had always picked on me came out. Turns out he was gay, too. He said he'd bullied me so much because I had the courage to be out and proud, and he didn't. And in reality, he said, he liked me. He asked me to be his boyfriend. For whatever reason, he thought he had the right to do that after all the hell he'd put me through. But I was a naive teenager, so desperate for someone to want me, and that's when I made the stupidest decision of my life. I said yes.

"Blaine and I stayed friends through college and while he was at law school, but I stayed in the same relationship with this guy who used to hurt me so much. We even had a daughter together via surrogate...she'll be seven in a few months. For a number of years, once we got settled into our relationship, everything was fine. I had a family and a great job teaching music at an elementary school in Columbus, and it seemed like things were finally starting to look up.

"But this past February, everything went downhill very fast. I won't force you to listen to the dirty details, but my partner - who I thought had done a wonderful job rehabilitating himself from his bullying ways in

high school - started hurting me again. He had started drinking and he had a terrible alcohol tolerance. He was physically and verbally abusive to me...he never once lay a harmful hand on our daughter, but he wasn't shy about hurting me in front of her. I knew I couldn't take much more, so I had to get out of there.

"This was all going on about six months after Blaine first moved here to Chicago. We'd stayed in touch, so when I told him what was going on, he immediately told me that if anything else happened, if this didn't stop, that he wanted me to take my daughter and come out here to live with him. And one night, that's exactly what happened. We drove all the way here in one night just to get away from that monster.

"Blaine was nothing but sweet and sympathetic to our situation. The fact that he was willing and able to open both his home and his heart to us...I'll never be able to thank him enough for that. But one thing was true - there was a lot of tension between Blaine and I after my daughter and I moved in with him. And it wasn't necessarily bad tension - we just could both tell that there was something more just waiting to happen in our relationship. Something that had been waiting to break free for a decade. And so one night, we did a lot of talking and finally revealed our feelings to each other. Now, I'm proud to say he's my boyfriend, and we're in the process of having him adopt my daughter so we can be a family."

Kurt paused to catch his breath for a second, but the crowd took advantage of this brief hesitation to erupt with an emotional ovation. He smiled and blinked once, allowing a single tear to roll down his cheek. But he wasn't crying because he was sad. He was *so* happy. It was just difficult for him to make sense of his emotions right now.

"I couldn't be more honored to share the stage with such an incredible man this evening," he said into the mic once the noise from the crowd had died down somewhat. "All I can say is that after everything I've been through...I finally feel invincible."

There were more cheers as the lights on the stage went dark, save for the light shining directly over where Kurt was standing. Blaine let a huge smile take over his face as he watched from the back of the stage in the shadows. His heart was overflowing with emotion and pride and love for Kurt, all of which intensified when the other man began to sing.

"Follow through, make your dreams come true

Don't give up the fight, you will be all right

Cause there's no one like you in the universe."

As he sang the last few words of the line, he smiled and stepped back towards where Blaine was standing with a microphone of his own. Another spotlight lit up, shining down onto Blaine as he stepped up beside Kurt and sang his verse.

"Don't be afraid of what your mind conceives

You should make a stand, stand up for what you believe

And tonight we can truly say

Together we're invincible."

They walked out to the middle of the stage and smiled at each other as they laced their hands together and joined their voices to sing the chorus in unison.

"During the struggle they will pull us down

But please, please let's use this chance

To turn things around

And tonight we can truly say

Together we're invincible."

Blaine couldn't have been more proud of Kurt than he was in that moment. Even with the thousands of people in the crowd, as he sang the next line by himself, he couldn't take his eyes off of the beautiful man standing beside him.

"Do it on your own, it makes no difference to me..."

Kurt squeezed Blaine's hand and returned his smile as he took over to sing the next line.

"What you leave behind, what you choose to be."

They sang the last line of the verse together but in gorgeous harmony, Kurt going up a third higher than Blaine.

"And whatever they say, your soul's unbreakable."

Once again, they joined together for the chorus. Blaine slipped his hand free from Kurt's so he could wrap his arm around Kurt's waist instead. They finished the song with such power that chills ran down both of their spines. Blaine took the melody, while Kurt escalated up to a higher descant in a different key that sounded flawless when blended with Blaine's smooth tenor.

"During the struggle they will pull us down

But please, please let's use this chance

To turn things around

And tonight we can truly say

Together we're invincible

Together we're invincible."

The second the song ended, Blaine pulled Kurt into a tight, emotional hug as the audience burst into the loudest ovation of the night. Blaine buried his face in Kurt's shoulder and held him as close as possible, not even caring that so many people were being witness to such an intimate embrace. They stood like that for a very long time, neither having the heart to let go.

When they finally broke free, Kurt shared a lingering smile with Blaine before turning to head off the stage. He didn't get very far before a familiar hand closed around his wrist to gently pull him to a stop.

"Where do you think you're going?" Blaine said teasingly into the microphone.

"Oh. Uh...I thought we were done." Kurt realized too late that he hadn't spoken into his mic, but shrugged it off as he tried to figure out what was going on. They were done with their set, which meant it was time for the governor to come onstage and reveal the official result of the vote. But as Kurt glanced around, the governor was nowhere to be seen.

"We're not done yet," Blaine said. He led Kurt back to the center of the stage, where two stage hands were setting up stools and a microphone stand. He braced his hand against Kurt's shoulders and gently pushed him down into one of the stools, then took a seat in the other stool and pulled the mic stand closer to himself.

This time Kurt remembered to speak into the microphone he still had. "What's going on?"

Blaine put his own mic into its holder on the stand in front of him and adjusted the thin metal pole to the correct height. Another stage hand came out and handed him his guitar, so Kurt handed the guy the mic he was still holding to get rid of it. As he turned back to Blaine, his heart stopped when he noticed his boyfriend quietly tuning his guitar.

"Blaine," he whispered, glad he didn't have the microphone anymore.

"Kurt," Blaine said confidently into his mic on the stand so that the whole audience could hear, "you have been so strong with everything that's happened to you. And...I can't even explain how proud I am of you for putting all that behind you and coming up here to sing with me tonight. I have one more song, and I hope this gives you some insight into exactly how I feel. This is for you, Kurt. I love you more than you'll ever know."

The emotion Kurt had been holding back sprung to life as tears in his eyes. He blinked rapidly a few times as Blaine gently began to strum the opening chords of the song. Suddenly it felt like all of this was a dream and he was about to wake up any second. The thing was, though, he never *wanted* to wake up if this were a dream.

"Oh, Blaine," he said softly, his voice weak with emotion.

"Let me be your hero," Blaine whispered, and as soon as those words had left his boyfriend's lips it suddenly hit Kurt what song this was. As Blaine began to sing, Kurt already knew he'd be in tears at the end of this.

"Would you dance if I asked you to dance?"

Would you run and never look back?

Would you cry if you saw me crying?

Would you save my soul tonight?"

Out in the audience, a few hundred people had cell phones in the air and were swaying their arms back and forth to the gentle beat. Every single person silently watched this beautiful gesture unfold from one man to another.

"Would you tremble if I touched your lips?

Would you laugh? Oh, please tell me this

Would you die for the one you love?

Hold me in your arms tonight."

There was nothing but pure love and affection in Blaine's warm eyes as he sang, never once letting his gaze stray from Kurt's. Kurt was trembling the tiniest bit with suppressed sobs, but a few tears had managed to leak from his eyes.

"I can be your hero, baby

I can kiss away the pain

I will stand by you forever

You can take my breath away."

The last note of that first chorus resonated in the air for a second. Kurt tried to take advantage of this short moment to get some kind of mental hold on his emotions, but the moment of hesitation was gone almost as quickly as it began. When Blaine began the second verse, Kurt only had more tears slipping from his eyes.

"Would you swear that you'll always be mine?

Would you lie? Would you run and hide?

Am I in too deep? Have I lost my mind?

I don't care, you're here tonight.

I can be your hero, baby

I can kiss away the pain

I will stand by you forever

You can take my breath away."

After that, there was a short guitar interlude during which Blaine still didn't take his eyes off of Kurt even as he played. He couldn't believe he could have such an effect on someone as perfect as Kurt. Tears were shimmering in his glassy eyes and even more were shining on his cheeks, but when Blaine looked at that radiant smile he couldn't help but fall even more in love.

"Oh, I just want to hold you

I just want to hold you, oh yeah

Am I in too deep? Have I lost my mind?

I don't care, you're here tonight."

He finished the song just as powerfully and emotionally as he'd finished the previous song. This time, though, he had tears of his own in his eyes.

"I can be your hero, baby

I can kiss away the pain, oh yeah

I will stand by you forever

You can take my breath away

I can be your hero, I can kiss away the pain

And I will stand by you forever

You can take my breath away

You can take my breath away

I can be your hero."

The applause had begun even before Blaine had finished singing the last line, but it didn't matter. Kurt was deaf to the encouraging cheers of the crowd as he stood up from his stool and crossed the short distance over to where Blaine was sitting. Upon seeing Kurt approach, Blaine put his guitar down and stood up to take him in his arms, thinking Kurt was just going to give him a hug.

But Blaine and everyone in the crowd was pleasantly surprised when, instead of simply embracing him, Kurt placed his hands on either side of Blaine's face and kissed him in front of everybody. Paralyzed with surprise for a few seconds, Blaine finally put his hands on Kurt's waist and melted into the kiss. As Blaine began to reciprocate, the crowd began cheering even louder, if that were possible.

It sent such a thrill to Kurt's heart to hear the audience cheering for them and shouting encouragements. If this had happened a few decades ago, they could have gotten hurt or even arrested for doing this out in public. These people, though...every single one of them was proudly cheering their support for him and Blaine and for every man and woman like them. It was a feeling Kurt couldn't even describe.

Glasz met hazel as they broke away from the kiss. Kurt could feel more tears coming as he looked into Blaine's eyes.

"I love you," he whispered brokenly.

Blaine gave him a tiny but sweet smile. "I love you," he murmured back. "Come on, let's get out of the way so they can finally announce the results."

Oh. The results. Kurt had been so caught up in the moment that he'd forgotten why they were here in the first place. Hands intertwined, they made their way back out into the audience to stand with Ellie, Emily and Parker.

"That was a really pretty song you sang for my daddy," Ellie told Blaine once they were situated.

"I would agree. That was gorgeous, Blaine," Emily added. "And Kurt, Blaine was absolutely right earlier when he told me what a beautiful voice you have. I literally got *chills* when you were soaring up to those high notes. Your voice is *immaculate*."

"Thank you so much," Kurt told her humbly. "It's not that great."

"Kurt, you're a countertenor. How is that not great? That's, like, the best type of voice a male singer can possibly have," Blaine said in disbelief. "Y'know who else was a countertenor? Freddie Mercury."

"Adam Lambert," Emily chimed in.

"Chris Colfer," Blaine added, and Kurt pouted and punched him lightly in the arm.

"Ow! Hey!" Blaine pretended to be hurt and rubbed his arm where Kurt had punched him. "My secret, embarrassing celebrity crush. Kurt doesn't like him," he explained for the benefit of Emily, who looked confused.

She nodded. "Ah. Jealous?"

"No, I just don't like him," Kurt countered defensively. He was about to say more, but the sudden sound of clapping from the audience around him interrupted his train of thought. He glanced up at the stage and realized that the governor, surrounded by a whole bunch of press people, was standing there and ready to speak.

Now came the moment of truth.

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. It's a pleasure to see you all here tonight," the governor began. Blaine, suddenly nervous, took both of Kurt's hands in both of his own.

"I'm sure you all just want me to cut to the chase, because this moment has been in the making for decades," he continued. "Earlier this evening, after all the votes were finished being tallied..."

Kurt's hands were starting to sweat. Or maybe Blaine's hands were sweating. His own palms were so clammy that he couldn't even tell.

"...it was determined that by an overwhelming majority, with over ninety percent of the vote, Proposition 21 has..."

Blaine was getting desperately impatient. He knew the governor was circumlocuting deliberately to build the suspense, but that didn't help the fact that his heart was about to pound straight through his chest.

"...passed. Ladies and gentlemen, it brings me great joy to announce to you all tonight that the voters of Illinois have voted to legalize same-sex marriage in our state."

The screams of delight from the audience had started before he'd even finished saying the word "passed." Kurt, by now completely in a state of pleasant shock, barely had time to let this wonderful news sink in when he felt himself being embraced.

"You did it," he whispered, so softly that Blaine would have been the only person in the audience able to hear him.

Blaine didn't say a word. He smiled at Kurt for a second longer, and his smile was so exquisite and joyful that it made Kurt's heart start to race. All around them, vivacity and bliss were in full bloom as some men got down on one knee to propose to their boyfriends and a few women did the same with their girlfriends. Parker and Ellie were hugging and jumping up and down, because they knew how much this meant to their parents. Kurt wanted to capture the happiness of this moment and keep it in his heart forever.

He was already smiling when Blaine's lips landed on his with the most gentle caress. Just a few minutes ago he thought he had no tears left to cry, but he was proven wrong when one solitary tear slipped down his cheek. Without breaking the kiss, Blaine placed his hand gently on Kurt's cheek and brushed the tear away with his thumb.

They broke the kiss, but once Kurt got a look at that adoring glimmer in Blaine's eyes he couldn't help himself. Underneath the sky and the glittering skyline of the city, Kurt kissed him again right in the middle of the crowd.

...

By the time they made it out of the crowded parking lot and back to the apartment building, it was late. Ellie had fallen asleep in the backseat on the drive home, so once they got back Blaine took the liberty of lifting her out of the backseat and carrying her up to the apartment so she wouldn't have to wake up.

Kurt pulled down the covers on his daughter's bed and Blaine gently set her down. She stirred a little bit but didn't wake up as Kurt pulled the covers over her and gave her a gentle kiss on the forehead. When he straightened back up to look at Blaine, he couldn't help but give him a kiss, too, but on the lips.

"I love you," Blaine whispered once they broke away.

Kurt responded by giving him another kiss, this one deeper and more passionate for the short length of time that it lasted before he pulled away, because they were still in his daughter's bedroom for crying out loud. His heart was racing as he took Blaine's hand and they left the room, shutting the door gently behind them, then entered their own bedroom and closed that door as well.

They didn't even bother to turn on any lights in the bedroom. The second they were alone on the other side of the door, Blaine's lips found Kurt's once again. Very carefully, he managed to blindly maneuver the two of them back towards the bed without breaking the kiss or running into anything.

Kurt felt his knees hit the back of the bed and he let himself fall backwards onto it, pulling Blaine down with him. By now he knew exactly what was going to happen between them here tonight - there was no doubt in his mind. And he was completely fine with that. He loved Blaine and Blaine loved him. If Blaine was ready to do this - and by the way he was slipping his hands under Kurt's shirt and caressing the soft skin of his chest as he kissed him, it sure seemed like he was ready - then Kurt wasn't going to stop him.

They broke the kiss and gasped for breath. Blaine removed his hands from under Kurt's shirt and began undoing the buttons one at a time as he held Kurt's gaze.

"What do you want, Blaine?" Kurt asked simply, even though he already knew the answer. He wanted to hear Blaine say it.

"I want you...," Blaine succeeded in opening the last button and slipped Kurt's shirt off over his shoulders, "to make love to me, Kurt."

Kurt wasted no time in doing away with Blaine's shirt as well. He rolled the two of them over so now he was on top of Blaine, straddling his waist, his own bare chest in direct contact with Blaine's as he kissed the side of his neck.

"I'll make love to you, baby," he murmured as he gently sunk his teeth into Blaine's neck. Suddenly it was hard for him to control the lust and physical desire for this man that he'd been harboring for a decade now. "God, Blaine, I *want* this."

Oh, Blaine could tell Kurt wanted this. It was obvious in the way his growing hard-on pressed right up against Blaine's own through the clothing they still wore.

Blaine let his hand trail down Kurt's chest. His fingers began flirting with the waistband of Kurt's deliciously tight skinny jeans. "I want *you*," he murmured breathlessly. "Inside me."

Kurt gave him an enticing smirk. "Get me naked and I'd be happy to take care of that for you."

Blaine's heart skipped quite a few beats. Mentally undressing Kurt had been his guilty pleasure for quite some time now. Now, he realized happily, he was about to be witness to the real thing.

"Trust me, baby, I have every intention of doing that," he said quietly but firmly as he unfastened the button and zipper of Kurt's jeans and yanked them down. Kurt, down to nothing but a tiny little pair of tight boxer briefs, kicked his pants aside and moved off of Blaine so he was lying on his back. "I'm going to be completely honest, Kurt, I used to get myself off to the thought of you naked back when I was a horny teenager. I *need* to see you. I *have* to see your cock."

Kurt was wearing the least amount of clothing Blaine had ever seen him in, but he didn't seem self-conscious at all. He smiled beautifully down at his boyfriend as Blaine kissed the bulge created by his erection at the front of his underwear. He kissed all the way back up Kurt's body to his lips. Kurt's hands wandered down to his own waistband as they kissed, but Blaine wanted to do this for himself. He gently took Kurt's hands and lifted them up above his head to get them out of the way.

"May I?" he requested softly as they broke the kiss, placing his hands gently on Kurt's waist.

"Always a gentleman." Kurt smiled and lifted his hips. "Be my guest."

Blaine wanted to take this moment slowly, but then he thought, *Fuck it, I've been waiting ten years for this*. Without hesitation, he slipped Kurt out of his final article of clothing.

Kurt simply waited patiently, never taking his eyes off of Blaine. He smiled when Blaine elicited a broken-sounding noise of pleasure once his erection was completely free from the confining fabric. His arms were

still stretched out over his head and he opened his legs a little bit, not shy about letting Blaine see all of him.

"Am I everything you ever masturbated to?" he asked flirtatiously, still smiling.

Blaine, meanwhile, couldn't even breathe for a second as his eyes swept over Kurt's entire beautiful body for the first time. Kurt had soft, creamy skin, uninterrupted by clothing, that flowed over small, sexy muscles. His cock stood at attention, already completely hard, just for Blaine. The way he was *looking* at Blaine was enough to turn the older man on even more. The gleam in Kurt's expressive eyes was demure and unashamed both at the same time. His hair was already starting to come undone from its perfect coif, and a few strands of his bangs hung down over his forehead. His smile was, as always, magnificent.

"You're perfect," Blaine finally responded, his voice thick with emotion. He reached out one trembling hand and placed it on Kurt's chest. "You are so beautiful, Kurt."

"Come here." Kurt placed his hands on Blaine's face and pulled him gently up into a kiss. Blaine couldn't resist touching the rest of Kurt even as he kissed his lips. He stroked up and down his chest, let his fingers play with his nipples for a moment, and finally ventured down and further below his waist.

Kurt moaned directly into Blaine's mouth as his boyfriend began to stroke him, but he forced himself to break the kiss before he could completely lose control.

"What do you think you're doing?" he asked with a smirk.

"I want this in me," Blaine murmured, never taking his hand off of Kurt's cock.

"Well for that to happen, I need to get *you* naked, too." Kurt expertly flipped the two of them over again so Blaine was underneath him and began working the button of his pants.

"Please, Kurt," Blaine sighed deliriously. "I just *want* you. I can't take it anymore."

"I'll take care of you, I promise," Kurt said soothingly as he pressed loving kisses to Blaine's toned stomach. "I want you, too."

Kurt was getting pretty impatient himself, so he rid Blaine of his jeans and boxers both at the same time. Once the clothing was tossed aside, he turned his attention back to the naked man lying in bed with him.

"Oh, Blaine," he whispered. He didn't even have the words to describe Blaine. Suddenly he felt the need to just *touch* him, so he placed one hand gently on Blaine's hip. He loved the way his own pale coloring contrasted with Blaine's slightly tanned skin. "You're *gorgeous*."

He could feel the heat radiating from Blaine's skin as his boyfriend blushed. "I'm nothing compared to you. I mean...," he trailed off as he stared unabashedly at Kurt's naked body.

"Shhhh," Kurt hushed him gently. "You are *flawless*, Blaine." He moved on top of Blaine so he was straddling his waist. It didn't take him long to realize that his rigid erection was pressing right up against Blaine's, and he couldn't resist tipping his head back and letting out a moan. "*Oh*."

"That's good," Blaine agreed breathlessly. He reached out and wrapped his hand around both of their hard shafts, holding Kurt's cock right up against his own.

The wonderful friction was almost too much for Kurt. He let his eyes drift closed. "Oh, Blaine..."

"*Kurt*," Blaine moaned in response. He let go of the hold he had on their hard-ons and placed that hand on the back of Kurt's head to gently pull him into a kiss. With his free hand, he reached out towards the nightstand, opened the drawer and blindly fumbled around for a moment before his fingers closed around what he was looking for.

Kurt abruptly broke the kiss. "What are you doing?"

Blaine closed the drawer and pressed the bottle of lube he'd just taken out into Kurt's hand.

"Oh, I see," Kurt giggled. He crawled off of Blaine and cracked the bottle open, then squirted some lube onto his fingers. "Spread your legs for me, okay?"

Blaine did as he was told. His heart was palpitating with anticipation as he watched Kurt lube up his fingers - *those fingers that were about to be inside him*. He blinked a few times as the reality suddenly hit him that this was finally happening to him, with Kurt. The thought of that was enough to make him tear up, but he forced himself to blink those tears away. He was not going to be a sap and ruin this special moment.

"This is going to feel weird at first, but you have to get used to having something inside you," Kurt told him gently, pressing soft kisses to his chest. He looked up into Blaine's eyes before he continued. "If I start to do anything that makes you uncomfortable, *please* tell me right away."

Blaine smiled. "Kurt, I am so beyond the point of being uncomfortable right now," he said reassuringly. "I love you, and I want to share this with you. I think we've both been waiting long enough."

"I won't argue with you on that," Kurt said as he gently began tracing Blaine's entrance with the tip of his index finger. He leaned down and kissed him as a distraction as he slowly pushed that first finger inside.

"You okay?" he asked once it was all the way in.

He couldn't help but notice that Blaine's face was knotted with tension even as he said, "Yeah. I'm okay."

"Blaine, I know it's weird to get used to, but you have to *try* and relax," Kurt murmured, stroking up and down his chest. "It'll make this a lot easier on you, trust me. Just relax and let me in."

There was absolutely no way Blaine could have refused that. Not even if he tried. He instantly relaxed and Kurt pressed a kiss to his abdomen as he slipped another finger inside.

"Good boy." He scissored those two inside Blaine, stretching him out some more.

Kurt continued preparing him lovingly, doing anything in his power to make this as painless as possible for the man he loved. After Blaine was sufficiently stretched out, Kurt extricated the four fingers he'd had inside him and reached for the lube again, but something stopped him.

He crawled back on top of Blaine, gave him a gentle kiss, and kept his face close as he spoke softly.

"Blaine, I love you," he said firmly. "And...I just want to make sure you know that. I want this to be so beautiful and perfect and amazing for you, because you deserve nothing less. You've done so much for me, Blaine...I only hope that this lets you know how much I love you, because I can't even put it into words."

"I love you too, Kurt," Blaine whispered back. "And this is already better than I ever would have dreamed it would be...because I'm sharing it with you."

Kurt studied Blaine's face as he quickly lubed himself up. Surprisingly enough, Blaine was the picture of calmness. He didn't seem nervous at all, just content as he watched Kurt's hand slide up and down his own cock, slicking it up. When he was finished, he settled himself between Blaine's legs and let the head of his cock prod lightly against Blaine's entrance.

"Just do it," Blaine insisted. "I'm ready, Kurt. I *need* you."

Kurt let one hand slip down the length of Blaine's arm until it reached his lover's hand. He interlaced their fingers and looked directly into his eyes as he began to push inside.

The second he was inside him, Kurt had to resist the urge to shove himself the rest of the way into Blaine and give it to him hard and fast. Blaine was so tight and warm and he stretched perfectly to accommodate Kurt. His breathless smile was a wordless signal to Kurt that it was okay to enter him completely, so Kurt did that and pushed the rest of the way inside.

Blaine knew he could try for the rest of his life to describe how he felt in that moment and never be able to put it into words. The physical sensation itself was strange - it hurt like hell, but that was almost canceled out by the fact that it felt wonderful to be so full with Kurt. Plus, as he looked up into those stunning glasz eyes and saw the way Kurt was looking back at him, he almost wanted to cry tears of pure joy. This was *finally* happening.

"Do you feel that, Blaine?" Kurt whispered after a breathless silence. "I'm all the way inside you. You are so tight around me and it feels *perfect*. Just hold still and feel this. Feel *us*." He paused for a moment. "How do you feel, Blaine?"

"So full," he gasped. "God, Kurt, it's like nothing I've ever felt before in my life. It hurts, but it feels so good at the same time to feel you inside me."

Kurt gently kissed the nape of his neck. "Just let me know when you're ready for me to move."

Blaine remained still for a moment longer as he looked up into Kurt's eyes. He thought of all the tears those eyes had shed in Kurt's life. So many tears, so many bruises, so much hurt, so much pain had led up to this moment. And Blaine could tell, just from looking into Kurt's eyes, that Kurt would put himself through hell and back all over again just for the sake of sharing this moment with Blaine.

"Go ahead," he whispered, and Kurt nodded as he pulled out of Blaine and thrust back in with a little bit more force than the first time. He repeated this a few times, and with each roll of Kurt's hips against his own Blaine found that the pain was more or less becoming hard to notice. Instead, he was finally able to focus on how beautiful it felt to be joined with Kurt like this, and how amazing Kurt felt inside him.

"You feel *so* good, Blaine. *So* good," Kurt mumbled deliriously as he pushed himself inside with a little bit more force.

Blaine decided that he liked making Kurt feel good, so he decided to do so even more than he already was. Remembering Kurt's little kink for licking, he picked up his head and pressed his tongue against one of his lover's nipples.

The sudden sensation caused Kurt to thrust in even harder as Blaine licked and sucked the sensitive bud. He was unshy about emitting a deep, guttural moan as Blaine kept it up. He moved his mouth to the other nipple as Kurt's thrusts inside him came quickly and more frequently. He could live on the noises Kurt was making through all this.

Kurt, on the other hand, found it hard to stop once he'd managed to gain a steady rhythm. Blaine was quickly becoming an expert at this. Once both nipples were hard, he licked back up the top of Kurt's chest, over his neck and finally into his mouth. His fingers tangled roughly in Kurt's hair as they shared what was quite possibly the most heated, passionate kiss of their relationship thus far.

Blaine knew he was getting close. His breath was getting shorter and his heart felt like it was about to beat right out of his chest. When he attempted to speak and form a coherent sentence, he found that forming words was suddenly difficult.

"Kurt, baby, I...I'm gonna come..."

Kurt kissed him softly once again. "Go ahead and come, Blaine. Come all over me. Let yourself go."

Blaine couldn't have resisted that even if he'd tried. One more thrust from Kurt and he was finished, screaming Kurt's name as he released all over his lover's chest and stomach.

"I'm so close...", Kurt whispered once Blaine was spent. "Oh, god, you're so tight, Blaine..."

"Kurt," Blaine demanded gently. "I want to see you come. I want you to fill me up."

Just as Blaine had immediately obeyed his command, Kurt couldn't help but climax right as Blaine finished speaking. He unleashed one of his coveted high notes as he released inside of Blaine, who gently pulled him down closed and kissed his forehead as he rode through his orgasm. When he was finally finished, his cock was soft inside Blaine and their faces were dangerously close as their chests rose and fell together with the rhythm of their breath.

Kurt kissed Blaine's eyelids and the tip of his nose as he gently pulled out, then let their eyes meet. Neither of them said a word.

Blaine couldn't help but smile as he stared up into Kurt's eyes. He had just had sex with Kurt Hummel. It was still hard for him to wrap his mind around, even with Kurt still here with him.

He giggled a little bit and gave Kurt a kiss. It didn't last very long before he broke away, still smiling.

"Today was a very good day." He lay down on his side and pulled Kurt against him to be his little spoon.

"Can't argue with that." Kurt turned his head and smiled at his lover. "I hope that was just as amazing for you as it was for me."

"Kurt, I'm not kidding when I say that that was the most amazing experience of my life," Blaine told him sincerely. "Thank you for letting me share that with you. I love you so much."

"I love you, too." Kurt smiled and kissed him gently once. "You feeling okay?"

"I feel incredible, but I'm exhausted," Blaine admitted. "You wore me out." He winked.

"Get some sleep, then." Kurt turned around in Blaine's arms so he could stroke his fingers through his hair and kiss his forehead. "I love you *so* much, Blaine."

"I love you so much, too, Kurt." Blaine smiled drowsily as he closed his eyes and shifted so his head was resting against Kurt's chest, right over his heart. Kurt was still stroking his hair and pressing gentle kisses to his temples as Blaine drifted into unconsciousness. He fell asleep knowing nothing else except how it felt to be adored.

Chapter Seventeen

Kurt woke up the next morning with a smile on his face and a pair of soft lips pressed gently against his.

"Hi," he murmured sleepily with his eyes still half closed as Blaine finished kissing him.

"Hi," Blaine whispered back. He pressed a kiss to the corner of Kurt's mouth and nuzzled his face into the smooth, pale skin of the younger man's neck.

Kurt gave up on attempting to open his eyes and instead let them fall closed again as he absentmindedly stroked through the dark curls on the back of Blaine's head. "Did last night really happen, or was it all just some kind of phenomenal fantasy?" he mused dreamily. "It all seems too good to be true."

"If last night was a dream, then so was this entire past decade," Blaine reassured him. He picked his head up and kissed his way down onto Kurt's bare chest, then finally rested his head on his flat stomach.

"I'll tell you what happened, if you need some clarification," he continued softly as he let one hand stroke up and down Kurt's chest. "Last night, my amazing guy made love to me for the very first time, and it was nothing short of perfection."

He smiled up at Kurt, who was blushing softly with a tender smile of his own. Suddenly Blaine was overcome with the desire to touch his angelic face. He let his hand rub up Kurt's chest one more time, then kept going. Blaine's fingers traced lovingly over his nose, his cheeks, his lips.

"I'm glad you loved it just as much as I did," Kurt whispered as he took Blaine's hand and planted a lingering kiss on the inside of his wrist.

Blaine closed his eyes and shivered a little bit in ecstasy as the memories came flooding through his mind. "Jesus, Kurt, that was even better than I ever dreamed my first time would be," he sighed. "Which is really saying something, because I've had some pretty vivid fantasies about you before. Just...*thank* you. For doing that for me. I...I can't even describe what I'm feeling right now."

Kurt giggled that cute little laugh of his and smirked. "So...I'm hoping that means I was worth the wait?"

"Oh, *hell* yes," Blaine said steadfastly. "Kurt, you're worth waiting a lifetime for. But I have to admit, a few more years and I probably could have sold the movie rights to my sex life. *The 30 Year Old Gay Virgin*."

Kurt couldn't help but grin proudly as he pulled Blaine up for a proper kiss. "Well, I took care of you, so you won't be needing to do that."

Blaine loved the way he could feel Kurt smiling beneath his lips as they kissed. He took the liberty of deepening the kiss by slipping his tongue into Kurt's mouth as he adjusted his body so that he was completely on top of the younger man. They kissed passionately like this for a few minutes before Kurt abruptly broke away.

He glanced down at Blaine's cock, which was already half hard against his own, then glanced at the digital clock on the bedside table. There were still fifteen minutes before the alarm was set to go off.

Kurt reached over and flicked the alarm switch to *off*, then turned back to Blaine with a smirk. "You woke me up early just so we could make out, didn't you?"

Blaine grinned triumphantly. "Maybe."

Kurt stared at Blaine for a second, blinked, and flipped the two of them over so he was on top. He pressed one more quick kiss to Blaine's lips, then took his time as he kissed down the rest of his body.

"Y'know what?" he murmured against Blaine's chest as his lips moved down further. "I'll do you one better."

Blaine barely had time to react before he felt Kurt's lips moving further below his waist than ever before. He couldn't breathe as Kurt lay a row of kisses down his entire length, completely hard by now, and finally opened his mouth and swallowed him down.

He'd never felt anything like this before. The second Kurt had him all the way down his throat, he couldn't help clenching his fingers in his lover's hair and groaning, "Oh, Kurt, *fuck!*"

Kurt simply smirked around Blaine and continued working his magic with his mouth. Blaine immediately found that he loved watching Kurt do this to him. Kurt's normally perfect hair was messy from sex, his cheeks were still red with a faint blush, his flawless pink lips were swollen from kissing and looked absolutely incredible wrapped around Blaine. He looked so disheveled and undone and so much the

opposite of the pure, perfect facade he put on for everybody else, and Blaine thought that was pretty much the hottest thing ever. He bucked his hips up and thrust into Kurt's mouth, forcing Kurt to take even more of him, which the younger man gladly did. Kurt took him graciously further down and proceeded to do something magical with his tongue on the underside of Blaine's cock.

But then out of nowhere Kurt looked up at Blaine with his mouth still closed around the older man's hard length. His eyes, which always seemed to change color, had looked turquoise earlier this morning but now they were wide and dark with lust. His long, dark eyelashes made him look almost innocent. The look in his eyes, and the way his blushing cheeks were sucked in around Blaine...he just looked so *hungry*. And all of a sudden Blaine could take it no longer.

He came down Kurt's throat without warning, uttering his boyfriend's name as a deep, drawn-out guttural moan. Kurt kept his mouth on Blaine until he was spent, then let him go and smiled the most beautiful, innocent smile up at him.

Kurt moved back up Blaine's body and kissed him sweetly on the mouth. Blaine wrapped his arms around him to pull him closer and moved his hands back around Kurt's sides until they were resting on his ass. Kurt was kissing him without inhibition, not holding anything back, letting Blaine taste himself in his mouth. And suddenly Blaine decided that he wanted a turn.

He could tell that Kurt was already getting hard, so he flipped the two of them over to maneuver Kurt underneath him. Without hesitation, he immediately began licking down Kurt's body, causing the younger man to draw in a gasp and let it out as a breathless sigh.

"Kurt, baby, you've got a very talented mouth," Blaine whispered as he let his tongue caress Kurt's toned stomach. "But if you think we're going to get out of bed this morning before I get a chance to taste that beautiful cock of yours...then you've got another thing coming."

There was licking. And dirty talk. And a blow job that was about to happen. Every single thing about this was turning Kurt on. All of a sudden he felt dizzy and lightheaded and he was really glad he was lying down. *Wednesday mornings should not be allowed to be this sexy.*

Still, he managed to regain control of his coherency at least for a second as Blaine drew out a lick up Kurt's entire shaft.

"Yeah," he was finally able to respond. "That other thing will be me."

Blaine paused for a second so he could shoot a knowing smirk up at his boyfriend.

"Don't worry, I'll be sure that happens," he murmured. And with that, he opened his mouth around Kurt so he could return the favor.

...

Kurt knew that although his daughter was young, this did not mean that she was stupid. He saw the questioning look in Ellie's eyes as Blaine came into the kitchen that morning after getting dressed. He could tell she hadn't missed the way Blaine had wrapped his arms around Kurt's waist from behind and rested his head on his back as the younger man began stacking fresh chocolate chip pancakes up on a plate for everyone. He waited for her inevitable question as to why the two of them seemed especially "lovey-dovey" (as she liked to put it) this morning.

But the question never came. She looked at them with obvious curiosity in her young eyes for a second before picking up her glass of orange juice and taking a long swig.

Kurt had to reluctantly slip away from Blaine's embrace so he could put the plate of pancakes in the center of the table where everyone could reach them. Blaine did not let this go unnoticed. He sneaked up behind Kurt as he made his way to the table and surprised him with a kiss once he'd put the pancakes down.

"You look amazing," Blaine whispered, and Kurt blushed. He'd decided to dress simply today - well, simply for him - in his favorite pair of dark wash skinny jeans and the t-shirt he'd bought at Navy Pier last night. It was black with rainbow lettering that spelled out *Love Is Love*, and Blaine loved the way it fit him snugly and showed off his incredible body a little bit. His hairstyle deviated from his usual perfect coiffure - it looked like he'd deliberately messed it up, then gelled it into disarray.

"Speak for yourself," Kurt giggled in response as he seated himself in his usual chair at the table.

Blaine glanced down at his usual work clothes - dress pants, button down, tie. "I'm nothing special," he admitted. "I look like a lawyer."

Kurt grinned and shot him a wink. "A very sexy lawyer."

Ellie giggled a little bit as she got up to pour herself more orange juice. "Daddy called Blaine sexy!"

"Yeah, well, he's lying," Blaine told her with a shy smile. He picked up the can of whipped cream that was in the middle of the table and sprayed a large dollop onto the stack of pancakes he'd already put on his plate. He went to put the can back with the rest of the toppings, but suddenly glanced over his shoulder to make sure Ellie still had her back to them as she poured more juice for herself. She did. Blaine turned back to Kurt and leaned in close.

"We could probably have some fun with this stuff," he whispered, tantalizingly shaking the can a little bit.

Kurt collapsed into a tiny fit of giggles and blushed again, but he managed to regain his composure and snatch the can of whipped cream away from Blaine. "You naughty boy. I think I need to take this away."

He reached behind himself and placed the can on the counter, as far away from Blaine as possible, but secretly the idea thrilled him. He tried to think unsexy thoughts for the remainder of breakfast, but it proved difficult.

The second she'd swallowed her last bite of pancakes, Ellie had left for school with the girl from down the hall whose mother was driving their car pool group today. That left Blaine to help with the dishes. By now, Kurt had managed to purge his mind of all unclean thoughts that involved Blaine licking whipped cream off his naked body, or vice versa. Not thinking about that meant instead focusing more intensely than necessary on washing the dishes, but it had to be done.

All of a sudden the phone rang and snapped Kurt out of his trance.

He held up his soapy hands and smiled wryly at Blaine. "Could you get that?"

"Sure, no problem." Blaine sidestepped the open door of the dishwasher and reached out to grab the phone at the end of the counter. He smiled as he read the caller ID and answered it.

"Good morning, Emily," he greeted the caller (who, apparently, was Emily). "How's life treating you so far today?"

Kurt waved one soap-bubbly hand from across the kitchen to get Blaine's attention. "Tell her I said hi!"

Blaine giggled. "I'm doing great. Kurt says hi," he told Emily on the other end of the line. There was a pause as Emily said something, then Blaine turned to Kurt with a smile. "She says hi back."

Emily started talking again, and Kurt couldn't hear her end of the conversation so he went back to washing dishes. All of a sudden, though, Blaine spoke again and Kurt couldn't help but be intrigued.

"No, I haven't seen the paper yet," Blaine said. "I recently signed up for a daily subscription so we should be getting today's issue soon...hold on, let me go check because it might even be here already."

Kurt quickly rinsed his hands and turned off the water in the sink. Blaine had never seemed this eager to see the newspaper before. Kurt figured there was probably just something about the event last night that Emily wanted them to see. Still, he couldn't take his eyes off of Blaine as his boyfriend opened the apartment door to check if today's issue of the paper was waiting on the floor outside in the hall yet.

Blaine's back was to Kurt, but Kurt didn't miss the way his boyfriend froze in a state of almost shock as he stared at what was presumably the newspaper on the ground.

"Oh...my...god." Kurt wasn't quite sure if Blaine was talking to him or to Emily or to himself. It didn't matter. He hurried across the kitchen towards where Blaine was standing in the doorway and glanced down at today's issue of the *Tribune* to see what all the fuss was about. And what he saw on the front page stopped him cold.

Kurt was staring at himself. And Blaine. Locked in a passionate kiss the previous night. He figured some photographer who had been commissioned to cover the Navy Pier event had probably taken it, but *still*. On the *front page*. Above the fold and directly below a large, black headline that read *Love Triumphs*.

Blaine bent down to pick up the paper and held it so Kurt could see. Now they were able to read the caption under the picture: *Local attorney and activist Blaine Anderson shares an emotional kiss with his boyfriend, Kurt Hummel, after the announcement that Proposition 21 had become law.*

"I never thought I'd live to see the day...," Kurt murmured in disbelief. And it was true. Not too long ago, he could remember a period in his life when people would have been outraged at seeing this on the front of a major newspaper. Now, though, it seemed that society had opened its minds enough to allow things like this to happen.

As Blaine continued talking to Emily, Kurt took the newspaper and studied it without really reading the article that was printed on the front page about Prop 21. His eyes kept getting drawn back to that picture. He had to admit, it was a beautiful picture of the two of them. It was just the last thing he would have expected to see on the front page of one of the biggest newspapers in the country.

Blaine finally hung up the phone and smiled breathlessly as he turned to Kurt. "Wow."

"Wow is right," Kurt agreed. "This is insane. I mean, it's pretty cool, but it's insane."

"Emily said they've been talking about it on the news all morning, too," Blaine told him. "Even the Today show had a spot about it."

"I need to sit," Kurt murmured as he sank back into his chair. His head was spinning as he tried to wrap his mind around everything and it was making him somewhat dizzy.

Blaine picked up the newspaper from where Kurt had left it on the counter. He stared thoughtfully at it for a second. "I have to admit," he mused thoughtfully, "I adore this picture."

"So do I," Kurt agreed with a tiny smile.

Blaine flipped open the paper to browse through the rest of it as he spoke again. "Anyway. Emily called to ask if we could babysit Parker tonight. I told her we could. She's got a date."

Kurt smiled, genuinely excited for his friend even though she wasn't there. "She does? Aww, that's sweet, I'm happy for her. Who with?"

"A girl she met down at Navy Pier last night. They're going out to dinner tonight around seven, so she's just going to drop Parker off a little bit before then," Blaine told him.

Kurt nodded. "Okay! That's completely fine."

"Also...," Blaine continued, still smiling, "she said they're almost done with Hummel House and it's opening next week. She wants to know if we want to talk at the grand opening, but when she said 'you guys' I think she was really just talking about you."

A sudden realization hit Kurt and he squeezed his eyes shut for a second. "Oh, crap, I feel so bad," he said dejectedly. "I didn't get over there to help her fix the place up as much as I wanted to..."

"Kurt, it's fine," Blaine told him reassuringly. "She knows you and I have both had a lot on our plates lately. I told her I'd talk to you about it...because really, Kurt, the whole point of her building this place was to help people who were in the same situation as you. I have no place getting up in front of a bunch of people like that and pretending I know their pain. Only *you* can empathize with them."

Kurt thought for a second, then nodded. "Okay. I'll talk to her about it when she comes over tonight."

"That's my boy." Blaine smiled and stepped closer to where Kurt was sitting at the kitchen table. "Can I have a kiss?"

Kurt returned his smile as he tilted his face up towards Blaine. When they were both standing, Kurt was taller by a few inches, so he thought it was cute how this time Blaine was the one who had to stoop to reach his lips. Blaine kissed him sweetly for a second before breaking away with a smile.

"All right. I need to get to work," Blaine told him. "I'll see you later on. I love you."

"Love you too." As Blaine turned to leave, Kurt reached out and pulled him into another quick kiss. "Have an amazing day."

Kurt sat there for a moment longer after Blaine left and allowed a tiny smile to appear on his face as he studied the front of the newspaper. He was proud. There was no doubt this picture would still be a bit controversial even today, but at the same time it was a symbol of how far they'd come.

After a few minutes he decided he'd better get up and finish washing the dishes. When he got over to the sink he realized that the can of whipped cream was still on the counter, so he decided he'd better put that away. Before he did, though, he uncapped the can and smirked as he squirted some of the fluffy white cream right into his mouth. Now that he was alone, he was free to think all the sexy thoughts he wanted.

So he let his mind wander as he went back over to the sink and started to finish the dishes once and for all. A chill went down his spine at the memory of Blaine's warm, wet mouth sucking him off earlier this morning. His mind wandered back even further, to last night, and it took every single remaining ounce of Kurt's willpower to restrain himself from humping the counter along the kitchen sink as he thought about *that*.

Out of nowhere there was a sharp knock at the door that snapped him out of his sexual reverie. Kurt turned off the faucet and cursed under his breath as he dried his hands off. It seemed like the universe was aligned in such a way that prevented him from ever getting these stupid dishes clean.

He pulled open the door and squinted in confusion. The man on the other side looked vaguely familiar, but Kurt could not remember for the life of him where he'd seen the guy before. He was tall with broad shoulders and dirty blond hair that was spiked up a little bit.

"Hi," Kurt said warily, wondering why this man was here.

"Hello, Kurt," he responded. Now Kurt was especially confused. *How does he know my name?*

"I believe we've met before," he continued, extending his hand cordially. "Derek Campbell?"

He said his name like a question, hoping it would ring a bell in Kurt's head.

"Oh," he said blankly. "Derek, Blaine's...oh. What are you doing here?"

He didn't mean to make that last part sound quite so rude, but it was too late.

Derek stepped around Kurt to let himself into the apartment. Kurt blinked in disbelief. The *nerve...*

"Blaine's not here, is he?" he asked rather than answer Kurt's question.

"No, he left for work a few minutes ago. I'm sorry, I don't mean to sound rude, but you never told me why you're here." The guy was pretty tall and muscular and Kurt thought he could probably hide behind him if he tried, so it wasn't like he could do anything to physically force Derek to leave. He left the hallway door open just in case.

"Yeah, I figured he'd be leaving around now," Derek said. "I didn't want to run into him on my way up here, so I took the stairs instead of risking an awkward encounter in the elevator."

"And you mean to tell me *this* isn't awk-...," Kurt cut himself off and narrowed his eyes. "You mean to tell me you just hiked up twenty flights of stairs?"

Derek shrugged as if it were obvious. "I knew that seeing such a gorgeous man would be worth it."

Kurt was under the assumption that Derek was talking about Blaine. "I just told you, Blaine's not here."

"Who says I'm talking about Blaine?" Derek was practically leering at Kurt and Kurt would be lying if he said he wasn't the tiniest bit uncomfortable with all this.

He blinked and took a step back away from Derek. "What do you want from me?"

Derek stepped forward towards him as soon as Kurt had stepped back. "I came here because I wanted to let you know how incredible you were last night," he said in a low voice, and Kurt could tell that Derek was fully aware of the sexual implications of that sentence. "Watching you sing, Kurt...I have to admit, I fell in love."

Kurt's eyes went wide. No. This was not happening. What *was* this? People did not just go over to their ex-boyfriend's apartment to tell the new boyfriend of said ex that they were in love with him. That just wasn't something that normal people did.

"Excuse me?" he asked after a few seconds of silence.

"I thought you were gorgeous that morning when I first saw you on the courthouse steps," Derek continued. "Up to that point I was still bitter about Blaine dumping me for you, but when I saw you I immediately could see why he'd wanted you so much. And then, like I said, hearing you sing last night...*did* something to me. I just wanted to stop by and tell you that. In person."

He paused for a second. "And also I wanted to apologize for being...less than cordial when we first met. I feel like I was a little rude to you, and last night when you were talking about everything you've been through and then you sang...I don't know, I just felt bad. So I'm sorry."

Kurt bowed his head humbly. Derek's first few comments had honestly weirded him out a little bit, but his apology seemed sincere. "Thank you."

"So you forgive me?" Derek asked, a little too hopefully.

All of a sudden Kurt's mood changed completely. He stared at Derek in complete and utter disbelief for a second, determined to make Derek really think about what he'd just said. The other man's mere presence here was starting to annoy Kurt greatly.

"I don't forgive very easily," he said coldly. "The last time I forgave someone, that person ended up hurting me even more some years down the road. I learned my lesson from that. And now *you* decide to invite yourself over, confess your so-called love for me, and expect me to forgive you for being a total asshole to me when we first met? I don't think so."

"But Kurt...," Derek stepped forward and reached out towards Kurt's face. His fingers brushed Kurt's soft cheek for a fleeting second before the countertenor stepped away in repulsion.

"Don't *touch* me," he practically spat. "I think it would be wise of you to leave."

"Kurt, wait," Derek begged. "Just hear me out, okay? I *know* what I felt last night when you sang. It was love. You *moved* me, Kurt. If you would just give me a chance..."

"Ew." Kurt made a face. "And actually, it was infatuation, and you should really learn to differentiate between the two." He looked straight into the other man's eyes as he continued. "Look, Derek, you and I don't even *know* each other. I'm not going to 'give you a chance.' That's ridiculous...I mean, why would you even think that that would be an option? You can't just come into someone's home and expect him to leave his boyfriend for you."

He didn't even give Derek a chance to respond to his rhetorical question. "I love Blaine. And Blaine loves me. What he and I share...we have something beautiful and special between us. I just wish you would respect that."

Derek stared at him for a long time. Kurt stared back to let him know he meant business.

"Fine," Derek grumbled after a long time. "But just so you know, Kurt, I'm never one to give up on what I want. There's so much more that I could give you than Blaine can. And now you've just made me *that* much more determined."

"Blaine and I waited ten *years* for each other," Kurt reminded Derek as he stepped forward to back him up towards the still-open door. After taking a few steps, he realized that Derek was standing still, letting Kurt get closer to him instead of backing up. He stopped walking.

"I don't know who you think you are, but I am *not* going to give up on something wonderful that has been in the making for a decade," he continued. "And if you don't get out of here right now, may I remind you

that I have the best lawyer in town and he would be happy to assist me in taking you to court for trespassing. Or giving you a restraining order."

Kurt wasn't going to go that far, because he already had enough legal junk to deal with regarding his Supreme Court case and the possibility of that happening. Still, it was nice to scare Derek just a little bit.

Derek didn't speak for a long time. When he finally did, his voice was practically a whisper.

"Okay," he said. "I'll go. I just thought you deserved to know your options."

"The only option I choose is Blaine," Kurt said firmly. "Goodbye, Derek."

But Derek didn't listen. "Just know that if you ever change your mind, you have other opt-"

"*Goodbye, Derek,*" Kurt repeated, this time not bothering to hide the annoyance in his voice.

Derek headed for the door all but turned around at the last second. "Y'know what? I think I figured out why I love you so much. You remind me a *lot* of Chris Colfer. I've had a crush on him since I was fifteen..."

Kurt rolled his eyes and clenched his teeth, past the point of annoyance. "I swear to god, the next person who compares me to him..."

He strutted straight up to the door as Derek left and made a point of slamming it the second the other man had stepped out into the hall. He quickly turned the lock and slid the deadbolt into place, then crossed the room and let himself collapse onto the couch. Turning over so he was lying on his stomach, he buried his face in a pillow and took a moment to scream out his frustration.

"Karofsky."

The gruff prison guard's voice calling out to him immediately pulled Dave out of his light sleep. As usual, Kurt had haunted his dreams. Since he'd been imprisoned here, no night had passed without Dave's subconscious conjuring up images of his former boyfriend's face. In the dreams, Kurt's indescribably beautiful color-changing eyes were always brimming with tears and tracks of more tears shone on his cheeks, which were still marred with burns from boiling water like they'd been the last time Dave had seen him. Dream Kurt was forcing Dave to look at what he'd done.

He rolled over on his uncomfortable mattress to face the barred door, where the guard was standing. "Yeah," he mumbled, rubbing the sleep away from his eyes.

The guard held up a rolled-up newspaper. "I thought this might interest you."

Dave sat up as the guard tossed the paper in between the bars of his cell. It slid across the concrete floor a little bit and ended up on the complete opposite side of the tiny cell from where Dave's bed was. Dave knew the guard had done this on purpose, forcing him to get up and fetch the paper like some kind of fucking dog instead of simply handing it to him.

Still, his interest had been sufficiently piqued. Usually the prisoners only got to read the paper if they took one of the daily copies from the library cart that came around a few times a week. He wondered what had caught the guard's attention to the point that he would think of one specific prisoner to whom it might be interesting.

He stood up and went to go pick up the newspaper, expecting it to be the usual *Columbus Dispatch* - this was, after all, central Ohio. Dave knew he should have been surprised when he unrolled the paper and saw that this was in fact the *Chicago Tribune*. But he barely had time to notice he was reading a different paper, because the front page itself shook him to the core.

Kurt was *right there*, beautiful as ever, kissing Blaine. Both of them were completely wrapped up in each other: Kurt's arms around Blaine, holding him close; Blaine with one hand on Kurt's back and the other on his cheek, brushing away a tear with his thumb. The love between the two men in the picture was so tangible that it practically radiated off the page.

And then there was Kurt himself. His eyes were closed, but Dave still remembered their striking color and how it always seemed to change. His lips were locked passionately with Blaine's, but Dave still remembered their soft caress of his own mouth. His skin was perfectly clear, but Dave still remembered the scars and burns that had once tarnished the smooth, pale softness. Scars and burns that *he* had been responsible for.

With clammy palms and trembling hands, Dave returned to sit on the edge of his mattress as he perused the lengthy article that the picture accompanied. Apparently there was some important new amendment to the Illinois state constitution that allowed same-sex marriage, and there had been some big celebration

in Chicago last night. Dave didn't care about the details of that so much. He skimmed down the page until he came across one of their names.

The musical portion of the evening culminated in a powerful performance by Blaine Anderson. One of the most prominent attorneys in Chicago, Anderson has also been instrumental in pushing for support of Proposition 21 and also has become a household name on the local music scene.

Anderson began his set with the a capella cover of Michael Jackson's "Man in the Mirror" that catapulted his rise to musical notoriety some months ago. He followed up with an upbeat acoustic take on Matchbox 20's "How Far We've Come."

"I see this song as being about the end of the world, but it's got kind of a sarcastic tone to it," Anderson said before he performed this number. "I believe the world is burning to the ground. Oh well, I guess we're gonna find out. Let's see how far we've come.' The way I see it, it's like, if the world were ending, would we look back on our behavior as a society and see that there's been some much-needed changes that have taken place."

After two memorable songs, it seemed hard to believe that the best was yet to come.

Following his second song, Anderson was joined onstage by his boyfriend, Kurt Hummel. After suffering physical and verbal abuse at the hands of his former boyfriend in a previous relationship, Hummel moved from Columbus to Chicago with his daughter earlier this year and has since found solace in Anderson, his best-friend-turned-significant-other.

Together, Hummel and Anderson performed a moving cover of Muse's powerful anthem "Invincible."

"The love between Blaine and Kurt was so strong, and all of us in the audience could see it in the way they looked at each other while they sang," one attendee said after the performance. "Their story of how they waited so long for each other and how Kurt overcame such horrible abuse was so inspiring to me and many others. I find it absolutely beautiful that things were able to fall into place for them like that."

Dave had to stop reading for a second. He didn't even know the name of the person who had made this comment, and yet his or her words were making him tear up. In all honesty, he was happy for Kurt. He knew Kurt deserved somebody who loved him the way he deserved to be loved and who would never hurt him. If that person was Blaine, then Dave didn't have a problem with it at all. Dave, after all, had been entrusted with Kurt's precious heart and had ended up breaking it. Now as he thought about it, he was

eternally grateful that Blaine had been there to pick up the pieces - not just of Kurt's heart, but of Kurt himself.

Still, every word he read was like another stab to his heart, reminding him of what he'd done. He would never stop hating himself for it. He wished he could see Kurt and Ellie one more time - just once - and tell them how sorry he was. How much of a stupid fucking asshole he'd been to treat Kurt like that. How he'd been totally blind to how lucky he was to have someone as amazing as Kurt. He knew Kurt would probably never forgive him for what he'd done - and rightfully so. Dave knew he didn't deserve Kurt's forgiveness. He just thought it might ease his internal pain just the slightest bit if he could say he was sorry.

Dave took a deep breath and forced himself to continue reading.

The final song of Anderson's set was a surprise to everyone, including Hummel.

"I can't even explain how proud I am of you for putting [everything] behind you and coming up here to sing with me tonight...I hope this gives you some insight into exactly how I feel," Anderson told Hummel onstage right before his final song. "This is for you, Kurt. I love you more than you'll ever know."

The two were seated on stools as a stage hand came out and handed Anderson his guitar. The audience was completely silent and Hummel was brought to tears as Anderson serenaded him in front of everybody with an acoustic cover of Enrique Iglesias's "Hero."

Dave abruptly stopped reading once again. He thought back to the one and only time he'd ever done anything that had brought Kurt to tears of joy. On their eight-year anniversary, which turned out to be the last anniversary they spent together, they'd found a sitter for Ellie and driven up to Cedar Point that evening. He'd taken Kurt on the Ferris wheel once the sun was down. Once they got to the top, Dave had told him to look down at the beach. Right there, on the sandy shores of Lake Erie, he had arranged for every single one of their friends to hold up lit candles and stand in such a way so that the candles spelled out *I LOVE YOU KURT* when seen from above.

He remembered the way Kurt had burst into tears right away and hugged him as he blubbered about how this was the sweetest, most romantic thing anybody had ever done for him. Dave had wrapped his arms around Kurt and pressed him closer as he closed his eyes and wished that that moment could last forever. Now, even in this bleak prison cell, the memory of Kurt's warm, soft body in his arms seemed more alive

than ever. He thought about how much he would give to hold Kurt one more time, for just one more second, then canceled out all thoughts of that. He should never be allowed to touch Kurt ever again.

He couldn't take it anymore. He flung the newspaper across the cell like a Frisbee. It smacked against the concrete wall adjacent to the barred door and fell to the floor with pages scattering everywhere. He lay down on his hard mattress and pulled his knees to his chest, curling himself into a ball, a shell of the man he'd once been.

This was, after all, a medium-security state penitentiary, and most of the men here weren't ones to cry. Up until this point, Dave had done a pretty good job of holding back the tears that constantly threatened to leak from his eyes every morning when he woke up after seeing Kurt in his dreams. But this was different. He wasn't sure why he was crying anymore. All he knew was that in a strange way, it felt good to finally cry.

"Shut the fuck up, Karofsky."

The voice came from the cell across from him. Dave couldn't remember the guy's name, but he was a big, meaty guy with lots of muscle who was in for attempted robbery or something like that. He was lying on his back on his own mattress, staring up at the ceiling even as he addressed Dave.

"I dunno much about being gay or whatever, but stop fucking crying," the guy continued. "You hurt him. He's gone, and you gotta accept that. You don't deserve him."

Dave gasped out one more sob, then blinked his wet eyes and willed himself to stop the tears. He wasn't sure how the dude had known why he was crying, but whatever. Lucky guess, probably. It didn't matter. Dave had been telling himself that ever since he'd come here, but it brought him some strange comfort to hear that from someone who didn't even know him.

"Thanks," he said weakly, because the guy had just told him exactly what he needed to hear.

...

Kurt knew he shouldn't have downed an entire Starbucks caramel mocha in the time it took for him to get from the coffee shop drive thru to the middle school, but unfortunately he had. And of course that meant that he desperately needed to find a restroom as soon as he got to work, otherwise he was pretty sure he would explode.

With Buckley being an inner city school and therefore not the most equipped with amenities, there were no separate bathrooms for staff members. Kurt didn't even care about this at the moment. He paced quickly down the main hallway en route to the nearest commode, but suddenly he was stopped in his tracks by a sudden female voice.

"Kurt!"

He rolled his eyes and turned around. *Are you kidding me?* He forced himself to plaster on a smile despite his desperate need for a bathroom as he turned around and found himself looking at Tracy Mitchell. She had been the one to inform him of the union meeting he hadn't known about because he wasn't a member, so he figured she probably just wanted to know how that was working out.

(But really, he thought, whatever she had to say couldn't wait just a couple more minutes?)

"Hi!" he greeted her cheerfully.

"I just wanted to thank you," she said, grabbing his hand and giving it a quick squeeze. "The advice you gave me - about how sometimes all it takes is just a little more explanation and in-depth coverage of a topic - it really worked. I just graded my kids' tests from last week, and the class average is up to an 80 percent."

Kurt's smile turned genuine. "That's great!" he told her sincerely. "That's already a huge improvement, so as long as you keep it up I think you should see them doing even better."

He had already taken about half a step backwards to turn around and head for the bathroom once again, but unfortunately Tracy wasn't finished. "It was so simple, really," she continued. "I can't believe I hadn't thought of doing that before. Thank you, again."

"You're welcome." He gave her another polite smile but didn't even get a chance to turn around this time before she spoke again.

"Hey, by the way. Did you ever find out what was going on with the union situation?"

In that moment, Kurt decided that Tracy Mitchell had been placed on this planet for the sole purpose of ensuring he never make it to the bathroom.

"Um, I called the guy," he said. "Sean Jeffries. He said I wasn't in the union yet. They weren't letting me in."

"Why not?" Tracy asked, and Kurt mentally kicked himself. Now he would be stuck here explaining the details instead of going to the bathroom. He knew he should have made up some lie and told her it was a simple mistake and they'd forgotten to send him confirmation that he'd been accepted as a member, or something.

"Because I'm gay." He clenched his teeth and this time actually made an attempt to turn around. He was open about his sexuality to his fellow staff members here at work, so that particular bit of information wouldn't have come as a surprise to her, but it kept her talking, which was not Kurt's intention.

She reached forward and grabbed his wrist before he got very far, forcing him to turn around. "That's not right. I hope you're doing something about it."

"I am. I talked to Blaine and he's getting things figured out for me." There was no way he was going to mention the words *Supreme Court* to anybody unless it was absolutely necessary. He smiled wryly at her. "Look, Tracy, I really appreciate you being concerned, but I'm kind of in a hurry...I'll tell you all about it once we get things sorted out."

"Oh, I'm sorry." She let go of his wrist. "I'll see you later."

"Bye," he called over his shoulder as she turned the other way, then he practically sprinted the rest of the way down the hall towards the men's bathroom.

He threw open the bathroom door and was immediately thankful that no students were in there. No kid wanted to pee with a teacher in there, and quite frankly he would have found it a little awkward, too. He did what he had to do as quickly as possible, flushed, and went to wash his hands.

Right after he turned on the faucet, the door swung open and a student stepped into the bathroom. Kurt glanced up at the mirror out of curiosity to see if he knew the kid. He did not. In fact, he didn't know many of the kids here with the exception of those in his class. He pumped soap from the dispenser on the wall and went back to washing his hands.

But the kid noticed him - recognized him, even. He stopped in his tracks and turned towards Kurt at the sink.

"Hey, I know you," he said as the recognition set in. "You're the new music teacher."

Kurt glanced up and met his eyes through the mirror as he kept running the water over his hands. "Yes, I am."

He hadn't been able to read the kid's expression up to this point, but Kurt could only describe the look on his face as a sneer as he stepped closer to him.

"They were talking about you on the news this morning," he said.

Kurt had an uneasy feeling in his stomach, but not the slightest clue of what to do about it.

"Oh, yeah, I heard about that," he said after a few seconds. "I didn't see-"

But he didn't get a chance to finish his response because all of a sudden he felt his wrist being twisted as he was pulled away from the sink. Before Kurt really got to focus on what was happening, the kid had his hands around his neck and was forcing him back against the wall.

"Fucking faggot," he spat, the words flying like venom in Kurt's face. "Why're you even allowed to teach here?"

Kurt was really unable to give a shit at the present moment about what the kid was saying. He was just focused on trying to get the hell away from him. The kid was pretty tall, taller than Kurt was - upon first glance, Kurt had assumed he was an eighth grader who had recently shot through a growth spurt, or maybe he'd been held back for a few years, as that was not uncommon among students at this school.

"Get *off* of me," he growled as he managed to pry the kid's hands away from his throat, still struggling to break away from the wall. He knew that back in Ohio there had been strict rules about teachers and students and physical contact, but he wasn't sure about those rules here. Besides, in this particular situation, it was all in the name of self-defense. The dude had been trying to strangle him, for crying out loud. If any other administrator happened to walk into the bathroom and see this, Kurt would be off the hook once he explained his side.

All of this flashed through Kurt's mind in about a fraction of a nanosecond, because all of a sudden a sharp voice called through the bathroom.

"Hey!"

Both Kurt and the kid who'd attacked him glanced up when they heard the sudden voice call out. They both expected it to be a staff member, but for some reason Kurt was immediately glad when he realized that it was another student. In fact, it was Andre, from Kurt's music class.

Everything was frozen for a second. Kurt and the kid both stared in shock at Andre, who stared right back at them - actually, he stared mostly at the other kid. The only sound came from the running water of the faucet, which Kurt hadn't gotten a chance to turn off.

"Leave Mr. Hummel *alone*," Andre demanded as he stepped into the bathroom and let the door slam shut behind him.

The kid stepped away from Kurt, who immediately started breathing easier, but snickered. "His name's Mr. Homo?"

"That's not what I said and you know it," Andre snapped. "Leave him *alone*."

Kurt expected the kid to laugh and try to go after him again, or even worse, go after Andre. This kid was probably in eighth grade even though he looked like he probably should have been in high school by now, and Andre was a little sixth grader who hadn't finished his growth spurt yet. Which is why Kurt became almost paralyzed with shock as the kid stood there for a second, eyes wide with fear, and darted out of the bathroom.

Kurt exhaled a deep breath once the kid was gone. "Did you know that guy?" he asked Andre.

Andre shook his head. "I don't know him, but I've seen him around. He picks fights with a lot of kids but I think he's been getting in trouble a lot lately."

"Ah." Kurt nodded and went to turn off the water at the sink where he'd washed his hands. He figured the kid had probably gotten scared and ran away because he knew he'd be in even deeper shit than usual for trying to beat up on a teacher. "Anyway...thanks."

"No problem, Mr. H. See ya in a little bit." Andre shrugged as if it were no big deal, and Kurt turned to leave the bathroom.

"Hey, by the way," Andre called after him right as he reached for the door. "Cool shirt."

Kurt had reported the incident to the front office right away. He figured there wasn't much they could do since he didn't know who the kid was, but he knew it was worth telling the administration - especially since this kid was known for picking fights with other kids, as Andre had said.

He stood at the doorway of his classroom as the kids came in, as usual, and greeted them. Some of them stopped to tell him that they'd seen him perform, whether they'd been at Navy Pier last night or had heard about the events on the news. Some of the girls giggled shyly as they informed him that his boyfriend was cute, to which Kurt replied, "He is, isn't he?" and smiled. Some of them stared at his shirt but didn't say anything; some of them complimented him on it as Andre had done.

It was the closest he'd been to actually "coming out" since he'd moved to Chicago. Since he'd been here, he had never straight up told anyone, "I'm gay," and he didn't plan on doing that today, either. So far he'd let everyone he'd met here figure him out for themselves, and that was his plan for today as well. He was so sick of the notion that everyone who was gay was expected to officially come out and make a big deal out of it.

The bell rang, signaling the start of class, and Kurt shut the door. He headed over to the piano - which, as usual, was stacked high with papers due to the limited amount of storage space he'd been allotted in this classroom - and began to mark the attendance down on the appropriate sheet.

"Good afternoon," he said, glancing around the room to make sure everyone was in their seats. They were. Apparently several other teachers at this school had problems with students constantly skipping their class, but Kurt hadn't noticed too much of that for himself yet. He marked the attendance as 100% and set the clipboard on top of the piano so that he'd remember to take it up to the office later.

"I hope you all enjoyed your day off yesterday." He sorted through some papers on the piano for a second, looking for the music he wanted to use today, then pulled it out of the stack and set it aside. Before he continued, he made sure he was looking at the class as a whole so they knew he meant this. "Also, for those of you who either were at Navy Pier last night, or you heard about it on the news, or whatever...thank you so much. Several of you were telling me about it as you were coming in today. That means so much to me. I mean it."

One girl in the back row raised her hand with a question. Kurt nodded at her. "Kaylie?"

"What was at Navy Pier last night?" Kaylie asked quietly, obviously shy about the fact that she seemed to be the only person in the class who hadn't heard about it yet.

"There was a big celebration for Prop 21. They had some musical performances, and I sang a song with my boyfriend," he told her.

Kurt knew that back when he was in middle school, if a teacher had acted similar to the way he himself was acting now, there would inevitably be one smart-ass kid to raise his hand and ask what everyone had already figured out - "So you're gay, right?" - just for the sake of hearing the teacher say it. He waited. But none of them said a word, with the exception of Kaylie, who smiled and said, "That's cool."

They didn't end up doing anything that Kurt had planned that day, but he found he didn't mind. Somehow, the kids managed to convince him to sing Invincible for them, since some of them hadn't seen him perform and wanted to hear the song. He'd been unsure at first - "It sounds a lot cooler when both of us sing it, so you can hear the harmonies" - but they were persistent, so he managed to find the copy of the sheet music he'd downloaded and printed, then sight-read the piano part to accompany himself while he sang.

To Kurt's immense surprise and delight, they loved it. All the kids clapped for him when he finished. After that, for the rest of the class period, they just talked. Every single one of them, in one big discussion. Some of the kids started asking him things - about himself, about Blaine, about his family - and he was more than happy to answer. It suddenly occurred to him that his students were genuinely taking an interest in him because he had taken an interest in them. And this, he thought - having such an open rapport with his students, where they could just talk about anything like this - was so important to him.

His heart was overflowing with happiness, so much that he was almost sad when the bell rang to announce the end of the class period.

"Have a wonderful rest of the day," he called as the students began packing up their things and leaving the room. He smiled to himself as he went to sit at his desk and opened his gradebook. He was in an incredibly good mood, unpleasant events of the day involving Derek and that kid who'd attacked him in the bathroom already forgotten, so he decided he was going to give each student some extra credit for class participation today.

"Hey, um, Mr. Hummel?"

Kurt glanced up from his gradebook. Standing next to his desk was Michael Horowitz, the tall, skinny seventh grader who sat right in the middle of the baritone section. He was fiddling with the straps on his backpack, which told Kurt right away that he was nervous about something.

"Hey, Michael. What's up?"

"I was...I was just wondering if I could talk to you. Are you busy?"

"Not at all. Have a seat." Kurt now kept an extra chair right by his desk, as quite a few of his students had taken to staying after class to talk to him about things - family issues, trouble with schoolwork - he would listen to anything, and they knew it, which is why they felt more comfortable talking to him than to any other teacher in the school.

Michael took a seat in the blue plastic seat. He took his backpack off and pushed it under the chair, but not having the straps to fiddle with suddenly made him seem even more uptight. Kurt noticed this. Whenever one of his students wanted to talk to him like this, he always did his best to put him or her at ease, so that's exactly what he did now.

"Is everything okay? You seem a little nervous, and I just want you to know that you guys can tell me anything. My number one priority is making sure you all know that."

Michael nodded. "Yeah, um, I'm fine...it's just...when we were all talking today...it was...I just..."

He couldn't even finish the sentence he'd barely started. Before either of them knew what was happening, he let his head fall into his hands and he began to cry.

Kurt flashed through a mental review of everything he knew about Michael Horowitz. He was thirteen, in the seventh grade, and got B's and C's - which would have been relatively average at any other junior high in the country, but it made him one of the better students here. He was really into sports, especially baseball. Every single day when Kurt left work, he always saw Michael and some other Buckley kids playing a pickup game in the vacant lot across the street from the school. Since the school couldn't afford to sponsor sports teams, it was the only chance these kids had to play. And even from the few seconds of their games Kurt managed to catch as he walked to his car, he could tell that Michael was pretty damn good.

He certainly had never expected Michael to be the crying type. All of a sudden, for the first time since he'd began his stint as unofficial guidance counselor to the kids in his class, Kurt had absolutely no idea what to say.

But thankfully, he didn't have to say anything.

"I can't fucking keep it a secret anymore. I have to tell someone," Michael managed to choke out around one last sob. He let his gaze drop to the floor, suddenly unable to meet Kurt's eyes. "I'm gay."

Suddenly it all made sense to Kurt as to why Michael had seemed so nervous. There was no doubt in his mind that this was the first time Michael had ever told anyone - all the more reason to be as understanding as possible.

"Okay," he said gently, nodding. "You know what? That's perfectly all right. There's nothing wrong with it at all."

"Try telling that to my dad," Michael muttered, his voice still thick with tears. "This past weekend, all he talked about was how 'Prop 21 better not pass so those fucking fags can get married.'" He made air quotes around the words his father had apparently said. "This morning he called and canceled his subscription to the *Tribune* when he saw you and Blaine Anderson on the front page."

"What about your mom?" Kurt asked out of curiosity. "Does she feel the same way as your dad, or is she more accepting of things like that?"

Michael cast his eyes towards the ground again. "My mom died of an overdose when I was five," he mumbled. "I live with my older brother and my dad. He works three jobs. My brother is legally old enough to work, but all he does is sit around and get high all day. One of the main reasons I go out and play baseball so much is because I can't stand being at home."

"Oh," Kurt said quietly. "I...I'm so sorry. I lost my mom when I was eight. My dad remarried when I was in high school, but for a number of years it was just the two of us."

He paused for a second. "Look, Michael, there's nothing that says you *have* to come out to your dad. There's nothing that says you have to come out to *anyone*. Nobody ever expects a heterosexual person to come out and say 'I'm straight.' But when people start thinking that someone might be gay, they speculate and try to guess when that person is going to come clean, almost to the point where that person starts to

feel like he or she is almost *expected* to come out. It makes me sad that some people still can't see being gay as being a totally normal thing, and they expect us to announce ourselves to the whole world."

Michael thought about this for a second. "Seems kinda like a double standard, now that you put it like that," he said.

"You know what? It really is," Kurt agreed. "I came out to my dad and to my main group of friends when I was sixteen. After that, though...I decided that I was going to live my life the way I wanted and let people figure me out for themselves. And I hope someday society will realize that it's putting a ton of pressure on us, especially on kids your age, who are just starting to figure this stuff out. I remember being that age, and it's tough. Not only was it like, 'Oh, I like boys' but also there was this little voice in my head saying, 'So when are you going to come out?'"

Michael nodded. "Yeah, I've got that voice in my head too. It's annoying as crap."

"Blame the way our society thinks for that," Kurt told him. "And I'm not trying to say you should hide who you are for your whole life. The closet can be a very stifling place. I guess what I'm trying to say is...only *you* can decide who you want to come out to. You obviously just told me, and I'm fine with that, but don't feel like you have to tell anyone else unless you want to and you're ready. Don't put that pressure on yourself and make yourself feel like you *have* to come out to the whole world. Y'know, hopefully someday soon people will come to terms with the fact that we're all human. Gay, straight, bi, whatever. Love is love, and we shouldn't have to justify it."

Michael closed his eyes for a second as he digested all this, then looked at Kurt again.

"Okay," he said, nodding. "I definitely feel better now that I told you and got it off my chest, but I think you definitely have a point. Like you said, straight people don't have to tell everyone that they're straight, so why do people like us have to do that?"

He didn't answer his own rhetorical question. Instead, he asked another one, this one intending an answer.

"How did you make it?" he asked quietly. "I saw a replay of the concert thing on the news this morning, and they showed you talking about all the crap you've been through..."

Kurt thought for a moment. In all honesty, even *he* didn't know how he'd made it.

Well, actually he did.

"It wasn't easy," he admitted. "When I first came here to Chicago with my daughter, we showed up at Blaine Anderson's apartment at one in the morning, and we were both pretty shaken. My...uh, my ex...he'd been pretty brutal that night, and I already had some suitcases packed and in the car in case we needed to make an escape...and we did. I was completely broken. I was all bruised and battered, and I had burns on my face from one time when he'd thrown a pot of boiling water at me...it wasn't pretty."

Michael winced but didn't say anything. Kurt continued. "I honestly don't think I would have made it if I hadn't had someone like Blaine. Even before he became my boyfriend, he was always completely supportive and understanding. He'd always been that way, even back when we were in high school. In fact, the main group of people I hung around with in high school were all very supportive and accepting. I think the most important thing you can do is just to surround yourself with people like that. It doesn't necessarily have to be people you're romantically interested in - just people that will have your back." He smiled. "And after the discussion we all had today, I'd be willing to bet that every single person in this class - myself included - would be more than happy to stand with you and support you."

Michael let out a relieved-sounding sigh and, for the first time since the beginning of their discussion, smiled. "Thanks so much, Mr. Hummel. I actually feel pretty awesome about everything now."

"No problem," Kurt told him. "If you ever have trouble with anything and you need someone to talk to, you can always come to me. Okay?"

Michael nodded. "Yeah. Thanks again."

Kurt quickly wrote him a pass to his next class, scribbled his signature at the bottom, and handed it to him. "Take it easy, Michael."

"You too." He picked up his backpack from under the chair and headed for the door. "See ya tomorrow."

The door fell shut behind Michael as he left, leaving Kurt alone. For once, though, the stifling loneliness of being in this room all by himself didn't bother him. He was too happy to care.

...

Blaine arrived home that evening at the same time as a pizza delivery man, who was just waiting to knock on the apartment door.

"Oh. Hey, don't worry about that," he told the guy, pulling out his wallet. Kurt must have ordered pizza for Ellie and Parker. "I live here, I'll just pay you now. How much?"

The delivery man glanced at the receipt that had been taped to the top box. "Two large one-toppings? That'll be seventeen fifty."

Blaine peeled a twenty out of his wallet and handed it to the man along with instructions to keep the change as he accepted the pizza boxes. He headed into the apartment only to find Kurt in the kitchen, mixing ingredients into a large bowl.

"You're still making food even though you just ordered this?" Blaine set the pizza boxes down on the counter and gave Kurt a kiss hello.

"Ellie asked if we could get pizza, and I figured that would be fun for her and Parker. Emily called, she's gonna be dropping him off any minute now." He held up the bowl, which Blaine now noticed was filled with lettuce, tomatoes, croutons and shredded carrots. "And I was in the mood for salad, so I made a whole bunch."

"Ah. Mind if I have some of that?" Blaine nodded towards the salad, and Kurt shook his head. He reached into the cabinet and got himself a bowl, then served himself some of the salad with the plastic tongs from the utensil drawer.

"So how was your day?" he asked Kurt as he opened the refrigerator and surveyed the several bottles of salad dressing that were there.

"Strange, but ultimately good." Kurt shrugged. "Derek came over this morning."

Blaine practically dropped the bottle of house Italian he'd just taken out of the fridge. This was the last thing he'd expected to hear. "*What?*"

"Yeah, right after you left for work." Kurt opened the top pizza box and took one of the smaller edge pieces. "He wanted to 'confess his love' for me. Not even kidding. I can't make this stuff up." He rolled his eyes and popped the entire small piece of pizza into his mouth.

All of a sudden Blaine was very uneasy as he remembered something. "I gave him a key to the apartment back when we were dating. I don't know if he still remembers he has it, or whatever, but now that I think about that, I'm getting the locks changed."

"Blaine, you don't have to do that. Don't go to all that trouble. I'll be fine," Kurt reassured him. "I made sure he knew that I love *you* and I want to be with *you*."

"I know, but I also know that Derek can be very persistent. I don't want him trying anything," Blaine said as he lazily drizzled some dressing on top of his salad. "Really, Kurt, I'd feel a lot better if we just changed the locks."

Kurt thought about this for a second, then nodded. "Okay."

Blaine picked up a fork and speared a few leaves of lettuce out of his bowl. "So other than that, how was your day?"

"Work was eventful. I almost got assaulted in the bathroom and one of my students came out to me." Kurt said this nonchalantly, as if it happened every day.

Blaine immediately set his bowl down on the counter and crossed the kitchen to where Kurt was. He placed his hands gently on the younger man's waist and looked him over. "Jesus, Kurt, are you okay? What kind of idiot kid-"

Kurt laughed. Blaine couldn't believe Kurt was *laughing*. "Blaine, I'm fine. It was some homophobic moron. He didn't hurt me, and thankfully one of the kids in my music class happened to walk in before things could get too intense. I told the office, and they're going to keep an eye out for this kid because apparently he's one to stir up trouble all the time. I'm not worried about anything."

Blaine pulled Kurt completely into an embrace and pressed him close. "It just breaks my heart to hear about anyone wanting to hurt you," he whispered.

Kurt smiled at him. "I won't let anyone hurt me. I'm a survivor, remember?"

Blaine had just moved in to give him a kiss, and their lips were millimeters apart when they heard a knock at the door.

Kurt gave Blaine a wry smile as he reluctantly slipped away. "That must be Emily and Parker. I'll make it up to you later." He shot Blaine a wink, then turned to answer the door.

"Hi!" he greeted them cheerfully. Emily looked amazing - her dark hair was completely straightened and fell in soft layers around her shoulders, and her outfit was practically ripped from the pages of *Vogue*. Kurt gave her major mental props for the burgundy sweater that looked fantastic with her skin tone and the knee-length pencil skirt that looked exactly like the one from the new Alexander McQueen line. "Parker, I think Ellie's out watching TV." He stepped aside so the little boy could get through, then addressed Emily again. "Do you want to come in for a few minutes?"

She shook her head. "Oh, no thank you. Savannah actually lives in this same building, so I'm here to pick her up, too."

"Aww! Blaine, did you hear that?" Kurt turned to his boyfriend with an excited smile. "Emily's new girlfriend lives here, too. What a small world."

"She's not *officially* my girlfriend yet, but I have a good feeling." Emily smiled hopefully. "I'm hoping to be back around nine or so. I don't want to stay out too late because Parker needs to get to bed, but I didn't want you guys to have to worry about getting him to sleep."

"It's no problem, really," Kurt reassured her. "You go have an *amazing* time. You deserve it."

"Thank you so much." She gave them an appreciative smile and turned her chair around so she could roll herself down the hall towards the elevators. "I'll see you guys later."

She hadn't gotten very far when all of a sudden Kurt remembered the conversation he'd had with Blaine this morning. He called out to her. "Emily! Hold on."

"Yeah?" She turned her chair back around.

"Blaine told me you wanted me to be the keynote speaker at the grand opening of Hummel House next week." He smiled. "I'd be honored."

Emily seemed ecstatic to hear this. She let an elated smile take over her face. "Oh my gosh, thank you so much! I'm still trying to get all the details worked out but I'll call you when I can figure out more information."

"Sounds great. Thank *you*," Kurt said appreciatively. "I don't want to hold you up any longer. Go have fun."

"Okay!" She turned her chair back around and waved over her shoulder. "Bye, guys!"

Kurt smiled and turned to Blaine as he shut the door. "I'm so happy for her. I hope everything works out with her and Savannah."

"I do, too." Blaine wrapped an arm around Kurt's waist as they headed back out to the kitchen, then called out to the living room where Ellie and Parker were watching cartoons. "Kids, come on out and get some pizza."

When Ellie was little, her daddy had showed her how to clean up after herself when she was finished eating. So when she was all done with her pizza, she threw her paper plate in the trash and reached up to put her empty glass in the sink.

"What do you wanna do now?" she asked Parker, who was still sitting at the kitchen table.

Her friend shrugged. "I don't know. You pick."

Ellie thought for a moment. She actually kind of really wanted to play Barbies, but Parker didn't like Barbies. This would be tough.

Suddenly she saw the piece of pink construction paper on the refrigerator. It was the card she had made for her daddies back when the rest of the kids were making Mother's Day cards for their mommies. That was when Ellie didn't think she had a mommy. But now she knew that she did.

"Let's go color," she suggested.

Parker hopped up from the kitchen table. He and Ellie headed out of the kitchen and through the living room, where her daddy was watching the evening news on TV and Blaine was curled up next to him on the couch, reading some thick boring-looking book about lawyer stuff. They went back to Ellie's room and she got out her coloring paper and crayons.

"I'm going to make a picture for my mommy," she announced.

Parker had carefully been writing his name in large, blue-crayon letters at the top of a blank piece of paper. He stopped and looked up at her after he drew the line for the *k*. "But you don't have a mommy. You have two daddies."

"I didn't think I had a mommy either, but then my daddy said I do," she said as she started to draw a picture of herself on a blank sheet. "He said that two daddies can't make a baby, so they have to find a lady to help them have the baby if they want to have kids. So that lady is still the baby's mommy. There's a special name for it, but it's a big word that I forget. I think it starts with an S."

"That's cool," Parker said. "Do you know her?"

"Not yet, but Daddy and Blaine and I are all going back to Ohio for a few days to visit Grandma Carole and Grandpa Burt," Ellie said. "My mommy is going to be there, too, so I can meet her. I'll give her my picture then. Daddy said her name is Brittany and she has a wife named Santa."

Parker looked over at her to make sure he'd heard that right. "Like Santa Claus?"

"I know. It's a weird name," Ellie agreed. "But I think it will be cool to meet them."

Neither of them talked again for a long time. Ellie didn't mind. She wanted to make this picture as nice as possible for her mommy.

She thought the self-portrait of herself looked pretty good once she was done. Now she just had to write on it. She didn't know how to spell "Brittany," so she just decided to guess.

To my mommy Brtny, she wrote above her own head. Then, down near the bottom of the picture by her feet, *From Ellie*.

She wanted to write Ellie Hummel-Anderson, like her new name was going to be. But she didn't know how to spell Blaine's last name yet. She would have to learn how. Blaine was her daddy now, too, and that made her so happy.

She set the crayon down after writing her name and looked over her picture. Overall, she was happy with how it turned out. She only hoped her mommy would think the same.

Chapter Eighteen

Dave ended up reading the entire issue of the *Tribune* that featured Kurt and Blaine on the front page. For whatever reason, learning about the issues and politics of a city some 400 miles away made the time he spent incarcerated go somewhat faster. He even found that as long as he didn't look at the front, it took his mind off of Kurt and how awful he still felt.

And then of course Blaine Anderson had to pop up.

The ad was somewhat small, but somehow it still managed to catch Dave's attention. Large, formal-looking text read *Carter & Anderson*, and below that, in smaller print, *Attorneys at Law*. Blaine was pictured alongside another attorney, important-looking and middle aged, who Dave presumed to be the Carter half of the equation. Beside their friendly-looking, smiling faces was a promise in the form of a slogan: *Integrity. Commitment. Results*. And finally, the only information that Dave found particularly useful - the firm's telephone number and address along the bottom of the advertisement.

The next time he was allowed out of his cell to visit the prison commissary, Dave made sure to pick up some pens and paper. He returned to his cell and penned through countless sheets of paper without even realizing what he was doing. All he knew was that he had to do this. There was no other way for him to get any closure with Kurt.

He still loved him, after all. He knew it would be hard for anyone to believe, but Dave had seriously started to repent what he'd done. He knew he wouldn't be this remorseful over his actions if he *didn't* love Kurt. And he knew there was no way he deserved a second chance, but at least he could try and let Kurt know how truly sorry he was.

xxx

Blaine officially felt like the worst boyfriend ever - or at least the most forgetful.

There had been so much going on this month. He'd prepared what had to be at least a hundred pages of Supreme Court documents for Kurt and sent them to Washington, D.C. He'd filled out the necessary paperwork that would allow him to legally adopt Ellie - and at least they had gotten somewhere with that; the adoption hearing was scheduled for tomorrow. He'd helped Kurt write his speech for the grand opening of Hummel House ("You're a lawyer, you're so much better at this than I am," Kurt had lamented

at one point when he was drawing a blank). He'd been talking to his own parents and to Burt and Carole on the phone, trying to work out plans for the trip to Ohio. His thoughts had been in an endless jumble of randomness all month long, never ceasing. Whenever he tried to stop thinking about one thing, a new thought immediately entered his mind.

And with all this going on, he somehow seemed to have forgotten that it was May, which meant that Kurt's birthday was just around the corner, at the end of the month. Blaine had absolutely no idea what to do for him.

He wanted to do something amazing. Kurt, after all, deserved nothing short of perfection. Try as he might, Blaine could think of nothing that would measure up to how incredible Kurt himself was. And they *would* be doing something fun - they had decided to drive down to Ohio the afternoon of Kurt's birthday after the school day ended, since it turned out that several districts in the area had the next day, Friday, off as well. Blaine needed to *get* him something, though. He knew Kurt would enjoy spending time with his family that weekend, but Blaine knew he needed to do something more. And Blaine had never been too great at picking out gifts for people to begin with.

He had some down time at work one afternoon, so he resorted what was quite possibly the most pathetic search for ideas ever - he Googled "what to get my boyfriend for his birthday."

4,210,000 results. Great. Blaine scrolled down the first page and noticed with dismay that all the results had come from websites that were geared towards teenage girls.

That's what you get for not being creative enough to think of your own gift idea, the voice in his head taunted him, and Blaine mentally asked it to kindly shut up.

He finally found a site that looked promising and clicked the link. The first few ideas consisted of things Blaine knew Kurt wouldn't be interested in - football tickets, a foosball table - but he scrolled down the page a little bit and finally came to a few ideas that were slightly more romantic. Slightly more...*Kurt*.

All of a sudden, halfway down the page, something caught Blaine's eye and he stopped scrolling. He found it ironic, because when he stopped to read he noticed that the little blurb of text was accompanied by a photo of a woman in lingerie lounging on a couch, giving the camera a sultry come-hither look.

No, thank you, Blaine mentally told the woman in the photo, but he decided to read what it was all about just for the heck of it.

Set up a session with a professional photographer for a boudoir-style photoshoot! This style of photography is sexy yet tasteful and the finished products will make your man very, very happy. Boudoir photography allows you to show off your sexy, confident side while at the same time leaving a little bit to the imagination...and there's nothing wrong with a little teasing.

Blaine hadn't really been able to imagine himself doing anything like this, but now he was seriously considering this. He'd never admitted it to anyone, but he'd always loved the idea of doing a sexy photoshoot for someone. And Kurt was the perfect someone for whom to do it. The more Blaine thought about it, the more he wanted to do it - this would put him in a very vulnerable position, obviously, but he liked the feeling of vulnerability that being with Kurt always seemed to give him. They had both bared themselves so completely to each other - both physically and emotionally - but the ability to do that only made their love grow even stronger.

He would have to get Kurt something else to go with the pictures, of course. As much as he loved the idea of the photoshoot, giving his boyfriend nothing but a set of photographs of himself seemed a little narcissistic. But at least he had somewhere to begin.

Now that he was thinking about it, he really wanted to go through with it. He quickly clicked over to the desktop calendar on his computer - the rest of his afternoon was absolutely free, which was rare. If he was lucky, he might even be able to get these pictures taken today.

But first he needed a photographer. For a moment he considered looking up a local photographer online, then threw that idea away. If he was going to do something like this, he would rather go with someone he knew - at least by association - rather than any random photographer. Even though he wasn't planning on full nudity or anything like that, he knew he had been in the public eye a lot as of late, and he would have preferred to keep the source as close to him as possible, so that nothing about this became public.

He picked up his phone, about to call Kurt and ask if he happened to know any professional photographers, then immediately shook his head and set the receiver down again. He couldn't ask Kurt. These pictures were going to be *for* Kurt. That wouldn't exactly work, would it?

At least Blaine knew other people in this city of over three million besides just his boyfriend. There was also, for example, his former client who had grown to become his friend. He picked up the phone and called Emily.

He heard the phone ring twice on the other end of the line when suddenly it hit him that she was at work and might not answer her cell. He was about to start feeling bad that he had called and bothered her at work about something like this, but suddenly there was an answer.

"Hi, Blaine!" At least she didn't *sound* annoyed when she answered.

"Hi!" he greeted her. "Hey, um...you're not busy, are you?"

"Not at the moment. What's up?"

"I just...," he paused for a second. "I was wondering if you happen to know any photographers, by chance."

Now she sounded slightly unsure, or maybe just curious. "Why do you ask?"

"I, uh, I want...," Blaine suddenly realized his office door was open, so he stood up from behind his desk and quickly crossed the room to go close it. He leaned up against the door once it was closed and finally finished. "Kurt's birthday is coming up. I was thinking of maybe taking some sexy photos for him."

He heard Emily gasp through the other end of the line and immediately knew he hadn't used the right choice of words. "Blaine, are you crazy? Do you know what happens when people take those kinds of pictures? They always manage to get into the wrong hands, and then-"

"No, no, not like that," he interrupted gently. "Nothing full-out pornographic. Just some pictures that are kind of alluring, kind of seductive, but without going over the top, y'know?"

Emily didn't say anything for a few seconds. Blaine was about to open his mouth and say something else, but then she spoke with a smile in her voice.

"In that case," she said, "I know just the girl you need."

xxx

Lady Luck was on Blaine's side today, because when he called the photographer Emily had told him about, he was fortunate to learn that she happened to have a session open that same afternoon. This was one of the perks of being his own boss, Blaine thought - he pretty much dictated his own schedule, and this time frame allowed him to get the pictures taken before he and Kurt headed off to the grand opening of Emily's Hummel House, where Kurt would give his little speech later this evening.

He hoisted the duffel bag full of outfit changes he'd brought with him over his shoulder as he headed through the front doors of his own apartment building and pressed the button for the elevator. This time when he stepped inside, he didn't press the button for the twentieth floor as usual. He'd be riding up a little higher than usual, to the twenty-third floor.

When he reached the door of the specific apartment he was looking for, he paused for a second and took a deep breath. Then he knocked.

The first thing Blaine noticed about the woman who pulled open the door from the other side was that she was even shorter than he was and wore a dark purple tank top over impossibly skinny jeans. She had auburn hair that fell asymmetrically across her forehead in bangs, and when she smiled she flashed teeth that were almost impossibly white.

"Oh my god, it *is* you!" She giggled a little bit upon recognizing Blaine. "I know you already called and said who you were, but I was thinking it was maybe a joke or something. Come on in."

She stepped aside to let him in, and after she closed the door behind him Blaine smiled and extended his hand. "Blaine Anderson," he introduced himself. "Thank you so much for doing this on short notice."

"Oh, everyone knows who you are." She burst into another little fit of giggles. As she shook his hand, the column of chunky bracelets she was wearing slid down her arm. "Savannah Nichols. Emily's told me so much about you, and I hear about you in the news all the time...it's so amazing to actually meet you."

He knew he probably would have been meeting Savannah later tonight anyway, now that she and Emily were officially an item and they would both be at the grand opening of Hummel House. But when Emily had told him on the phone that her girlfriend was a freelance photographer who also had a home studio in her apartment, Blaine had decided to call her right away and see if she could set him up for a photoshoot session. And even without the other girl here, Blaine could tell that she and Emily were a great match.

But something in her last comment left Blaine slightly confused. "I'm sorry...what do you mean by 'actually' meet me?"

She reached into the kitchen and grabbed an expensive-looking professional camera off the counter and turned it on. "I've gotten a few shots of you before, even though we've never met," she told him as she pressed a few buttons on the camera, then held it out for him to see the display screen. "Look familiar?"

Blaine's jaw dropped when he found himself looking at the exact same photograph of himself and Kurt kissing that had graced the front of last Wednesday's *Tribune*. He blinked a few times to make sure he wasn't hallucinating, but sure enough, there it was. "Oh my god, you took that?"

She grinned and nodded as she pressed the arrow buttons to scroll through to the next pictures. There were about ten or fifteen of him and Kurt - *how long had they been standing there kissing?* - but then, he realized, this was probably one of those super-powerful cameras that took multiple pictures a second. The more he looked at them, the more he started noticing the motion of the images - the muscles in Kurt's arms tightening as he brought Blaine closer, Blaine's hand shifting the slightest bit on Kurt's cheek. Now it was clear that all of these had been taken in merely a few seconds.

"But...there wasn't any photo credit in the paper," Blaine pointed out. "I don't remember seeing it, at least. I feel like I would have remembered your name if I saw it."

Savannah smiled and scrolled back to the original picture - the one that had ultimately made the cover of the paper. "I went down to Navy Pier that night just to take pictures, like I usually do when there's some big public event," she explained. "And also because, as a lesbian, Prop 21 was obviously very important to me. When I managed to get those shots of you and Kurt, I knew I had to take them to the *Tribune* right away. Their photo editor looked through all of them, but as soon as he saw you and Kurt he was like, 'We have to use this for the front page.'"

Blaine smiled a little bit. "Why didn't they give you credit, though? I'm not going to lie, it's an amazing picture of us. You should have been recognized for capturing it."

Savannah shrugged. "Because I didn't want them to credit me," she said simply. "This picture..." she gently tapped the display screen of the camera with one long, black-lacquered fingernail, "this right here is about you and Kurt sharing that beautiful moment together. The only names that belonged in that caption were yours and his. I don't know why, but something didn't seem right about having my own name right there

next to a description of you two sharing something so special and personal. I mean...yes, I took the picture, but this moment truly belongs to you and Kurt." She smiled. "So I let them publish it without crediting me."

Blaine stared at the image on the camera for a second longer and blinked. It was a powerful photograph. He could still feel the bliss of that moment when he looked at it.

"You didn't have to do that," he told her quietly.

"Yes, I did. It felt right." She turned off the camera and smiled before following up with a complete non sequitur. "So what are we looking to do today?"

xxx

Two hours later, Blaine was sitting in the black swivel chair at the computer desk in the corner of Savannah's in-home studio. Savannah knelt beside him (he had offered her the chair, but she refused), clicking through the images from the photoshoot as they reviewed them on the computer.

"Not going to lie, I am *so* happy with how these turned out," Savannah admitted as she clicked to a picture of Blaine wearing a tight-fitting black t-shirt that showed off his arms. He was staring straight at the camera with what turned out to be a very sexy look. "I think it definitely captures the sexiness, but it's still in good taste, y'know?"

She clicked to the next picture - Blaine wearing an unbuttoned dress shirt that was soaking wet, running one hand through his hair. Blaine never thought he would smile while looking at a picture of himself that oozed sex appeal, as this one did, but he couldn't help it.

"I know what you mean. These are *amazing*," he told her. "This is just the kind of vibe I was going for, and you got it perfectly."

"I'm glad you like them." Savannah giggled as she clicked on the next picture, which featured Blaine, once again soaking wet, in the process of removing a dark blue sweater. "I think this one's my favorite. Kurt is going to *love* these."

"I hope so," Blaine said with a smile. "Can we order the prints now?"

As it turned out, they could. He finally decided on the eight images he liked the best, and Savannah went to some online photo-ordering site so they could place the order for the prints. She uploaded the image files they wanted, then turned the controls over to Blaine so he could enter all his information. He decided on getting one 8.5x11 of each picture, and typed in his work address when the site asked him where to ship the prints. He didn't want them getting delivered to the apartment when Kurt was home.

"You're all set!" Savannah told him with a smile after the order had been confirmed. "I like ordering prints from this site because they're usually really prompt and the pictures always have such amazing quality. They should be delivered tomorrow at the earliest, the next day at the latest."

They headed out of the studio and back out towards the apartment door. Before he left, Blaine gave her one last appreciative smile.

"Seriously, thanks so much for helping me out with this," he said sincerely. "Especially on such short notice. See you tonight?"

"Of course! This is exactly the type of event I would go to shoot at anyway...besides, I've gotta be there for my girl." She smiled dreamily.

"That's very sweet of you," he told her. "By the way, if I act like I've never met you before, don't be surprised. I'll be there with Kurt and he isn't exactly aware of the fact that I'm here right now. As far as he knows, we haven't met yet."

"Okay." She nodded. "I'll play along and pretend I have no idea who you are."

"All right, cool." Blaine smiled and turned to leave. "Thanks so much again. See you later on."

He headed down the hall to the elevator and rode down to his own floor. Kurt wasn't home yet, and that was good. Blaine had time to put his things away and get changed back into his work clothes before heading back to his office for the rest of the afternoon.

Tonight, he thought, he would watch the man he loved speak about his own horrific experiences to people who could actually relate. Tomorrow they would all go to court together so that they could *officially* be a family. And next week, Blaine would give Kurt those pictures on his birthday, along with whatever additional gifts he would have to think up, and they would all make an amazing trip back home. Everything seemed to be going absolutely perfectly.

Blaine didn't know it as he drove back to work, but soon enough he would learn that even the most perfect of ideas can become disastrous.

xxx

Michael Horowitz came home at six on the dot. He tossed his crappy baseball glove and battered Louisville Slugger into the hall closet where he usually kept them, then called out to inform his father that he had arrived. "I'm home!"

He headed out to the living room, flopped on the couch and turned on the television as his father paced quickly through the room to the kitchen to grab his keys, en route to his third job of the day as the nighttime custodian at one of the suburban high schools.

"You're gonna have to find something to eat for dinner," his father informed him as Michael lazily flipped through the channels. "I don't know where the hell your brother is."

Probably out getting high, Michael answered mentally. He rolled his eyes and flipped to the next channel, which was showing the local evening news.

Something made him stop on this channel. He watched for a few seconds as the scene unfolded on the screen. Two men were standing hand-in-hand in front of an excited crowd, waiting for the reporter beside them to start asking questions.

Oh my god. Michael only had to look at the two guys for a split second before he realized it. That was Mr. Hummel, his music teacher at school, and his boyfriend Blaine Anderson. What were they doing on TV?

"...and we're so excited to be here today at the grand opening of Hummel House, a project started by Emily Jade to help victims of domestic abuse," the reporter lady was saying. "Already you can see a huge crowd has gathered here to show their support, and right now I'm here with local attorney Blaine Anderson and his boyfriend Kurt Hummel, for whom this new building was named. Guys, what can you tell our viewers about the significance of this project?"

Michael saw Mr. Hummel start to answer the question, but he couldn't hear a word his teacher was saying. All of a sudden his father, who had been on his way out the door, turned around and headed back inside when he heard the television.

"What are you watching?" he asked, then stopped in front of the television before Michael even got a chance to respond. "Turn this crap off."

"How come? I think it's a really cool project," Michael said as nonchalantly as possible.

His father wasn't listening. "I am so sick of the media shoving us all over to the left and brainwashing us into thinking that *this...*," he gestured to the television, motioning specifically to Blaine Anderson and Mr. Hummel, "is acceptable. And I'm especially sick of seeing these two fags everywhere."

Michael tried not to wince when his father used that word. *Well, if they're fags, then so am I.*

"The guy on the right is the one they named the building after. That's why they're interviewing him." Michael was trying to make it sound as if he had never seen Mr. Hummel before. His father didn't take enough interest in Michael's education to know that his son was taking a music class taught by this same man, and Michael wanted to keep it that way. But if his father found out that Michael was in that class, he would call the school right away and have him removed from the class. Michael really didn't want that to happen. As dumb as it sounded, he really looked forward to going to music every day. With Mr. Hummel teaching and that particular group of students in the class with him...he actually felt like he belonged. And he didn't want that to be taken away.

Once again, though, his father paid no mind to what he was saying. "These two came all the way from Bumblfuck, Ohio to try and shove this gay crap down our throats. First I have to see them sucking each other's disgusting faces on the front of the newspaper, now this. Now they show up to this thing *holding hands*. It's not normal...it's sick. Guys aren't supposed to like other guys. Real men like women. The way I see it, if you don't like pussy, you must be one."

Every word was like another punch in the gut to Michael, but he didn't dare let it show on his face. His father punctuated his final sentence by pressing the power button on the television to turn it off, as if that would stop Michael from watching it while he was at work.

Neither of them said another word. His father left and let the door slam with a loud *bang* behind him. Once he was alone, Michael laughed emotionlessly to himself.

"If you only knew," he said under his breath, then grabbed the remote and turned the television right back on to watch what was happening at Hummel House.

xxx

Kurt shouldn't have loved the attention, but he did.

Quite a bit of the local media had showed up to cover the grand opening. There was nothing full-out paparazzi style, but there was still a sufficient amount of cameras and boom mics and reporters covering this possibly historic event. Hummel House was the first building of its kind - not only would it provide shelter to those who had escaped domestic violence, but it also provided a safe haven for people of all shapes, sizes, colors, sexualities, you name it. Emily had coordinated a system with the local foster care department that would help children who had to escape to the house find a new, loving home. Several people had already moved in and taken shelter even before the official grand opening, and countless more had pledged to volunteer.

It all made Kurt so happy. Everything about this did. He couldn't do anything but hold Blaine's hand and smile as he basked in the glow of the cameras' blinding flashes.

"Let's get one of the whole family!" one photographer called out, and Kurt instinctively pulled Blaine and Ellie closer to him. It was something he'd known for a long time now - they *were* his family; it was so easy for him to accept that. They all smiled as the camera captured the moment.

Blaine leaned over to whisper in Kurt's ear as the same photographer took another picture. "Tomorrow it'll be official."

An amazing feeling of pride swelled up in Kurt's heart and only intensified when he noticed that his daughter was holding on to Blaine's hand. "I'm so happy," he said softly. "I am *so* happy. You're an *amazing* father, Blaine. I just can't wait for it to be official."

Blaine smiled and kissed his cheek. "You're loving this, aren't you?" He glanced around at the various members of the media surrounding them with cameras.

Kurt smiled ruefully and blushed. "It's amazing to see them all here giving attention to such an important cause."

"That didn't answer my question," Blaine said with a teasing smirk.

Kurt turned to him with a softer smile. "As selfish as it sounds, yes," he admitted. They began making their way through the crowd once again. Before he continued, he checked to make sure Blaine still had Ellie's hand so that she didn't get lost. "I love the spotlight. This right here...it's everything I ever dreamed of. I've got my girl...," he smiled at Ellie, "my man, and we're here together supporting something amazing. And we're all sharing the spotlight *because* we're a part of this. Some people are in the public eye for all the wrong reasons, but to me...," he paused for a second, "this feels so right."

After what seemed like forever, they finally managed to make their way into the building itself. The front lobby was like anything you'd find in an apartment building or condo - Emily had tried to make the whole place feel as much like an actual home as possible, and she thought that having a large entryway would have been too superfluous and intimidating. The room had an intimate, cozy feel, and several attendees were trying out the new couches and chairs that had been generously donated to the project by a local furniture store.

Kurt was pretty impressed with the place so far, but he hadn't made it very far into the room when he felt someone suddenly grabbing ahold of his free hand from behind.

"Oh, my god." He turned around and slapped a hand over his heart to keep it from beating out of his chest. His expression relaxed significantly when he realized it was only Emily.

She burst out giggling. "I'm sorry! I didn't mean to scare you, but your reaction was pretty funny."

Blaine had turned around when he noticed that Kurt had abruptly stopped walking. "Hey, Emily! What's going on?"

"I just scared the living crap out of your boyfriend," she said proudly.

Kurt blushed. "She grabbed my hand and I had no idea who it was."

"Sorry," Emily said again. "I tried calling out to you guys but you must not have heard me, and I can't exactly reach up to tap you on the shoulder or something." She smiled wryly. "Anyway, I'm so glad you guys could make it! Kurt, I've been talking to a whole bunch of people tonight and already some of them have told me they're so excited to hear you speak."

Kurt felt another blush creeping up over his collar. "I don't really know why anyone would be excited for me to do anything," he said modestly.

"Oh, stop. You're going to be amazing." Blaine kissed his cheek.

"Is Parker here?" Ellie asked Emily before she could say something in response to Kurt and Blaine.

"He's here, but he was getting a little hungry so Savannah took him to the cafeteria to get something to eat," Emily told her. "I think they should be back-"

"Ellie! Hi!" The timing couldn't have been more perfect if they'd planned it, because at that moment Parker came running up beside her and gave his friend a hug. He looked up at her dads with the same enthusiastic smile on his face. "Hi, Mr. Kurt and Mr. Blaine!"

Kurt couldn't help but smile, just like he always did when Parker used the cute nicknames by which he'd taken to calling the two of them. "Hello there, Mr. Parker."

Suddenly he realized that their little group had also been joined by another woman, who was leaning over and giving Emily a kiss on the cheek when Kurt first looked at her. She was short and skinny and wore a fancy, professional-looking camera on a strap around her neck.

"Oh, hi!" She turned to acknowledge him with a smile on her face. "You must be Kurt and Blaine? I'm Savannah."

"My girlfriend," Emily said proudly, clasping her hand.

"Your guess would be correct." Kurt laughed and shook her free hand. "I'm Kurt Hummel, and this is my better half, Blaine." He wrapped his arms around his boyfriend's waist as Blaine shook hands with her.

Kurt couldn't help but notice something as Blaine greeted Savannah. They both had this knowing look in their eyes - almost like they'd met before. He knew it was weird, but suddenly he was dying of curiosity.

He managed to shrug it off. It was probably just a coincidence.

xxx

"I could go on and on about how truly honored I am to be here tonight, but this isn't about me. None of this is. Tonight is about the amazing, courageous inhabitants of this household and countless others who will be utilizing its services in the weeks, months and years ahead."

Blaine smiled to himself and turned up the volume on the TV, where the local news station was airing a segment on the opening of Hummel House. Right now, they were replaying part of Kurt's speech.

"I hope that because of this incredible new facility, anyone who may not feel safe in their own home now knows that they have a sanctuary. A safe haven. Everyone in the world deserves a safe place to live, and by undertaking this project, my good friend Emily Jade has worked to ensure that this is possible for more and more people in our community." TV Kurt smiled. "Being in unsafe domestic situations...it's tough. Believe me, I know. But getting out of that situation is the most important thing you can do...it ended up being the best decision I ever made, because it led me here and gave me the chance to help people who have experienced similar things."

"What do you think you're doing?"

The voice that spoke just then also belonged to Kurt, but it hadn't come from the TV. He was standing in front of the bedroom door, which he must have closed when he came in here. His hands were behind his back and he had Blaine's favorite smile on his face.

"Watching your speech again," Blaine said as Kurt came over to snuggle up to him on the bed, still keeping his hands behind his back and being extremely careful not to let Blaine see what he was hiding back there. "You were *amazing*, baby. I'm so proud of you."

Kurt placed his head on Blaine's chest and frowned as he watched himself talk for a few seconds on the TV. It was almost the end of his speech. "This is weird," he said. "I don't like watching myself. Let's do something else."

The thought of *something else* was suddenly very appealing to Blaine. He picked up the remote and turned off the TV, because Kurt's speech had ended and they were showing the anchors at the news desk, anyway. "Something like what?"

Kurt responded by picking his head up and leaning in to give him a kiss. Blaine let his eyes drift closed as he kissed him back. So far, something else was off to an amazing start.

But it didn't last very long before Kurt pulled away with a glimmer of mischief in his glasz eyes. Before Blaine even knew what was happening, Kurt had pulled the mystery object out from behind his back and used it to squirt something into Blaine's open mouth. Something sweet, white and fluffy.

Kurt held up the can of whipped cream so that Blaine could see what it was and twirled it around his fingers expertly, tantalizingly. "I believe you expressed an interest in having some fun with this?"

Blaine gently tackled Kurt back onto the bed, eliciting a fit of giggles from the younger man, and hastily began doing away with his clothes. "I love you, Kurt Hummel," he said in a low voice once Kurt's shirt was out of the way. Blaine began making quick work of his pants. "Have I ever told you that? Because I do. I really fucking do."

"I really fucking love you too, Blaine," Kurt giggled in response once the last of his clothing was out of the way. Blaine reached for the can of whipped cream, but Kurt held it tantalizingly out of his reach. "Not yet, baby. You have to be naked, too. This stuff can get pretty messy." He winked.

"You little tease," Blaine said with a smirk, but began undressing himself all the same. Kurt watched him intently, licking his lips. Just when Blaine thought he couldn't get naked fast enough, Kurt put the nozzle of the can in his mouth and lazily traced the tip with his tongue.

Okay, that is it, Blaine thought. He practically tore his own boxers in his haste to get them off, then reached for the can of whipped cream again. This time, Kurt let him have it without any trouble.

He squirted a small amount on the tip of his index finger and traced Kurt's lips with it. Kurt smiled expectantly as Blaine leaned in to kiss him, slowly sucking away the cream, and began squirting more of it over the rest of Kurt's body.

Kurt trembled at the intense sensation of coldness, which became almost unbearable when Blaine broke the kiss, lowered his head and began licking it up with slow, tantalizing strokes of his tongue. The warmth of Blaine's mouth coupled with the coldness of the whipped cream was indescribable. Not only that, but Blaine seemed to be enjoying it, too, judging by the way he let his mouth linger on Kurt's skin as he whispered, "You taste *amazing*."

Kurt reached out and grabbed the abandoned can of whipped cream without thinking. He smirked and expertly flipped the two of them over so now he was on top.

"Hey, I wasn't done yet," Blaine complained with a teasing pout. There was still a decent amount of cream smeared on Kurt's chest and along the tops of his thighs.

"My turn," was all Kurt said. He aimed the nozzle and wrote his name in creamy white letters on Blaine's chest, then sat back to admire his work with a smile. "All mine."

"I've been branded in whipped cream," Blaine commented as he tilted his head down to look at what Kurt had done. "And I can honestly say I don't mind."

What happened over the course of the next few minutes (hours? neither of them could tell, nor did they care) was undoubtedly the messiest and most delicious sexual encounter either of them could remember having. It was funny, Blaine thought at one point as Kurt licked a good sized dollop off of his hipbone - whipped cream usually got associated with kinkiness. Now, though, they were using it as a way to get to know each other's bodies even better. In a strange way, there was an almost romantic side to it.

The can hadn't been entirely full when they'd started, so eventually they ran out. When this happened, Kurt reached into the drawer on the bedside table and extracted the bottle of lube. He handed it to Blaine and smiled, just like Blaine had done the first time Kurt had made love to him.

Suddenly it occurred to Blaine what Kurt wanted him to do. "Kurt, I...are you sure?"

"I'm positive," Kurt whispered. He smiled as he held Blaine's gaze to let him know he was serious. "I want you."

Blaine took the bottle and lubed up his fingers, all the time watching Kurt's face to make sure his beautifully expectant smile never wavered - and it didn't. He trusted Kurt when he said he was ready, but he also couldn't help feeling slightly emotional. The last person to do this to Kurt had ended up causing him more physical and emotional pain than anyone should ever have to endure. And now Kurt was literally about to let Blaine in, giving himself so completely to Blaine by allowing his boyfriend to do this to him, giving Blaine every chance to destroy him completely and trusting him implicitly not to do so.

"Please tell me if I hurt you," Blaine said softly as he nudged Kurt's legs open. "The last thing I want to do is cause you any more pain than necessary, I promise."

"I know." Kurt smiled as he spread his legs even further for Blaine. "I trust you."

Just the fact that Kurt was able to honestly say those words to anyone - let alone *him* - after what he'd been through still amazed Blaine. He very carefully began slipping his fingers inside.

He only managed to get three fingers inside, though, before Kurt reached down between his legs and grabbed Blaine's wrist. "I don't need any more," he said in a soft but firm whisper. "I want *you*."

Blaine was honestly a little surprised that Kurt hadn't wanted to be stretched out more. "You're ready?" he asked, just to double check.

"I'm ready," Kurt confirmed with the most beautiful smile Blaine had ever seen.

Blaine extracted his fingers and lubed himself up. For a moment, his mind flashed back to the story Kurt had told about his own horrendous first time. Blaine still felt awful about that, and he knew he would never be able to give Kurt his first time back. However, he could make *this* - Blaine's first time inside him - the sweetest and most special experience of his life.

He placed one hand on Kurt's cheek and kissed him. Kurt's long eyelashes skimmed the top of Blaine's thumb as his eyes fell closed. After letting his lips linger on Kurt's for a perfect moment, Blaine pulled away and looked him in the eyes as he settled between his legs.

"Just do it," Kurt whispered as he lifted his legs up to curl around Blaine's waist. He must have been able to feel Blaine prodding him. "I *need* to feel you inside me, Blaine. Please."

Blaine knew he'd never be able to resist that, so he did as he was told. He shifted his hips forward and let his cock become sheathed in *holy shit sweet tight fuck hot Kurt*.

"All the way," Kurt encouraged when Blaine had gotten himself about halfway inside. He was trying to take it slowly, not wanting to hurt his lover, but if Kurt wanted him all the way inside then Blaine wasn't going to complain. He could *feel* Kurt's tightness pulsating around him and it felt so, so good.

He buried himself the rest of the way inside Kurt and closed his eyes. "Kurt, *fuck*. Why didn't I think of doing this a long time ago?"

"Because you weren't ready, and that's okay," Kurt reassured him gently with a smile. "And besides, this was well worth the wait. Having you inside me is *amazing*."

Blaine leaned down and gave him a sweet kiss before breaking away so he could pull out and push back in. Kurt rolled his hips up against Blaine's to meet his thrust; the added force took him even deeper this time.

Neither of them said much from that point on. The only sounds were the slapping of skin on skin as Blaine pulled out and pushed back inside, their ragged breathing, and occasional deep moans and soft sighs. Blaine never once took his eyes off of Kurt, who looked back at him with nothing but pure adoration in his gaze and the tiniest but most satisfied smile on his face. At one point his eyes fell closed and his smile grew even bigger. His voice was low and saturated with lust as he spoke. "Oh god, Blaine, *yes*. Just like that. You know just where to get me...mmmmm."

He was practically panting for breath by the time he finished speaking, and Blaine could tell he was getting closer and closer. To tell the truth, Blaine wasn't too far from the point of climax himself. He leaned down and pushed Kurt's sweaty bangs off his forehead, then kissed his temple.

"Kurt," he said softly as his hand moved down to caress the other man's cheek, still nothing but pure tenderness even as the lower half of his body continued its steady motion in and out. "Will you come with me?"

Kurt answered his question by squeezing his muscles even tighter around Blaine, creating a sensation that pushed both of them over the edge. They came together, Kurt wailing Blaine's name as his own name fell from Blaine's lips as a deep, low moan.

Blaine ended up pressed directly against Kurt when they were both finished, his face nuzzled against the other man's neck. He picked his head up and looked into Kurt's eyes for a moment, then kissed his lips softly as he pulled out.

"Amazing," was all Kurt said. His voice was thick, almost as if he were about to cry.

"Speak for yourself," Blaine responded gently. He continued placing kisses all over the rest of Kurt's face - his forehead, his nose, his eyelids, his cheeks.

Kurt smiled as a faint blush spread over his skin. For the first time, Blaine noticed that they had neglected to turn the lights off. In a way, this made it even better - he could see all of Kurt and Kurt could see all of him; there were no insecurities that could be easily masked by darkness.

"We made a mess," Kurt observed, looking at the way his own come had landed both on his own chest and on Blaine's. Not only that, but a few traces of whipped cream still remained on their skin. Kurt giggled after a slight pause and corrected himself. "*I* made a mess."

"You did," Blaine agreed. "But it's nothing a nice shower won't fix. Care to join me?" He glanced towards the open door of the bathroom attached to the master bedroom and smiled back at Kurt.

Kurt smiled and moved to stand up from the bed, but before he even stood he realized that his legs were still trembling from the intensity of his orgasm. He didn't think he'd ever come so hard in his life. He wondered for a fraction of a nanosecond if he would even be able to stand up.

Thankfully, Blaine solved this dilemma for him. He stood up from the bed and scooped Kurt up in his arms. Kurt smiled and wrapped his arms around Blaine's neck as his boyfriend carried him into the shower. After all, they had a big day ahead of them tomorrow, and they had to clean up.

xxx

The next morning, Ellie Hummel woke up as Ellie Hummel for the last time. Later this morning she would have a new part to her last name and she would officially be Ellie Hummel-Anderson. They all had to go to court this morning to make the adoption official, so she would have to miss the first part of the school day. But Ellie didn't really care about that. Today she would officially be able to call Blaine her daddy. And that was *so* much better than school. How many of the other kids would be able to say they got a new daddy today?

She sat down with a pencil and a pad of paper as they all ate breakfast that morning and practiced writing her new name, saying each letter to herself in her head as she wrote it. E-L-L-I-E-space-H-U-M-M-E-L-hyphen-A-N-D-E-R-S-O-N. Blaine's last name ended up being pretty easy for her to spell and remember. She liked the way the two names sounded together.

Her daddy came back out into the kitchen after going to make sure all the papers were organized and stuff. He was all breathless and smiling and kind of in a rush. He had this really big smile on his face and his eyes had this excited kind of sparkle in them.

"You guys ready to get going?" he asked her and Blaine, giving them both a kiss on the cheek.

"Absolutely," Blaine said, then smiled at Ellie. "What about you?"

She smiled excitedly and got up to put her breakfast dishes in the sink. Her daddy and Blaine had already finished eating, so soon enough they were out the door.

Her daddy smiled at her as they headed down the hall to the elevator. "Sweetheart, you look absolutely beautiful."

Ellie ran around him and squeezed herself in between them so her daddy was on one side and Blaine was on the other. She reached up and took both of their hands.

"Thank you!" she said happily. She was wearing her favorite sundress, the one with the white Hawaiian-looking flowers on it, because it was so warm today. Blaine had helped her curl her hair, which was something she'd never really thought about trying before. She *felt* beautiful.

When they got out to the car, they all talked excitedly for the whole time it took to drive to the court building. It wasn't too far away. Blaine parked the car when they got there and they all headed up the big steps together, holding hands just like they'd done as they walked down the hall in the apartment. A few people recognized her daddy and Blaine and said congratulations to them as they walked up the steps. Ellie thought that was kind of cool. They had both been on the front of the newspaper and on TV, so they were almost famous. People actually knew who they were.

The actual part inside the court didn't take very long. Ellie didn't really understand much of what the judge guy was saying, but at least he was nice to her. Blaine and her daddy both held her hands the whole time and they all smiled at each other when it became official and the judge said that she was now Elizabeth Anne Hummel-Anderson.

And that moment, Ellie thought, was *the* coolest part of the whole thing.

xxx

After the adoption hearing, Blaine was going to drop Ellie off at school and then take Kurt back to the apartment, since they'd all driven together and Kurt would need his own car to get to work. They had somehow started talking about the first real amazing family experience they'd all have together - the trip back to Ohio on Kurt's birthday next weekend. Kurt hadn't exactly looked forward to any of his birthdays over the past few years. This one, though, was going to be different. He already had the feeling that it was going to be special - and not just because he would be turning 27 on May 27, thank you very much.

At one point during the conversation, Kurt happened to glance down at the packet of adoption court papers he had in his lap. His daughter's new name was staring up at him. *Elizabeth Anne Hummel-Anderson*. Ellie Hummel-Anderson. Hummel-Anderson.

That's when it hit him.

If his daughter could bear both of their last names, then why couldn't he and Blaine?

There was no longer a state law that prohibited the two of them from marrying. What else was stopping them?

He went into a trance, letting Blaine keep up the conversation with their daughter. He wanted to marry Blaine. There was no doubt in his mind about that now that he was seriously considering it. The idea of making it official - that this man was his to keep and cherish for the rest of his life...Kurt wanted nothing more.

At the same time, though, the thought scared the living shit out of him. After all, they'd only been together a few months. It seemed much too early to be rushing into something like a wedding. Yes, they'd known each other for ten years before that. Still, though. Kurt didn't know if getting married at this point would be too much, too fast.

But he DID just adopt your daughter, the little voice in the back of Kurt's mind said. *If that doesn't mean you guys are in it for the long haul, nothing does.*

"Blaine," he said without thinking.

His boyfriend turned to look at him with the most pure tenderness in his eyes as he pulled up to stop at a red light. "Yeah?"

Kurt looked back at him and for a second he was so tempted to say it. *Let's get married*. The words were right there on the tip of his tongue.

But they slipped away as he began to speak.

"Having you adopt her is already the best birthday present I ever could have asked for," he said with a soft smile.

Blaine returned his smile and gave him a quick but passionate kiss before proceeding through the intersection. "I'm glad," he said. "I'm so honored to be her father."

Kurt was slightly disappointed with himself that he hadn't said the words he'd really wanted to say, but the more he thought about it the more his disappointment faded. After all, Blaine deserved more than just a casual, spur-of-the-moment proposal. He deserved something that had been thought out and planned well in advance, something that communicated loud and clear just how much Kurt loved him.

If he was going to do this, he was going to do it right.

xxx

Derek Campbell had noticed a trend. Whenever he was home in between business trips, his mail always came at 12:53 on the dot every single day, like clockwork. He wasn't sure exactly what had caused him to notice this, but notice it he had. It was no different on this particular day.

At five til one, he headed out to the mailbox. Today looked to be the usual junk - bills and various ads. He was about to throw the entire pile on his kitchen counter and forget all about it, when suddenly he felt something different in between the glossy coupon paper and the envelope containing his monthly bank statement.

It was a large cardboard envelope, the kind used for mailing photos. Derek was slightly confused - he couldn't recall having ordered any photos as of late, but all the same he shrugged and opened the envelope.

Several professionally printed 8.5x11 photographs spilled out onto the table. At first Derek was extremely confused. This had to have been a mistake. He certainly hadn't ordered anything like this.

But then he actually *looked* at the pictures. And now it was absolutely clear to him that this had most definitely been a mistake.

He grabbed the cardboard envelope in which the pictures had been mailed. Sure enough, the address label did not contain his own name and address. It was addressed to Blaine D. Anderson, courtesy of Carter & Anderson. Go figure. The building where Blaine's law firm held its offices had the exact same address number as Derek's house, but was on a completely different street. The mail must have gotten mixed up

somehow; the carrier must have seen the street number and assumed that this was going to Derek. It wasn't unheard of for things like this to happen. Derek had mistakenly gotten other people's mail before.

All of a sudden, postal mistakes aside, a question began forming in Derek's mind. Why *had* Blaine felt the need to take pictures like this, anyway?

This was wrong and he knew it. He should have immediately called the post office as soon as he'd noticed the wrong address and reported the error. But he didn't, and he wouldn't. He carefully gathered the photos and slipped them back into the envelope as his mind wandered on to thoughts of Kurt Hummel.

So maybe Derek didn't have a chance in hell with Hummel. Kurt was Narcissus if he ever existed - extraordinarily beautiful, but also full of pride. He was just *so* proud to be with Blaine, the hotshot lawyer who helped advocate the gay rights movement and won important court cases. So, so proud.

But maybe Kurt *wouldn't* be so proud to be with Blaine Anderson if he thought that his boyfriend had been whoring himself out to the public. Kurt didn't seem like the type who would go for a slut.

Derek opened the envelope and looked through the pictures again. It didn't even enter his mind that this was so, totally, completely wrong. All he cared about was that if his plan worked, Kurt Hummel would eventually be single.

xxx

Blaine was slightly disappointed when he arrived at work later that morning. He'd had his fingers crossed, hoping and praying that the pictures he'd ordered would have arrived, but they had not. He knew Savannah had told him that they would take two days at the most to get there, so he still had tomorrow, but still. He would have felt a lot better just having them.

The only piece of mail he received that day came in a thin, business style envelope. Blaine glanced at the top left hand corner to read the return address. It simply read *Franklin County Department of Corrections*.

That was strange, he thought. Why would he be getting a letter from a central Ohio prison?

He opened it all the same and began to read the words that had been scrawled on the paper - words that shook him to the core.

Blaine,

I know I'm probably the last person in the world you want to hear from right now. I guess it's safe to say you hate me, and rightfully so, because I hate myself.

I saw last Wednesday's issue of the Tribune. You and Kurt were on the front, but you're probably aware of that by now. It was probably a really big deal for you guys. In the same issue I found an advertisement that your law firm must have placed in the paper, which is how I got this address. Now that I know I have a way to contact you, I can't help but get some things off my chest.

Like I said, you probably don't want to be reading anything that comes from me. In fact, if you're still reading by this point and you haven't yet fed this letter to a paper shredder, I'm honestly surprised. But since you're still reading, you may as well continue.

I love Kurt. I always have and I always will. I know that sounds pretty crazy, considering all the shit I put him through earlier this year. But the fact of the matter is, I had something amazing with him and I let it slip away. I couldn't appreciate him the way he deserved to be appreciated. Despite the eight years we spent together, it took losing him to make me finally realize just how much he meant to me.

I see his face in my dreams every single night and it absolutely terrifies me. I know that in a way, my own subconscious is forcing me to look at what I did to him. Every time I wake up, I hate myself even more for what I did. If I could rewind the past and change my ways, I would. Believe me, I would. There are so many things I regret and so many things I would change.

But now that I think about it, I think if I could rewind the past, I would rewind all the way back to high school. If I could redo that portion of my life, I would come out to Kurt just like I actually did. I would apologize to him for being a bully just like I actually did. But I wouldn't ask him out, like I actually did. I would not put him through that again. I would encourage him to go and be with you. I would tell him that Blaine Anderson is a really amazing guy, and an absolutely perfect match for someone like Kurt.

Enough about that because now I'm confusing myself and probably you. My point being, you can't rewind the past. All you can do is learn from the mistakes you made and try to fix them. I've already learned so much from my mistakes, and this letter is my best attempt at trying to fix them.

I've always been able to tell that you love Kurt. Even the very first time I met you, I could see it in your eyes that you would do anything to protect him, even if it meant risking yourself. And now, just from seeing you two kissing on the front of the paper, I can tell you love him more now than you ever have.

I still love Kurt, too, but I'm not disappointed that he's with someone else now. Especially because it's someone like you. I know for a fact that I don't deserve him. I don't think I ever did. He gave me his beautiful heart, I broke it completely, and you pieced him back together. I couldn't be happier that he has someone like you to take care of him. Not that Kurt isn't a strong person, because he is. He is SO strong. But he deserves to be cared for and protected, too. There's no doubt in my mind that you can do that for him. Be that for him. I sure as hell wasn't.

Please hear me out when I say that I am truly sorry from the bottom of my heart for what I did to the man you love. Like I said, I absolutely hate myself because of it. However, some of my sadness is canceled out somewhat by the fact that Kurt is happy again. At this point in my life, his happiness is all I want. I completely and honestly wish you two the best. The two of you deserve a happy, beautiful life together. Cherish each other.

And again, I'm sorry.

David Paul Karofsky Jr.

Chapter Nineteen

Kurt walked out to the kitchen on the morning of May 27 to find the table already set, breakfast already made, and his boyfriend and daughter waiting for him with expectant smiles.

"Oh my goodness, you guys." He laughed a little bit as he took in the complete table setting and the ridiculous amount of pancakes, eggs, sausage and hash browns just waiting to be eaten. "You didn't have to do all this."

"Yes, we did." Blaine stepped forward and gave him a kiss before guiding him to his usual chair. "It's your birthday. We thought we'd make breakfast for you." He turned and gave Ellie a knowing smile. "Besides, it was her idea. She said we should give you a break."

"Happy birthday, Daddy!" Ellie skipped over to Kurt's chair and gave him a kiss on the cheek.

"Thank you, sweetie." He gave her an appreciative smile. "Really, though, I don't mind cooking for you guys. Let me at least help you-"

Blaine shook his head as he cut him off. "You're not going to help me do anything. Today is *your* day." He gestured to the large amount of food spread out over the table. "Eat. Then you get your presents. This afternoon, I'm driving the whole way back to Ohio so you can relax."

Kurt froze as he reached for the tray of pancakes in the middle of the table. "Blaine, it'll take us eight hours to get there. I can drive part of the-"

"You are going to *relax*." Blaine giggled and kissed the top of his head as he stepped around the back of Kurt's chair to take his usual seat next to him.

"Stop interrupting me," Kurt said, but smirked as he piled a few pancakes on to his plate.

Blaine returned his smirk and shrugged. "Only when you stop wanting to do everything on your birthday."

They started to eat, and Kurt immediately found that he loved every single thing Blaine and Ellie had prepared. For the first time in his twenty-seven years, he went back for seconds before the rest of his dining companions had even finished their firsts.

When they were done, Kurt had barely managed to stand up when Blaine took his hand and led him out to the living room where a pile of brightly wrapped presents was already waiting on the coffee table in front of the sofa. Kurt rolled his eyes and smiled wryly.

"I told you I didn't want anything," he protested as Blaine gently pushed him into a sitting position on the couch.

"I didn't listen," Blaine said with a proud smirk as he took the gift on the top of the pile and pressed it into Kurt's hands.

Ellie did not let this go unnoticed. She immediately took the gift out of Kurt's hands and replaced it with one in a small gift bag. "Open mine first! I made it!"

Kurt looked at Blaine, who smiled. "Go ahead. She was so excited about this."

Kurt began pulling the tissue paper out of the bag so he could get to whatever else was inside. His fingers closed around something thin and wooden. From the bag, he extracted the classic kindergarten-made popsicle stick picture frame.

But it wasn't just any run-of-the-mill kid-made frame. This one contained a picture of Kurt, Blaine and Ellie. Along the top and sides, she had glued alphabet beads that spelled out I LOVE MY DADDIES. The stick on the bottom contained the artist's signature, complete with the new part to her last name: *Ellie Hummel-Anderson*.

As simple as it was, Kurt's entire heart was touched. He studied the picture for a few moments. It had been taken by Savannah at the Hummel House grand opening and featured their family of three posing together in the lobby. All three of them had happy, genuine smiles on their faces.

"Thank you so much, sweetheart." He reached out to give his daughter a hug and kissed her forehead. "I love it. I love *you*. I'm going to keep this on my desk at school."

The rest of the presents were from Blaine, who had suffered a mild internal panic when his pictures failed to arrive by the deadline. He had compensated by hitting up nearly every single trendy boutique on Michigan Avenue, searching for the perfect last-minute gifts. He'd ultimately tried ordering the pictures again and this time they arrived perfectly on time, but not before he'd already bought Kurt a Burberry

scarf, a Gucci sweater, some Marc Jacobs cologne and a wallet from the new and improved men's line at Coach.

"Jesus Christ, Blaine," Kurt murmured once all the gifts had been unwrapped and he was left surrounded by wrapping and tissue paper. "Thinking about how much you must have spent on all this stuff for me makes me want to throw up, but at the same time I love it." He smiled at his boyfriend. "Thank you so much."

"You're so welcome." Blaine was already smiling as he moved closer to Kurt on the couch and gave him a kiss. "You deserve it. I love you."

Kurt couldn't help himself. The second Blaine's lips were on his, he immediately deepened the kiss and slipped his tongue into his boyfriend's mouth. They were all alone - Ellie had left for school a few minutes earlier, and they had the apartment all to themselves. He held the kiss as he leaned backwards so he was lying on the couch and pulled Blaine on top of him.

Before they could get too involved, though, Blaine broke away with a smirk.

"What are you doing?" Kurt teased. "It's my birthday. You said I get whatever I want. I want this."

"Can you wait for a few more minutes?" Blaine sat up and reached underneath the couch for something he had hidden under there. He pulled out a large envelope and handed it to Kurt. "I have one more present. I wanted to wait until Ellie was gone to give this to you."

"Color me intrigued. I wonder what could be in here." Kurt raised one eyebrow and broke the seal on the envelope. Once it was open, he slid its contents out into his open hand and immediately lost his breath.

"Blaine, oh my goodness." He was looking through several professionally taken pictures of his boyfriend. Some of them featured Blaine in various stages of undress or soaking wet; some showed him fully clothed but still looking sexy. "These are *beautiful*."

"You think so?" Blaine had a small, shy smile on his blushing face. "I was a little nervous about doing it at first, but then I talked to Emily and she told me Savannah was a photographer. I thought it would be a little easier getting them taken by someone I already kind of knew."

Kurt studied the picture he was currently looking at. Sure enough, there was tiny lettering in the bottom right hand corner: *Savannah Nichols Photography*.

"She did an amazing job," Kurt said, flipping through the pictures again and smiling. "My boyfriend is so hot."

"So is mine." Blaine took the pictures out of Kurt's hands and set them on the coffee table, then pulled him into another deep kiss. They picked up right where they'd left off, tongues colliding and hands roaming, always eager to explore each other.

They were just starting to get really into it, with Blaine's hand halfway down the front of Kurt's pants, when suddenly Kurt heard something from the edges of his consciousness that made him break away suddenly.

"What's wrong?" Blaine asked as he extracted his hand. Kurt usually wasn't like this. When he was on, he was *on*.

Kurt didn't say anything, just sat up and turned to face the television. It had been on, turned to the local morning news, ever since they'd come into the room to open presents, but with the volume lowered to the point of background noise. Something the anchor had just said managed to catch his attention. He had distinctly heard her say the name "Blaine Anderson."

He focused his attention on the screen for a second. Sure enough, they were talking about Blaine Anderson.

"...just this morning, we received these pictures from a source who wishes to be kept anonymous. He claims Anderson sent him these photographs. As you can see, they're nothing too scandalous, but definitely provocative enough..."

Kurt was completely frozen. The images they were showing on the screen were the exact same pictures that were currently sitting on his coffee table. The same exact ones Blaine had had taken just for Kurt.

He reached for the remote and turned off the TV, then picked up the pictures and gave Blaine his signature *what the actual fuck?* stare. For the moment, he was numb. Or maybe that numbness was just denial. Blaine wouldn't really do that. Would he?

But then again, how else would those pictures have fallen into someone else's hands?

Blaine, meanwhile, became reduced to an emotional wreck in a matter of seconds when he saw that hurt and disbelief written all over Kurt's beautiful face. He knew those had to be the original copies he'd ordered; they must have been delivered somewhere else by mistake. But where? And who would do something like that to him?

He couldn't think about that now. Not when the man he loved was looking at him with unspoken words reflected in his eyes - *please don't let it be true*. He immediately began to scramble for an explanation he didn't have.

"Kurt," he said, his voice trembling, "I don't know what to tell you. Honestly, I don't. I have no idea how anyone else got those pictures. I didn't send them to anybody."

Kurt inhaled deeply and closed his eyes. When he opened them again and spoke, his voice was thick with tears.

"Then how else, Blaine?" he demanded, blinking quickly, not wanting to break down and cry. "How else would anybody else have gotten them?"

Blaine sighed and tried to hold back tears of his own. He would never dream of doing any such thing to Kurt - especially since Kurt had always trusted him so much in the time that he'd lived here. He'd already been hurt once by a man who pretended to love him. Blaine knew something like this wasn't nearly as harrowing as being physically abused, but still. Kurt didn't deserve any more pain at the hands of someone who supposedly loved him.

"I don't know, Kurt." He paused, then spoke again. "Wait, actually I might know. I ordered the prints right after Savannah originally took the pictures. They were supposed to arrive within two days and they never did. I figured there had been some kind of mistake so I placed the order again. This time, they arrived on time. Those pictures they showed on the news must be from the original set I ordered. They must have somehow gotten sent to the wrong address and that person must have sent them to the news station, for whatever reason."

He took the pictures from Kurt and set them on the coffee table again, then reached for Kurt's hands. Kurt immediately recoiled and pulled his hands back. That stung, but Blaine couldn't let that hurt him now. Not

when he was trying to explain himself and make this right. A stupid mistake like this could very possibly cost him Kurt.

"If you want, I can show you my internet history. I never clear it out." Blaine's voice was softer now; he was closer and closer to tears as he tried desperately to prove himself to the man he loved. "I'll show you the online order form I filled out for those pictures. Both times, I typed in my work address. I didn't want them to get sent here, because it was supposed to be a surprise. I'll show you if you don't believe me."

He reached out again, and this time Kurt let him take his hands.

"I would *never* do anything like that to you, Kurt," he continued weakly. "I swear to you. I love you more than anything else in the world. I would give up my life for you." His hands were trembling, but he kept holding onto Kurt's. "You were the only person I wanted to see those pictures. You're the only person I *want*, period. No other man could even come close to you. I would never try to seduce anybody else. Why would I do that when I somehow got lucky enough to have the most amazing boy on the face of the earth?"

By the time he was finished, he had given up and let himself cry. The last word was barely out of his mouth when Kurt pulled him into his arms and let Blaine sob into his shirt. He held him close as he gently stroked his fingers through Blaine's hair to calm him down.

"Hey," he commanded gently after Blaine had been crying for a few minutes. "Look at me."

Blaine picked his head up and looked at Kurt through tear-soaked eyes.

"I'm not mad at you." Kurt's voice was quiet but firm. "I believe every single word you just said. I trust you, Blaine. I know you would never sink that low." Blaine trembled closer to him and Kurt tightened his embrace to hold him there. "I don't want you to let this get you down. We're going to try and figure out who did this, okay?"

Blaine nodded against Kurt's chest and sniffed back another sob.

"And even if we can't figure it out, we're not going to let it bother us. Those media people are pretty uptight about keeping their sources confidential, but we'll see what we can do. But the most important thing is that you and I love each other, and we know the truth."

"I love you, Kurt," Blaine whispered.

"And I love you," Kurt promised. "I'll call the station and ask that they air a correction to that story and explain the mistake. Actually, maybe you should call them. It would probably sound more credible coming from you, since the pictures were *of* you."

Blaine cleared his throat. "Okay." His voice was stronger now. "I'll do that. Then we can put this whole mess behind us and go have fun in Ohio this weekend."

"That's my boy." Kurt smiled and playfully ruffled his hair. "Now come here. I want kisses."

A huge deluge of relief flooded through every cell in Blaine's body. He picked his head up off of Kurt's chest and was more than happy to give his boyfriend what he wanted.

xxx

Blaine had been blessed with a relatively lenient work schedule as of late, so he was able to return home at three that afternoon after going in for a half day. Kurt and Ellie were already home from school and they were in the process of getting all the last-minute items packed up and ready to go so they could hit the road.

"You're wearing your presents," Blaine noticed with a smile, nodding at Kurt's getup - the scarf and sweater Blaine had gotten him. The wallet was sitting on the counter, already stuffed to capacity, and Blaine caught a whiff of his new cologne as he pulled him in for a kiss.

Kurt broke away from the kiss after a few seconds with a breathless smile. He did a little twirl so Blaine could see him from all angles. "Do you like it?"

"I love it. You look gorgeous," Blaine told him with a smile of his own. He glanced around the room at the suitcases that he and Kurt had already packed the night before. "All right, is everyone ready to go?"

"I'm ready!" Ellie stepped up between them and took both of their hands. She was all set with her purple Hello Kitty backpack bursting with movies to watch on the portable DVD player Kurt had gotten her. "I want to go see Grandpa Burt and Grandma Carole."

"We'll be able to see them tonight," Kurt promised her, then gently slipped his hand away so he could pick up suitcases to carry them out to the car. "Let's get going."

When they got outside, Ellie got herself situated in the backseat of the car while Kurt and Blaine got the heavy stuff loaded into the trunk. Blaine decided to take this opportunity to talk to Kurt about a few important things.

"Hey, um, about that thing with Dave." He had shown Kurt Karofsky's letter the second he'd gotten home from work the day he'd received it. After talking for hours that night, Kurt had eventually decided that he would go to the county prison and visit him. "Do you still want to go?"

Kurt hesitated for a moment, then nodded. "Yes," he said. "I just...I don't know. Part of me doesn't want to see him, but my gut is telling me I should go. I think I'll listen to my gut. I figure he's already done all the damage he can do, so what's the worst that could happen?"

He turned and picked up another suitcase from the ground to lift it into the trunk. The second his hands were free, Blaine took them in both of his own.

"You know you don't have to go," he reminded Kurt gently. "But if you do, I'll be right there with you. I hate him with every fiber in my being for what he did to you, but I'm willing to put that aside as best as I can and be there to support you."

"Thank you," Kurt whispered. He squeezed Blaine's hands. "I wouldn't go if I didn't have you with me."

Blaine responded initially with a tender kiss.

"I will always be there for you," he promised with a smile, then immediately switched over to the other thing he needed to tell Kurt. "Oh, by the way. I called the TV station this afternoon. They said they'll air a correction on the next broadcast but they can't tell who the source is."

Kurt smiled emotionlessly. "It's a start, I guess," he said. "I say we forget about it for the weekend, then try again once we get back. Maybe the guy will have decided to come clean by then. What he did to you was really low. I don't give a crap about confidentiality of sources. There's no way that can be legal."

"It's not, and if I ever find out who he is I could technically sue him for slander if I wanted, but I'm not going to take it that far," Blaine said. "Nobody got hurt, the pictures weren't scandalous enough to completely ruin my reputation, and everyone who watches the five o'clock news tonight will find out it was all a big fake. I'd just like to find out who the guy is and get some kind of apology out of him."

He closed the trunk and turned to Kurt with a smile as he continued. "But you're right. I think this has already stressed us out enough today, so let's just forget about it for the time being and give it another shot when we get home. Let's get going."

Part of the reason they'd decided to leave in the afternoon was to avoid rush hour traffic, and it ended up being a good idea. They breezed down Lake Shore Drive towards the freeway with virtually no holdups. Kurt wanted to say something to acknowledge this, but knew he'd probably jinx it - the second he opened his mouth, they'd run into a huge traffic jam. He kept his mouth shut and opened the jewel CD case he'd brought with him.

"What's that?" Blaine asked as Kurt inserted the disc into the stereo system.

"I made us a homecoming mix," Kurt explained as the first song - appropriately enough, Homecoming by Kanye West - began to play.

Blaine tapped out the beat on the steering wheel as he cruised along. "Good song," he pointed out. "And ironically, it's about Chicago, which we're leaving."

Kurt somehow managed to keep a straight face as he sang the first few lines right along with Kanye to emphasize Blaine's point. "Yeah! And you say Chi city! Chi city, Chi city!"

Blaine couldn't help but giggle. "How are you so cute?"

"I'm really not," Kurt said through his own laughter, which had taken over as soon as he'd stopped singing. "I'm just a dork."

"A cute dork," Blaine countered. "*My* cute dork."

Kurt stuck his tongue out at him.

"That just makes you even cuter," Blaine told him.

Kurt rolled his eyes, but he couldn't help but smile. He was content to just gaze out the window for a little while as they zoomed along by the lake, but near the end of the song he absentmindedly began singing along.

"Do you think about me now and then? Do you think about me now and then? Cause I'm coming home again. Coming home again..."

Blaine joined in and sang along without even thinking about it.

"Maybe do you remember when, fireworks at Lake Michigan. Oh, now I'm coming home again. Coming home again."

Kurt kept smiling as they sang the rest of the song together. The irony of it was too sweet. As much as he loved living here in Chicago, there would always be a piece of his heart back in Ohio. Just knowing that they were going back made him feel whole again - like he was finally headed back to fill that part of him that he hadn't even realized was still empty.

Blaine turned to him and gave him a tiny smile as they sang the very last line together.

"Maybe we can start again."

xxx

Burt Hummel hadn't seen his son since he'd moved out to Chicago. He vividly remembered every single word of the emotional voicemail Kurt had left him at two in the morning that unforgettable night: *Dad, I'm in Chicago. Ellie and I left Dave. H-he's been drinking lately and it's turned into physical abuse and I couldn't let us stay there any longer. A shaky breath, then a sigh. Blaine is letting us stay at his place. I'm going to try and look for a job and get Ellie into school as soon as possible. We just have to start everything over. I...I know this is completely random and out of the blue, and maybe I should have told you earlier but I couldn't. I couldn't. Okay. I'm going to try and get some sleep now. I just drove nonstop for 400 miles and I'm so, so tired. I love you, Dad. Goodnight.*

Of course, he'd called his son back right away the second he heard the message. Kurt had given him a more in-depth explanation of everything that had gone down. Burt had poignant memories of that phone call, too. The entire time, he recalled, Kurt's voice had sounded thick, almost as if he was about to cry, but he never did. Burt had hung up the phone that morning and buried his head in his hands, wondering if his son would ever be able to find happiness after escaping from such pain.

But when Kurt and his family stepped into the Hummel-Hudson household at eleven thirty the night of Kurt's birthday, Burt couldn't help but notice the glow that lit up Kurt's face. He knew the kid had to be

exhausted after sitting in the car for eight hours, but there was no denying that this was the happiest he'd ever seen his son.

"So I guess I need to re-introduce the two of you to this guy right here," Kurt was saying, laughing as he curled an arm around Blaine's waist. "Dad, Carole, this is Blaine Anderson. My boyfriend."

He looked so proud to say that, Burt noticed. He had never seen Kurt this happy when he was with Dave. Not once in eight years. Burt had met Blaine before on several occasions back when he and Kurt were still friends, and the elder Hummel had immediately taken a liking to him. He'd never cared much for Dave Karofsky, to tell the truth - he'd always thought Kurt would be much better off with a guy like Blaine.

Funny how fate seemed to work out.

His wife seemed to have the ability to read his thoughts. "I'm so happy for the two of you," Carole was saying as she hugged Blaine. "I always thought you boys would be perfect together, and here you are."

"My daddies are the best couple in the whole world," Ellie announced proudly. She was exhausted, too - Burt could tell just from looking at her - but the way she made this simple declaration made it clear that there was no doubt in her young mind.

As he observed the way Kurt lit up whenever Blaine so much as looked at him over the course of the night, Burt found that he had to agree with his granddaughter.

xxx

They had decided to forgo a hotel and instead use Burt and Carole's house as lodging for the weekend. Ellie was sleeping in Finn's old bedroom; Kurt and Blaine were in Kurt's.

Blaine woke up early the next morning. His body clock hadn't adjusted to the time zone change yet, but Kurt's apparently had. His boyfriend was still fast asleep, breathing deeply and making soft little sighing noises every couple of breaths. Just looking at his face, so serene and tranquil and unworried in sleep, nearly brought tears to Blaine's eyes. He literally could not wrap his mind around how flawless this man was.

He had half a mind to just stay in bed and watch Kurt sleep, but reluctantly decided against it and got up. Kurt stirred the tiniest bit in his sleep but didn't wake as Blaine stood up from the bed. Blaine pulled the covers back over his sleeping boyfriend and kissed the top of his head before heading downstairs.

The house was completely silent. Nobody else was awake yet. Blaine wandered out into the living room at the bottom of the stairs. The only noise came from the ticking of the clock that hung on the wall. Blaine found the sound strangely peaceful.

He sauntered over to the timeworn piano against the back wall and ran his fingers over the ivory keys with the softest caress. At the top of the keyboard, he played a few of the softer high notes, barely audible, and was surprised to hear that the antique instrument was still perfectly in tune.

Just as he was about to walk away, the row of framed photographs on top of the piano caught his eye. Each one featured two people - Kurt as a little boy, and a woman Blaine had never seen before. Kurt's mom.

There seemed to be no chronological rhyme or reason to the order of the photos. Blaine picked up the frame near the middle of the row. Kurt looked to be about four or five here. He was missing a tooth, probably the first one he'd ever lost, but with the exception of that his smile was identical to his mother's. It was unbelievable how much they looked alike. The same color hair, the same smile, the same impossibly beautiful eyes.

He set that frame down and picked up the one next to it. Kurt was just a baby in this one, maybe three or four months old, but he already had a full head of jet black hair. His tiny fist was partially in his mouth and his baby soft cheek was pressed against his mother's shoulder. She was cradling him tenderly against her chest. Blaine wasn't sure why, but something about the compassionate way she was looking at her son made him tear up again.

"Whatcha looking at?"

The sudden voice made Blaine freeze and practically drop the picture frame. He turned around immediately and saw Burt.

"Oh, um." He set the frame back in place and stepped away from the piano, suddenly feeling like he was invading on something deeply personal. "The pictures just kind of caught my eye."

Burt made his way over to the piano and studied the row of frames as if he hadn't seen them in a while.

"This is where Liz taught Kurt everything he knows," he said. "About a year before she passed away, he asked her if she could teach him how to play the piano. And she did. Right here on this old thing." He gently slapped his hand down onto the sleek, dark wood on top of the instrument.

Blaine smiled fondly. "Kurt's told me she was an amazing musician."

Burt nodded. "She was." He turned back towards the piano and looked over the pictures again. "And this was all his idea. After Liz died, he decided he wanted to make a memorial to her to put on the piano. He went through all our old photo albums and picked out his favorite pictures of the two of them. I took him to get some frames and he set this all up."

"I can't even imagine...," Blaine trailed off thoughtfully for a second. "He must have loved her very much."

"He really did. And she loved him, too. God, she *adored* that little boy." Burt sank down onto the piano bench, and maybe Blaine was mistaken but he could have sworn he heard his voice break with emotion. He turned around and picked up the picture Blaine had just been looking at, the one with Kurt as a baby, and looked at that as he continued.

"He was a gorgeous baby. I'm not just saying that because he's my son. Y'know how there are some babies that no matter how you look at them, they just aren't cute?" Blaine nodded; he had seen plenty. Burt continued. "That wasn't Kurt. He was a good-looking kid. Full head of hair, longest eyelashes I've ever seen on such a little guy, and those eyes. Liz would take him out for walks in the stroller, and people would stop and compliment her on what a beautiful little boy she had."

Burt closed his eyes. Blaine sat down on the ottoman of the armchair across from the piano bench and leaned in closer, because suddenly Burt's voice was quieter. "But she'd figured it out long before then. I'll never forget the night we brought him home from the hospital. We were putting him to bed, and Liz just stopped and looked at him lying there, fast asleep. Didn't take her eyes off of him even as she was talking to me. 'He's perfect, Burt,' she said to me. 'He is so, so perfect.'"

"He was her entire world. Even when she was sick and in the hospital, slowly losing her life. One of the very last things she said to me was, 'Take good care of Kurt. I never want him to forget how much I love him. Please don't let him forget.'"

Blaine was silent for a long time as he took all this in. He'd never really known this side of Kurt's life. Kurt hadn't talked about his mom too much - occasionally he would reminisce affectionately when he cooked one of her recipes, and there was the one conversation they'd had when Kurt had told Blaine about how his mom used to sing to him, but that was the extent of it.

As he pondered all of this, a sudden thought occurred to him and he couldn't help but ask about it.

"Do you think she...," he paused for a moment before continuing nervously, "w-would have accepted Kurt?"

Burt immediately picked up on what Blaine was talking about. He turned around and set the picture frame he was still holding back onto the piano.

"Kurt's always been different," Burt said slowly. "You know that. He's always had some real nice friends - he was never a total outcast, but there were always other kids who picked on him." He sighed. "One night when he was about six, the three of us were eating dinner. All of a sudden, just completely out of the blue, he asks us, 'What does gay mean? And don't say happy. I already know that one.'"

"Liz and I just kind of looked at each other. She and I didn't really know much about being gay, but we didn't necessarily have a problem with it and we didn't want our child to grow up being intolerant and ignorant. She explained to him that it's when boys like other boys and girls like other girls. Kurt goes, 'In a romantic way?' Liz told him yes, in a romantic way. He just kind of stared at his food for a second before he finally started eating again.

"And of course, I wanted to know where he'd heard that word before. I didn't know how the kids at school were talking. So I asked him. Kurt just got real quiet and said, 'A kid in my class called me it today.'"

Blaine closed his eyes. "That was around the age when I first started to figure myself out," he said softly.

Burt nodded. "That's what Kurt tells me, too, and I don't doubt that. The way I see it, it's something guys like you and him were born with, just like some people were born straight. It's just something you *know*. There's no doubt in my mind that he already knew at that age, even if he might not have understood what it meant. He just knew he liked other boys, and that was that. He didn't know there was a specific term for it. None of that.

"So anyway, later that night, I decided to do something about the elephant in the room. Like I said, Kurt was different. Liz knew that and I knew that. So when we were getting ready for bed that night, I finally just came right out with it. I asked her if, y'know, she thought that kid might be right - that maybe our son *was* gay.

"I don't know what made me ask it and I sure as hell didn't know how she'd react. I half expected her to look at me like I was some kind of psycho. 'For God's sake, Burt, he's six.' Something like that. But she didn't." He paused reflectively. "Without missing a beat, as soon as the question was out of my mouth, she said, 'Kurt is who he is, and I love him unconditionally. If he likes boys, girls, both boys *and* girls...it doesn't matter to me. He's my son, and nothing could ever change the way I love him.'"

"You never told me that story."

Both men immediately looked up at the sound of the sudden voice and noticed Kurt leaning up against the door frame with a tiny smile on his face. He was already completely dressed with his hair all done and everything. He'd still been completely asleep when Blaine had woken up. Blaine had never been able to believe how quickly Kurt could get ready for the day.

"Sorry, kid," Burt said with a sigh. "How long have you been standing there eavesdropping?"

"Since Blaine asked if you thought Mom would...accept me." He was still smiling a little bit, but something about his eyes looked sad. Blaine immediately picked up on the cause of his pain. Eighteen years later, Kurt still missed her deeply.

Blaine immediately stood up and crossed the room in two quick strides over to where Kurt was standing. He pulled the other man into his arms and just held him there for the longest time. Kurt squeezed his arms around Blaine's waist like he was holding on for dear life. He buried his face in his boyfriend's shoulder and began to cry quietly.

"I can't even imagine how much it hurts," Blaine whispered, his own voice weak with tears as he held Kurt close. "I'm so sorry, Kurt."

"It's not your fault." Kurt picked his head up and blinked as he tried to stop his tears. "I-I don't know what came over me just now. I just...I wish she were still here."

"I know," Blaine whispered as he kissed Kurt's tears away. "I know."

Kurt closed his eyes and took in a ragged breath. He opened his eyes again and looked straight at Blaine.

"Blaine, there's somewhere I need to go today," he said. "And I want you to come with me."

xxx

The flowers were unnecessary, or so Kurt had told Blaine when Blaine insisted on stopping by the florist en route to their destination. Blaine had gone ahead and purchased them anyway. He wanted to make a good first impression, so he figured this would be the polite and respectful thing to do.

When they arrived, Kurt parallel parked along the curb and pulled the keys out of the ignition, but he didn't get out of the car just yet. He leaned his head back against the headrest and closed his eyes.

Blaine reached across the gear shift console in between them and took his hand. "You okay?"

Kurt practically swallowed his own Adam's apple even as he said, "I'm fine."

"You still miss her," Blaine observed. It was a simple statement of fact, not a question.

Kurt nodded. His voice was small when he spoke. "Every single day."

It sounded like there was more he wanted to say, so Blaine didn't speak. Sure enough, Kurt continued after a few seconds.

"And you would think it gets easier as the years go by, but it doesn't. In a way, it hurts more than ever right now. All these amazing things that have happened to me - graduating, becoming a father...falling in love - and she's not here to share those moments with me."

He sighed despondently and kept right on talking, pouring out all the feelings that had been pent up. "And I just feel so selfish now. My daughter is meeting her mother for the very first time in her conscious life tomorrow, and I still can't let my own mom go after eighteen years."

"It's not selfish," Blaine whispered. "And nobody said you had to let her go."

They sat there in silence for a few more minutes before Kurt opened the door to step out of the car.

"All right, I'm ready. Let's go."

Blaine took his hand as Kurt led him down the paths that wound through the quiet cemetery. It was a beautiful day, just on the fringes of summer, so there were a few more people here paying tribute to their deceased loved ones than Blaine normally would have expected to see. He wasn't sure why, but the further they walked, the more nervous he became - especially when Kurt led him off the path and they began to walk on the grass towards one specific stone.

"This is it," Kurt said.

They were standing in front of the flat, light gray stone that marked Kurt's mother's final resting place. The name *Elizabeth Anne Hummel* was engraved in simple but elegant lettering above her dates: *October 19, 1964 - March 16, 2003*. Blaine quickly did the mental math. She had been only thirty-eight years old.

Without even thinking, he slipped his hand away from Kurt's and stepped closer to the stone. He sank down to a sitting position in the soft grass. Kurt hung back and watched to see what his boyfriend was doing.

"Hello, Mrs. Hummel," Blaine said politely, leaning the flowers he had been carrying up against the stone marker. "My name is Blaine Anderson."

Kurt's mouth fell open the slightest bit but he didn't say anything. He hadn't expected Blaine to do anything like this - but at the same time, the other man's actions amazed him.

"I wanted to tell you that I love your son," Blaine said gently. "He is...well, I can't even describe him." He hesitated. "I love Kurt more than life itself. He *is* my life. He's been through so much and I wish more than anything that I could make the world perfect for him...and it kills me that I can't."

Kurt swallowed the lump that was forming in his throat. He couldn't see Blaine's face, nor could he imagine what kind of forlorn expression he must have been wearing.

"He still misses you very much. I can't even imagine how hard it must have been for him to lose you, because I know how much he loved you. Loves you." Kurt nodded, even though Blaine's back was turned and he couldn't see. "Because I know he's never stopped loving you and he never will. And just from seeing those pictures Burt still has on the piano, I can tell that you love him very much, too."

He was quiet for a second. Kurt realized for the first time that silent tears were falling down his own face.

"I wish I could have known you," Blaine said softly. "Those pictures told me so much about you. You are an absolutely beautiful woman, inside and out. I would have loved to have a chance to meet you."

Through his tears, Kurt smiled. His heart had been sufficiently touched.

"But I know you're up there watching over us," Blaine continued. He tilted his head up to the clear blue sky just a bit. "You're Kurt's guardian angel. And I know you would be so proud of the man he's become." Suddenly Blaine's voice sounded shaky, like *he* was about to cry. "He's a fantastic teacher for the kids at the inner city school where he works. You couldn't pay me enough to have his job, I'll admit it. But he's really turning those kids' lives around. He's an *amazing* father. He is *so* good to Ellie. He's always been there to protect her even with all the crap they were going through earlier this year. It's so obvious how much he loves her." Another pause. Kurt could definitely tell that Blaine was crying now. "And...and I will never be able to figure out how I got so lucky to have him, but I will never take him for granted. He's my best friend, my lover and my soul mate all wrapped up into one incredible boy. I am so proud to be with him. And I'll love him forever. I can promise you that."

Kurt couldn't take it anymore. He needed to feel Blaine close to him as they shared this together. He rushed forward and collapsed on the grass beside his boyfriend, who pulled him into an embrace as they both cried their hearts out - Blaine for a woman he had never known; Kurt for a woman he would never forget.

After a long time, Kurt managed to smile through his tears and pick his head up to look at his mother's stone.

"Mom, I know the last time I came here...things were pretty rough." He exhaled deeply and closed his eyes. "I had burns on my face and bruises all over my body and I just remember wondering if I would ever stop hurting."

Blaine felt something grab at his heart, but forgot all about it when Kurt wrapped his arms around his waist and leaned his head on his shoulder. "But the hurt *did* stop, and now I'm happy again," He squeezed Blaine tighter. "All because of this guy."

Blaine pulled Kurt closer against him.

"I wanted to make sure you knew I'm doing okay," Kurt continued softly. "I'm happier than I've ever been." He absentmindedly reached down and pulled up a few blades of grass from the ground. "I wish you two could have known each other, Mom," he murmured, his voice even quieter now. "You would have loved him, too."

Blaine placed one hand on Kurt's cheek to turn his face up and towards him. The kiss he placed on Kurt's lips was soft, sweet, simple. They broke away after just a few seconds but Kurt held Blaine's eyes.

"Thank you for coming here with me, Blaine," he said quietly but firmly.

"You're welcome." Blaine pulled him even closer and kissed his forehead. He knew he would never be able to fathom just how much this meant to Kurt, so he settled for simply holding him in his arms as Kurt let memories float through his mind.

xxx

Later that night, the extended family found themselves in the living room, watching the Indians game on Burt's now-famous 55-inch plasma screen. It had been a long day - especially for Kurt, who was emotionally exhausted, although not necessarily in a bad way. It had made him so happy to finally share with Blaine a part of his life that he'd essentially kept hidden for so many years. He knew tomorrow would be emotional as well - his daughter was going to meet her mother for the first time and he and Blaine would make the difficult trip to the prison to visit Dave - but in a strange way, he was looking forward to it. He knew that it would give him an opportunity for closure, for redemption. And Kurt Hummel was never one to pass up redemption.

The others were exhausted as well. Ellie had curled herself up between Kurt and Blaine on the sofa and was slowly starting to nod off. Carole, who actually liked baseball, was trying to pay attention to the game, but it seemed that she too would fall asleep any minute. Burt was the only one paying close attention to the events on the screen.

Ellie snuggled herself closer between her daddies and let out a yawn. Blaine smiled affectionately at her. "If you fall asleep now, your daddy won't be able to sing to you."

All of a sudden Carole seemed to wake up. "You sing to her?" she asked Kurt with a small smile. "How sweet."

"Every night," Kurt confirmed, nodding. "Before she falls asleep. Just like my mom used to do with me when I was little."

"He has a beautiful voice," Blaine added fondly.

Carole nodded. "I remember hearing him sing at show choir competitions when he was in high school," she reminisced. "I haven't heard his voice in years, but it's not something you can easily forget. I still remember how pure and gorgeous he sounded."

Suddenly Burt spoke for the first time. "Hey, kid, how about you just sing for all of us right now? Your little girl's practically asleep anyway...plus, you've got a heck of a voice if I remember correctly."

Blaine looked at Kurt with an expectant smile. "I love your dad's idea. Please?"

Kurt considered this for a moment. It wasn't a bad idea, and he was still so full of passion and emotion after the events of the day. There was no better way to get that out in the open than with music, he thought - plus, an idea for the perfect song suddenly came to his mind. He said a silent prayer to Grilled Cheesus that he had the music for it.

He crossed the room towards the piano bench and opened the top to reveal the small storage area for sheet music. Underneath a few loose pages, he finally found the book he was looking for - *Pop Hits 2006!*, which he'd bought and used in junior high. After scanning the list of songs on the back, he bit back a smile when he noticed that the song he'd had in mind was included in here.

Burt reached for the remote and turned off the television as Kurt opened the book and propped it up on top of the piano. His family and boyfriend watched him closely, none of them seeming tired anymore.

"This is for my mom," he said softly.

He turned his attention back to the open music book on the piano and brought his fingers to the keys. The introduction he began to play was soft and gave off the impression that the song they were about to hear was going to break their hearts. After playing a few measures, Kurt began to sing, his voice hauntingly beautiful.

"Seems like it was yesterday when I saw your face

You told me how proud you were but I walked away

If only I knew what I know today."

He was sight reading this music for the very first time, so he got one or two notes wrong on the piano, but nobody seemed to notice. They were completely transfixed on him, lost in his voice as he picked up some power.

"I would hold you in my arms, I would take the pain away

Thank you for all you've done, forgive all your mistakes

There's nothing I wouldn't do to hear your voice again

Sometimes I want to call you but I know you won't be there

I'm sorry for blaming you for everything I just couldn't do

And I've hurt myself by hurting you."

Kurt's voice was softer as he began the second verse right after the chorus, but it was no less compelling. There could have been an earthquake or a nuclear explosion at that very moment, and nobody in the room would have noticed. They were too captivated by Kurt.

"Some days I feel broke inside but I won't admit

Sometimes I just want to hide cause it's you I miss

And it's so hard to say goodbye when it comes to this."

He hit a powerful crescendo over the next few lines that sent chills down the spines of every single person in the room. On the couch, Ellie trembled closer against Blaine. Kurt glanced up over the pages of music on the piano and instead looked at the pictures of him and his mother as he continued with more emotion than he'd ever put into any song he'd sang in his life.

"Would you tell me I was wrong? Would you help me understand?

Are you looking down upon me? Are you proud of who I am?

There's nothing I wouldn't do to have just one more chance

To look into your eyes and see you looking back

I'm sorry for blaming you for everything I just couldn't do

And I've hurt myself..."

Kurt blinked and found that his own eyes were wet. He hadn't meant to start crying, but somehow he hadn't been able to help it. He didn't let his tears stop him from putting just as much power into the bridge.

"If I had just one more day, I would tell you how much that I've missed you since you've been away.

Oh, it's dangerous, it's so out of line to try and turn back time."

He let the last note of that line hover in the air for a silent second before continuing on to the end of the song with a soft, gorgeous pianissimo and his signature high notes.

"I'm sorry for blaming you for everything I just couldn't do

And I've hurt myself by hurting you."

Even after he struck the last chord, Kurt didn't stand up from the piano bench. He stayed exactly where he was, looking at the pictures behind the sheet music once again. The rest of his family, meanwhile, had been stunned into silence. Not a single eye was dry.

"Kurt," Blaine finally said after a while. He tried to verbalize what the rest of them were thinking, but nobody had been able to find the words. "That was...mindblowingly beautiful."

"Your voice is just as gorgeous as I remembered," Carole chimed in.

"That was so pretty, Daddy," Ellie said softly. "It made me cry, but that's okay."

Burt simply shook his head in amazement and whispered, "God damn."

"Thank you," Kurt whispered to all of them. He closed the music book but didn't stand up just yet. He sat there for a moment longer and just thought. Even with four other people in the room, he was completely alone with his memories.

xxx

A bit later on, when Blaine took Ellie up to bed and Carole decided that she was going to try and get some sleep, too, Kurt hung back downstairs with his father. There was something he needed to ask his dad - something that had nothing to do with his mother or Brittany or Dave or anything else that had happened or would happen. This was something he'd had on his mind ever since Blaine had adopted Ellie and he needed to get someone's opinion.

"So what's on your mind, kid?" Burt asked as he cracked open a can of soda in the kitchen. He offered it to Kurt, who shook his head and refused. Burt took a sip for himself.

"It's just...there's something I've been thinking about," he mused, leaning forward on his elbows against the kitchen counter. "Something I want to do so much, but I'm scared."

"All right, what is it?" Burt asked.

Kurt closed his eyes for a second, unable to believe that these words were about to come out of his mouth. He opened them again and stole a furtive glance over his shoulder before turning back to his father once he'd ensured that the coast was clear.

"I want to marry Blaine," he said with a breathless smile.

"Then go for it," Burt said simply. "What's stopping you?"

Kurt sighed. "I don't know. That's the thing," he admitted. "I want to propose to him so much, but I'm afraid to do it. I feel like it's just too soon, y'know? I mean, we've only been together for a couple months...but then again, I know how I feel about him."

"And how *do* you feel about him?" Burt asked.

Kurt's voice was soft but steadfast. "I love him with all my heart. I want to spend forever with him. I want to legally, officially be able to call him my husband."

Burt thought about this for a moment. When he spoke again, his voice was lower and more serious so Kurt knew he meant every word.

"Y'know, Kurt," he said carefully, "a relationship isn't based on the length of time you've spent romantically involved with a person. It's all based on the foundation you've built together." He smiled. "Over the past ten years, I think you guys have managed to build a pretty solid foundation."

Kurt's heart started to flutter rapidly inside his chest. "You think I should propose?"

"You do what you want," Burt told him. "Honestly, I don't see any reason for you two not to just get married already."

"Yay!" Kurt bounced on his toes a little bit and clapped his hands, then leaned back against the counter again with an exhilarated sigh. "I need to think about when and how I'm going to do it. I want it to be absolutely perfect."

"I'm sure you'll think of something great," Burt told him. "Any ideas yet?"

Kurt thought for a moment. "No, nothing specific," he said. "I was thinking of maybe taking him up to the top of one of the tallest buildings downtown at night, when the city is all lit up, and popping the question there. Maybe when we're going for a walk along the beach at the lake while the sun is going down. Maybe even this summer - we might be going to Washington D.C., because we submitted a case to the Supreme Court and we're supposed to hear back from them any day now about if we get to go argue it." Too late, he realized that he'd unintentionally let the plan slip - he hadn't wanted to tell anybody about the case yet, but he couldn't take his words back. "So maybe I'll find someplace in Washington and propose. I don't know."

"Wait, hold up." Burt held up his hands. "Did you say you're gonna be taking something to the *Supreme Court*? Or is my hearing just going?"

"No, you heard right," Kurt said with a smile. "Not making it up, I swear. I'll tell you all about it after we hear back from them...I don't want to jinx our chances of getting in."

"Ah." Burt nodded. "Well, good luck with that." He paused, then gave his son a small smile. "Honestly, kid, wherever and however you decide to pop the big question is up to you. I know you're gonna make it real special for him."

"Thanks, Dad." Kurt had a huge smile on his face as he stepped forward to give his father a hug.

He had an amazing new feeling in his heart all of a sudden. Suddenly the idea of proposing didn't seem so crazy after all. He knew he wanted to spend the rest of his life with Blaine, and there was no reason why that couldn't happen now that same-sex marriage had been legalized in their home state - thanks in part to their efforts.

Kurt said goodnight to his father and left the kitchen. He felt like he was walking on air as he headed up to the bedroom to see his future fiancée.

Chapter Twenty

Derek may or may not have been keeping tabs on Blaine's Facebook page after sending those pictures to the local news. It had to be Blaine's, because Blaine miraculously hadn't deleted Derek as a friend yet - Derek had tried requesting Kurt once or twice, only to get ignored. That hadn't surprised him. What *did* surprise Derek, though, was Blaine's unchanging relationship status: *In a relationship with Kurt Hummel*.

After the pictures, Derek had been expecting to see *It's Complicated with Kurt Hummel* - or better yet, *Single* - because that would mean that Kurt was single, too. Unfortunately, it didn't look like that would be happening anytime soon. Not as long as Blaine was posting things like "Happy birthday, Kurt! I am so lucky to have you in my life, I love you with all my heart! :)" on Kurt's wall and writing status updates that talked about how he was "heading back to Ohio for the weekend with the love of my life" followed by a little less-than-three heart.

No. They seemed to be more in love than ever, if anything. And right now they were off in Ohio together, probably going for romantic strolls along the murky Scioto River. Derek rolled his eyes as he pictured this. Of course they wouldn't break up anytime soon. They were literally too perfect together.

He logged out of Facebook and decided to check on the local news station's website to see what people had been saying about Blaine's pictures. An online version of the story had been posted when the original story aired live on the news. Derek had had some fun reading some of the online comments, most of which lamented the fact that Blaine would cheat on Kurt like that because they were just *so* perfect together.

But to his dismay, the story about the pictures had been removed. In its place was an amended version, with an actual official statement from Blaine himself that they had evidently gotten over the phone.

"Those pictures were intended to be a birthday gift for my boyfriend, Kurt Hummel," Blaine had apparently said. "I never received the original set I ordered. My guess is that they were delivered to the wrong address by mistake. I did not personally send them to anyone. I love Kurt very much and I had no intention of these pictures being seen by anyone but him. I don't intend to take legal action, but Kurt and I would both appreciate if the person who mistakenly received the photos and publicized them without my consent would come forward."

Kurt and I would both appreciate... Derek had to roll his eyes again upon reading that. What, so now Kurt was involved? The only involvement Kurt was supposed to have in this was breaking up with Blaine after

he thought Blaine was trying to impress someone else with the pictures. He wasn't supposed to have an opinion about anything else.

Without thinking, Derek scrolled aimlessly down the page towards the comments. He began to read some of them without even realizing what he was doing. Before he knew it, he was reading things like:

Aww, I'm glad to hear Blaine didn't really do this. He and Kurt Hummel make such a beautiful couple and they literally had to go through hell and back for 10 years before their relationship finally fell into place. I am an openly gay high school student and these two give me hope that one day I can find true love no matter how tough things may be. I would have been devastated if a mistake like this had driven them apart.

and:

I knew Blaine Anderson would never do something like this. He loves Hummel way too much. Anyone can see that. The pictures were hot, by the way.

and:

I have to wonder how Savannah Nichols (local freelance photographer who took these photos, according to the watermark in the corner) feels about this. She and her girlfriend Emily Jade are good friends with Kurt & Blaine. She's a very talented photographer and it's really sad that someone would use her amazing photos (which were supposed to be PRIVATE, in this situation) to exploit Blaine Anderson for whatever reason. Some people will do anything for attention.

and:

God, I hope the SOB who accidentally got these in the mail and exposed them to the media comes forward. My guess is that the envelope was specifically addressed to Blaine and that the guy who got them by accident decided to keep them for this purpose rather than notifying the post office of the mistake. Any idiot could have figured out that these pictures were for Kurt's eyes only. Any idiot also could figure out that Blaine loves Kurt more than anything. Check out the footage of them at the Prop 21 celebration at Navy Pier or the Hummel House grand opening if you don't believe me. Like it or not, Blaine LOVES him. Kurt loves Blaine, too. The love they have for each other is beautiful beyond words. And if the person who did this is reading this, I hope you know you're a desperate lowlife who doesn't deserve to have any connection whatsoever to this amazing couple.

Derek could only stare at his screen in shock after reading through all the comments. He couldn't believe how stupid he'd been, but now nothing could have been clearer.

If a bunch of perfectly random strangers - most of whom probably didn't even *know* Kurt and Blaine - could see what a beautiful relationship they shared, then why couldn't Derek accept that, too?

He scrolled up to the top of the page and looked at the file photo that accompanied the article. It depicted Kurt and Blaine posing together outside the Hummel House building at the grand opening. Blaine's lips were pressed affectionately against Kurt's cheek, and Kurt had this totally blissed out smile on his face. Derek thought back to that one comment. *Any idiot could figure out that Blaine loves Kurt more than anything.*

Kurt had an absolutely angelic smile. Derek had figured that out the first time he'd ever seen him. But sometimes there was even more to his smile. He would actually show his teeth and his eyes would sparkle and he'd start to blush a little and his entire face would just glow. That was what he looked like in this picture. And, Derek now realized, Blaine was the only person who could make him smile like that.

Derek knew there was no telling just how terrible Kurt's situation had been before he'd come here. Didn't he deserve to be with someone who could make his face light up like that even after coming from the most horrible of circumstances?

If Derek really felt as strongly about Kurt as he said he did, he knew he had to accept the fact that Kurt was really, truly *happy* with Blaine and get over it.

He closed the internet browser and shut his computer down. He knew what he had to do.

xxx

Ellie had been in her temporary room at Burt and Carole's for nearly half an hour with the door closed when Kurt finally decided to intervene.

"Ellie?" He knocked lightly on the door. "Sweetie, hurry up. We're meeting Brittany and Santana in twenty minutes."

"Almost done, Daddy," was her muffled response. "I don't know what to wear."

Because fashion advice had always been one of Kurt's strong points, he asked, "Can I come in?"

There was a pause. "Okay."

He opened the door and his face was immediately set to stunned. The little pink duffel bag Ellie had brought with her on the trip sat open on the bed, completely empty. Its contents were strewn all over the floor. His daughter was sitting next to the empty bag wearing a pink Hello Kitty spaghetti-strap top, jean shorts, and a frustrated frown.

"Oh my god, Ellie." He quickly crossed the room and went to sit beside her on the bed. "What happened?"

"I don't know what to wear," she said quietly, not looking at him.

"You look very pretty just like this," he reassured her sincerely. "We're just going out to lunch. It's not a big, fancy place, so you don't have to get dressed up. You look perfectly fine, I promise."

Ellie glanced around the room at the clothes she had apparently flung out of her suitcase in frustration. "Oh," she said. "I tried everything on because I didn't know what she would want me to look like."

"What she-," It took Kurt a few seconds to realize what his daughter meant. "Sweetheart, it's not going to matter to her what you look like. She's your mother. She's going to love you - I've talked to her and Santana, and they're both so excited about meeting you."

He hesitated for a moment. "Do you not want to go?" he asked. "I can call her and say we won't be able to make it. It's perfectly okay if you're not ready."

Ellie shook her head. "No, I want to go," she told him. She was quiet for a moment, then looked at him for the first time since he'd come into the room.

"Daddy?"

"Yes, honey?"

"I don't want you and Blaine to stop being my daddies."

Kurt stroked one hand affectionately through his daughter's hair. "Why would we ever stop being your daddies?"

"Because I have a mommy now," she said. Her voice was quiet again. "I told one of the kids at school that I was going home to meet my mommy. He didn't believe me when I said I have two daddies. He said it was a good thing that I was meeting her because then I could have a real family." She looked up at him with sad eyes. "I thought me, you and Blaine *were* a real family."

"Oh, Ellie." Paternal instinct took over and he immediately pulled her into his arms. "We *are* a real family. You've got two parents who love you very much, and we have an amazing little girl who means the world to us. Yes, you have a mommy, but that doesn't change anything between the three of us, okay?"

"Okay." She nodded against his chest.

Kurt kissed the top of her head affectionately. "I love you, Elizabeth."

"I love you too, Daddy." She smiled and kissed his cheek. "And I love Blaine. We all love each other. That's all we need to be a real family."

There was nothing Kurt could do but give her another hug and hold her close. Those were the most blatantly true words he'd ever heard from someone so young.

xxx

Brittany Lopez-Pierce opened the door but didn't get out of the car. She sat completely still for a second and closed her eyes.

"Britt?" her wife's comforting voice asked. Suddenly a familiar, delicate hand was gently covering her own. Brittany opened her eyes and looked at Santana.

"Santana, I'm nervous," she admitted in a wary murmur. "I don't know what she's going to think of me."

The other woman's face melted into the smile that never failed to warm Brittany's heart. "She's going to love you, I know it," Santana said reassuringly. She squeezed Brittany's hand. "We've been talking to Kurt and Blaine ever since we decided to set up this little reunion. We know they've been explaining things to her and getting her ready. This is all completely new to her, too."

Brittany took a deep breath and let it out as a sigh. She turned to Santana and smiled.

"You're right," she said. "I shouldn't be freaking out about this. Kurt and Blaine are *amazing* dads. They wouldn't be having her do this if she wasn't comfortable."

"¿Ves? Tengo razón," Santana said proudly. She smiled and leaned across the seat to give her wife a kiss. "Now come on, let's go meet your daughter."

They got out of the car and made their way across the overheated parking lot towards the front of the restaurant. May was fading into June, but already the air was saturated with an unbearable stickiness. For a fraction of a nanosecond, Brittany pushed aside all thoughts of Kurt, Blaine and Ellie and thought about how amazing it would be when they finally made it into the air-conditioned restaurant.

But as they got closer, they caught sight of three figures sitting on one of the benches outside the door - two men and a little girl. They walked a few more steps and suddenly it was clear that these were the people they were here to see. Brittany abruptly stopped in her tracks.

"What?" Santana asked gently.

Brittany's eyes were trained on the little girl, who was holding hands with her daddies as the three of them got off the bench and began making their way towards where Brittany and Santana were standing.

"Oh my god, Santana," Brittany whispered. "She's so beautiful."

"I would say she looks like you, but I have to admit she's got a lot more Kurt in her." Santana, who had never seen Ellie in person, could notice this even from the distance that still separated the two families. "Either way, she's gorgeous."

Brittany saw Kurt give his daughter's hand a little squeeze before letting go of it and pacing forward a few steps to greet them.

"Hi!" he said cheerfully, giving them both a hug. "Oh my goodness, it's so nice to see you girls again!"

Brittany smiled blissfully as she hugged him back. All of a sudden it occurred to her just how much she'd missed Kurt. He'd been the first to openly accept her relationship with Santana when she came out back in

high school, and she'd been honored when he and Dave had asked her to be the surrogate for the baby they wanted to have. It felt nice just to be with him again.

"God, I missed you," she said with a breathless smile once they broke away from the hug. His eyes were sparkling with excitement. Brittany had always thought Kurt had pretty eyes. She glanced over his shoulder at Blaine and Ellie, who had hung back for the moment, then looked back at Kurt. "She's so perfect."

"She wants to meet you." Kurt smiled and took her hand. "Come here."

Brittany allowed Kurt to lead her the short distance over to where Blaine and Ellie were standing. Santana was close behind, biting back a smile.

Ellie was still clinging somewhat shyly to Blaine, but Kurt let go of Brittany's hand and stepped forward to take his daughter's. His voice was gentle and reassuring as he spoke to her.

"Elizabeth," he said, leading her tentatively towards where the two women were standing, "this is Santana and Brittany."

Brittany was so awestruck by the affectionate way Kurt was speaking to his daughter that a short moment passed before she realized that the little girl was taking a shy step towards her and her wife. Brittany considered stepping out to meet her, but decided to stay in place. *Let her come to you. Don't impose yourself.*

When Ellie was close enough, Brittany knelt to her height. She couldn't contain a smile as she looked at the girl she'd given life to for the first time in almost seven years.

"Hi," Ellie said. Her voice came out soft. Brittany figured she was probably nervous. "I'm Ellie."

Brittany's smile grew even wider. "Hi, Ellie," she said tenderly. "My name is Brittany, and this is my wife Santana."

"It's nice to meet you." Ellie was still speaking quietly, but all of a sudden a smile graced her features. Brittany couldn't help noticing that she had Kurt's same exact smile. The resemblance didn't stop there - she had his brown hair, his beautiful eyes that Brittany had never been able to name the exact color of. She recognized her own nose, but that was about it. *Ellie was Kurt.*

"It's very nice to meet you, too," Brittany told her. "You are so pretty. You look just like your dad."

"Thank you!" Ellie responded with another smile that lit up her whole face. She had very good manners, Brittany noticed. Kurt had done an amazing job with her. "Lots of people say I look like him."

"You really do," Santana told her sincerely. "I've known your dad since high school and I only just met you, and you already remind me so much of him, which is amazing."

Kurt smiled as he chimed in. "Well, are you guys ready to go in and eat? I know you girls just got here this morning, you've gotta be starving."

"Flying is exhausting," Santana said with a wry smile. "Food sounds great."

They all started to head into the restaurant, but suddenly Ellie called out, "Wait!" and the collective group paused.

"I have to give something to my mommy." She unzipped the little purse she'd brought with her and extracted a folded piece of paper. Brittany suddenly found her heart filling with some kind of maternal love that she hadn't even known existed.

No. She couldn't get too attached. Ellie was her daughter by blood only. Kurt and Blaine were her true parents.

"I drew this for you," Ellie said to Brittany as she handed her the folded paper.

Brittany unfolded the paper and smoothed out the creases. On the inside was a self-portrait that Ellie had drawn of herself in crayon. Scrawled above her head in clumsy kindergarten writing were the words *To my mommy Brtny*. Brittany usually got annoyed when people misspelled her name, but in this case she was too touched to care. The bottom of the picture read *From Ellie*.

"Aww, Ellie." Her voice was partially weak with tenderness. "This is so sweet. Thank you."

She couldn't believe she hadn't felt like this when Ellie had first been born, but suddenly Brittany was overwhelmed with the love that only a mother can give. This picture was like a little piece of her daughter's heart, and she knew she would treasure it forever. This feeling was new and completely unexplainable, but she loved it.

She wondered what Santana would say about having a baby of their own.

xxx

To Kurt's extreme delight, their little lunch date with Brittany and Santana went even better than he expected. He knew Ellie was probably nervous beyond belief the whole time, but as they all ate and talked and laughed together it seemed that she was really taking a liking to her birth mother and the wife of said mother.

Still, though, when she got up to use the restroom near the end of the meal, he went with her. Kurt didn't know this restaurant and he wanted to keep an eye on his daughter - plus, he had to double check and just make sure everything really was going smoothly.

Ellie started chattering excitedly once they had started making their way towards the sign that said *Restrooms* near the back of the establishment. "Brittany and Santana are really nice. Remember when Santana said we should all go out for ice cream when we're done here? Can we go? It's really hot today and ice cream sounds good-"

"Ellie," he interrupted her gently. He and Blaine had been planning on taking her back to Burt and Carole's after lunch so they could keep an eye on her while they went to the prison. Neither of them thought it would be a good idea for her to know what was going on - Ellie didn't even like when anyone so much as mentioned Dave's name, and Kurt and Blaine both knew that it would make her extremely uncomfortable if she knew where they were going.

But she seemed to really like spending time with Brittany and Santana, and Kurt had no idea when the next time they'd all be able to see each other would be. Plus, Brittany had gone six years without seeing her daughter. He figured she deserved to spend more time with the girl she'd watched take her first breath.

He sighed. "Blaine and I have somewhere to go after this." He hated being so vague, but it was for her own good. "If you really want to go get ice cream, I can ask Brittany and Santana if the two of them can just take you. Would that be okay, or do you want to go back to Grandma and Grandpa's?"

"Can I please go with Brittany and Santana?" she asked with a hopeful smile. "I really want ice cream."

"Sure," Kurt told her. "I'll see if it's okay with them when we get back to the table."

Ellie went into the women's restroom to do what she needed to do, and Kurt waited outside the door for her. When she came back out, they headed back to the table just as Santana was handing the little black checkbook back to the waitress with her credit card sticking out.

Kurt frowned as he slid back into his seat. "Blaine, I thought *we* were treating *them*."

"That's what he tried to tell me, but I didn't listen," Santana said coolly as she slipped her wallet back into her purse. "It's on us."

"Oh," he said with an appreciative smile. "If you insist...thank you."

The crowd in the restaurant had thinned somewhat while they'd been eating, so it didn't take long for the waitress to return with Santana's card. Kurt slipped a few bills out of his own wallet and put them under his empty glass as a tip, but didn't get up to leave before explaining to Brittany and Santana what he'd told Ellie a few minutes earlier. They understood completely and happily agreed to take Ellie to go get ice cream with them.

There was, however, one crucial piece of information he purposely left out, because he didn't want to tell Brittany and Santana where he and Blaine were headed in front of Ellie. When they left the restaurant, he pulled Brittany aside while Blaine walked with Ellie and Santana to the rental car the girls would be using during the weekend. He quickly explained to her exactly where he and Blaine were about to go.

Brittany, naturally, looked confused. "But why would you and Blaine want to go see Da-"

"Shhh!" He cast a furtive glance over his shoulder to make sure that the rest of the group was out of earshot. It seemed like they were. "I don't want Ellie to know. I think it would make her very uncomfortable if she knew. She doesn't even like to talk about him. Anyway, he somehow got an issue of the *Chicago Tribune* and found an advertisement in it that Blaine's law firm placed, and it had their business address on it, so he wrote this big, long letter to Blaine explaining how bad he feels. I just...I don't know. Something's telling me I should go see him. I guess I think it could be a chance to redeem myself. He hurt me so much, but his actions didn't completely ruin my life. In fact, it had the opposite effect. I want him to see that he didn't completely break me."

Brittany took his hand and held it affectionately while she spoke. "Kurt, I can't even imagine what's going through your head right now...but if you think it's the right thing, then you should go. Santana and I can take care of Ellie for a little bit. Are you sure she doesn't mind?"

"I'm sure. She loves you guys already, I can tell," he reassured her with a smile. "Are you sure *you* don't mind? I hate to seem like I'm just dumping her on the two of you last minute. I could always just take her back to my dad's, which was the original plan..."

"No, it's fine!" Brittany said happily. "We don't mind. I promise."

Kurt let go of her hand and gave her a hug. "Thank you," he said sincerely.

Just two little words, but they meant so much. They smiled at each other before heading off to catch up with the rest of the group.

xxx

Dave was sick to his stomach. The unpleasant feeling had been lingering all day. He'd thrown up twice today already only to feel even worse afterwards. Kurt and Blaine were paying him a visit today, or so he'd been told. He had no idea when they'd be here, because the prison staff hadn't seen it necessary to tell him. All he could do was sit in his cell and flip through his now-worn copy of the *Tribune*, the one with Kurt and Blaine kissing. He was surprised the correctional officers hadn't taken it away from him yet.

When the moment finally arrived, the guard unlocked his cell and led him down the corridor towards the only door in the hallway that didn't have bars on it. The door to the visitation room looked like a perfectly normal door. In a way, it was. On the other side, prisoners were allowed their only opportunity to connect with the normal, outside world.

He was led to the stool at the very end of the row, even though only about half of the booths were occupied by prisoners being paid visits and there were plenty of empty seats. He sat down. The officer didn't even bother uncuffing his hands. When Dave got situated and looked up, Kurt and Blaine were already sitting there waiting for him.

Dave felt his heart sink right before every single cell in his body went numb. He didn't know how to feel anymore. Kurt's face was completely healed now. There was no sign of the burns that once marred the

pale skin. Dave thought it would be pretty safe to say that his bruises had all faded, too. But that didn't mean the emotional scars were also gone.

Kurt wasn't even looking at him. He was leaning forward with his arms against his knees, shoulders slumped dejectedly as he played absentmindedly with his fingers. In all the years they'd known each other, Dave had never seen Kurt sit with such terrible posture. Blaine was sitting beside him, with one hand on Kurt's forearm and the other affectionately rubbing up and down his back. He was murmuring something to Kurt that Dave couldn't hear through the glass partition.

Dave barely even saw him - Blaine, that is. Kurt somehow managed to wordlessly command all of Dave's attention without even making eye contact with him. Seeing him broke Dave's heart, but he also couldn't help feeling happy because Kurt was so loved.

The correctional officer who had led him to the visitation booth handed Dave the telephone receiver, since Dave's hands were still bound by the cuffs and he couldn't reach it very well. He had great difficulty holding the thing to his ear once it was in his hand. Dave was pretty sure they kept the cuffs on just for added humiliation.

On the other side of the partition, Blaine handed Kurt the phone receiver once Dave had his own phone in hand. Kurt took the receiver with trembling hands and shot a helpless glance towards Blaine before pressing it to his ear.

Dave opened his mouth, but before any words could come out he heard Kurt's soft voice through the receiver. He couldn't believe Kurt had been the first one to speak. He didn't think it was possible, but hearing Kurt's voice somehow made him even more numb.

"I don't know what I'm supposed to say to you." Kurt was looking at him through the glass partition now. His eyes looked green today; their color was stunning even under the bland fluorescent light.

Dave's mind was blank for a second. He wasn't quite sure what to say, either.

"Kurt," he whispered, and he didn't miss the way Kurt melted instinctively closer to Blaine upon hearing Dave's voice. Blaine pressed a gentle kiss into the nape of Kurt's neck and whispered something in his ear. Dave was no lip-reading expert, but it looked like Blaine was saying *I won't let him hurt you*.

"You don't need to say anything," Dave continued softly. "I just want you to know I'm sorry. I know that doesn't fix things. It never will. I...I hate myself for what I did to you, Kurt. I'm sure you hate me, too."

Blaine sure seemed to hate him, that was for sure. He hadn't said a word through the phone, but his eyes were dark and fixed in a subtle glare on Dave. He was trying so hard to be strong for Kurt, but Dave could tell he was close to his breaking point.

"I did," Kurt admitted softly, "after it happened. After I first moved to Chicago to live with Blaine and all I could do was wonder if I would ever be whole again. I thought I would be broken forever, and I hated you for being the one to break me."

He paused for a moment and closed his eyes. "But as Blaine and I grew closer, I realized it was possible for me to love and be loved again," he continued. His voice swelled slightly with emotion, almost like he was about to cry, but Dave knew Kurt wasn't about to let Dave see him shed a tear. "And I just don't have room in my heart for hatred anymore. Nothing good ever comes of it, anyway. I have so much love, f-for Blaine and...and Ellie, and the kids at the inner city school I teach at now...and loving them all has taught me that I just can't hate anymore."

Incoherency struck Dave like lightning as he listened to the words falling out of his former boyfriend's mouth. Kurt was clutching the phone receiver with so much intensity as he spoke that his knuckles turned completely white. Dave could tell that Blaine had been completely awestruck, too. The loving gaze he fixed on Kurt as his boyfriend made these confessions was nothing like the way he'd been glaring at Dave just seconds earlier. He wrapped his fingers around Kurt's free hand and said something else to him. This time, Dave had no trouble reading the words on Blaine's lips. *I love you, Kurt. I love you.*

"Now I'm the one who doesn't know what to say," Dave admitted after a prolonged silence. He had expected Kurt to completely curse him out for everything Dave had put him through and swear to hate him for the rest of his life. This was so much more than Dave had expected to hear him say. He didn't deserve to hear anything like that from the man he'd hurt so much.

"I guess I just need some closure," Kurt told him. "Why are we here, Dave?"

"I'm here because I wrote to Blaine and explained myself. He called the prison, explained that the two of you were going to be in town this weekend, and asked to set up a visit. I really don't get much of a say in who comes to see me, but I honestly never expected the two of you to come here," he admitted. "But you

want to know why *you're* here? You're here because...because you're a good person, Kurt. You are *way* too good for me and I never even came close to being deserving of you in the eight years we spent together. You are a thousand times the man I'll ever be. And...and for some reason that I'll never be able to understand, you found it in your beautiful heart to come here today."

He paused. "M-may I...speak to Blaine, please?"

On the other side of the glass, Kurt took the phone away from his ear and said something to Blaine, who nodded and took the receiver.

"Hello, Dave." At least he had the decency to be polite. Dave knew this had to be killing him - sitting here face-to-face with the monster who had hurt the love of his life. He had to give Blaine major props for not breaking through the glass and attempting to tear his face off.

"Blaine, I w-want to apologize to you, too." Dave's voice was almost broken, but he kept speaking. He glanced at Blaine and Kurt's intertwined hands. "I just can't help noticing that you love him very much."

Blaine looked at Kurt and smiled. "I do," he said, and Kurt blushed.

Dave knew Kurt was probably thinking about the marital implications of those two words, but he forced himself to continue.

"I'm sorry for everything I put the two of you through," Dave said. "I...I can't even imagine what it must have been like for you to be in that situation so suddenly."

"It was the hardest thing I've ever had to go through," Blaine admitted. He closed his eyes for a second. When he opened them again, he was staring intensely at Dave as he spoke. He wasn't glaring anymore - now it looked like Blaine was trying desperately to get Dave to see his point of view. Very attorney-like of him, Dave thought.

"W-when the man you've secretly loved for ten years calls you in tears almost every single night and tells you he's being hurt by someone who supposedly loves him, all you want to do is hold him in your arms and kiss all his hurt away. But that's hard to do when you're four hundred miles away from him and can't do a damn thing about it. It's..."

He trailed off and shook his head, not even bothering to finish that sentence. His shoulders were shaking, almost like *he* was going to cry just remembering the agony of watching Kurt go through this. Not even Kurt had shed a tear yet.

Dave lowered his head shamefully, unable to look at the two of them now that he had visible proof of how much he'd hurt them both.

"I'm sorry," he whispered into his end of the receiver. "I don't know what else to say."

He looked up again. Kurt and Blaine had the phone in between them so they both could hear. Something about the way they were both listening into the phone together reminded Dave of Jimmy Stewart and Donna Reed in Kurt's favorite Christmas movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*. Their family had watched it every year around the holidays. Dave wondered for a moment if Kurt would still keep some of their favorite traditions like that, or if the memories would be too painful now.

"Take care of him, Blaine," Dave said quietly but profoundly. "Love him the way he deserves to be loved."

"I will," Blaine swore, looking at Kurt even though he was still speaking to Dave. "Forever."

In that moment, Dave saw something come over Kurt. It was almost like a shudder that rippled through his whole body and brought him closer against Blaine. The look in his eyes was something else entirely; Dave couldn't even describe it. He looked up at Blaine and whispered something that Dave could neither hear nor read from his lips.

Blaine spoke into the receiver again. "I think we need to get going," he said to Dave.

Dave nodded understandingly. He had expected that they probably wouldn't stay long. "Okay," he said softly. "Thank you for coming."

Blaine held out the receiver to Kurt, who shook his head. He had nothing more to say. Blaine looked at Dave through the partition and hung up his end of the phone.

Dave saw one of the officers lead Kurt and Blaine towards the door that led to freedom on the visitors' side of the room. He watched them leave, unable to make himself look away.

"Let's go, Karofsky." The correctional officer who had brought him here was waiting impatiently behind him. Dave stood up to leave. As he was being led away, he turned around again and looked through the glass.

The door on the visitors' side had just fallen shut. Kurt and Blaine were gone.

xxx

Out in the sticky heat of the parking lot, Kurt was just about to pull open the passenger door on Blaine's car when suddenly he felt himself being wrapped into an embrace.

He immediately turned around and buried his face into his favorite spot on Blaine: that little patch of warmth where his neck melted into his shoulder. Miraculously, he still hadn't cried, and he wasn't about to. It was just nice to feel Blaine so close to him after what they'd just experienced.

"Kurt." As usual, Blaine spoke his name with nothing but the purest affection. He picked his head up and looked into his boyfriend's warm hazel eyes, trying to drown himself in them.

"I just wanted to tell you how proud I am of you," he said in a low but strong voice. "Everything you did, everything you said in there. And you were right." He placed his hand on Kurt's chest, over his heart, feeling it beat into his palm. Kurt put his own hand over Blaine's to hold it there. "You have *so* much love to give, Kurt. And...and I still don't know what an amazing person like you could possibly see in me, but I consider it an absolute honor to be able to say that Kurt Hummel is my boyfriend. That...what you did in that visitation room was a perfect example of what I love most about you. The way you turn your pain into compassion and love." He paused for a moment as his mind suddenly wandered back to the events of the previous afternoon. "I've never loved you more than I do right now. And I know your mom would be so proud of you, too."

Kurt immediately responded by pulling Blaine into a tender, emotional kiss. There was no way he could verbally justify every single amazing thing Blaine had just said to him, so he wasn't even going to try. As their lips moved pliantly together, Blaine suddenly felt warm tears on his face. *Now* Kurt was crying.

Kurt breathlessly broke away from the kiss, smiling despite his tears.

"Thank you," he said weakly. "For...everything. I love you."

"And I, you." Blaine gave him one more gentle kiss, then glanced around at their surroundings. For a moment, they'd been so lost in each other that they'd forgotten where they really were - in the thick humidity of the parking lot outside the barbed-wire electric fence that surrounded the county prison.

"Let's get going," Blaine said, opening the door for Kurt. "I'm sure you've had enough of this place. I know I have."

Blaine was right, but Kurt still couldn't contain his smile as he slid into the passenger seat. Blaine really was too good for him, but he wouldn't have wanted anyone else.

xxx

The next afternoon, Kurt insisted on driving the entire way back home to Chicago. Blaine hadn't let him drive at all on the way down here, he pointed out, so he figured that it would only be fair to give Blaine a rest this time around. It ended up being a good idea, because Blaine was fast asleep less than an hour into the drive.

Kurt was perfectly content to let Blaine sleep, but he couldn't help noticing that the drive seemed to drag without him to talk to. They stopped for dinner somewhere in Indiana and Blaine stayed awake after that, so it was a little better. And because it was a holiday weekend, the freeways were an absolute mess. They didn't make it home until late that night.

When they finally arrived, Kurt immediately set his bags down next to the door and headed into the living room to collapse on the couch. He'd forgotten how exhausting the drive from Columbus to Chicago could be.

"I'll unpack later my stuff later," he announced, his voice thick with exhaustion. "Right now, I just need to lie down."

Ellie headed over to the couch and snuggled up beside him. "Me too," she said.

Blaine was feeling pretty well rested from his nap in the car. He couldn't help but smile as he watched Kurt and Ellie. "Aww, how cute is that?"

"If by 'cute' you mean 'deadbeat exhausted,' then yes. I'm sure we look very cute." Kurt managed a tiny smirk of his own even though he could barely keep his eyes open.

Blaine stepped forward and gave them both a kiss on the forehead. "You two stay here and rest. I'm going to head downstairs and check the mail."

"Okay," Kurt murmured. "I might be asleep by the time you get back, just to warn you."

Ellie stood up from the couch and yawned. "I'm gonna go brush my teeth and put my pajamas on," she said.

Kurt smiled wryly to himself after she left. He was all alone.

He really didn't feel like falling asleep on the couch, so he reached for the remote on the coffee table and turned on the TV to force himself to stay awake.

The eleven o'clock news was almost halfway over. Kurt tried to stifle a yawn and turned up the volume and tried to pay attention to what the anchor was saying.

When he was finally able to focus on the television, he couldn't believe what he was seeing. He squeezed his eyes shut and forced them open again, not sure if his exhaustion was making him hallucinate somehow, but when he tuned back in there was no mistaking that the news lady was talking about Blaine.

"We've touched on this story a few times over the past few days. It all started when we received a set of photos of local attorney and gay rights activist Blaine Anderson." As the anchor spoke, a few of the photos were flashed across the screen. "The person who leaked the photos to us originally said that Anderson had personally sent him the photos. We later spoke with Anderson over the phone, and he told us that the pictures had mistakenly fallen into the wrong hands. They were supposed to be a birthday gift for his boyfriend, Kurt Hummel. Earlier today the formerly anonymous source came forward and explained why he lied."

Kurt, no longer tired, was focused with rapt attention on the television. The screen cut to an interview that had apparently been taped earlier in the day. When Kurt recognized the man, his heart stopped cold.

"That son of a *bitch*," he whispered.

"I got Blaine's pictures by mistake. The envelope *was* addressed to him specifically. I will admit that," Derek Campbell was saying. He was identified by text at the bottom of the screen that said *Anderson's*

former boyfriend. "I didn't realize it until after I'd opened it, and I guess I should have done something right away when I realized the mistake."

"You *guess*?" Kurt scoffed at the TV.

"You guess what?" Blaine's voice suddenly asked. He shut the door behind him as he came back into the apartment and headed over to the couch to sit next to Kurt, tossing the stack of mail onto the coffee table.

"He was the one," Kurt explained in complete disgust and disbelief. "He got the pictures."

Blaine stared at him for a second. "This is a joke," he said. "You're joking, right?"

"I wish," Kurt said flatly.

They turned their attention back to the television to hear what else Derek was saying.

"...and I guess the only reason I did it was because I'm jealous."

"Jealous of Kurt?" the reporter conducting the interview asked, then held the microphone back in front of his face.

"No. Jealous of Blaine," Derek said. "I...had some really strong feelings for Kurt, and I thought maybe he'd break up with Blaine if he thought Blaine was trying to seduce someone else. I was pretty desperate. I thought if my plan worked, I might actually have a shot."

"I want to throw up," Kurt murmured absentmindedly.

"Is there anything you would like to say to Kurt and Blaine?" the reporter on TV asked Derek.

Derek looked straight into the camera as he spoke. "Kurt, Blaine, if you're watching...I'm sorry," he said. "You two obviously have something very special between you, and for some reason I refused to accept that. What I did was sneaky and immature, and I'm very sorry."

The program cut back to the anchor at the news desk. "Because Derek Campbell stepped forward, he faces the minimum penalty of paying a fine of an undisclosed amount. Had he kept his mouth shut and it was later discovered that he was to blame for this, he might have ended up in prison."

"Jesus," Kurt said breathlessly as he turned off the TV. "I think that's enough of that. Wow." He looked at Blaine. "They were *your* pictures. What do you think about all this?"

Blaine shrugged. "I was upset at first, but I'm glad the truth is out there now," he said. "I have to give him at least some props for coming clean. I just hope we can put all this behind us now, because we may have more important things to focus on."

Kurt raised one eyebrow. "Things like what?"

Blaine reached out and turned on the lamp that sat on the end table next to the couch. He leaned forward and sifted through the pile of mail he'd tossed onto the coffee table, finally extracting a large, official-looking envelope from the bottom of the pile. Kurt's eyes went wide when he looked to the upper left-hand corner and saw the return address.

"The Supreme Court of the United States," he read in a breathless whisper.

"It's your case," Blaine said, handing him the envelope. "Would you do the honors?"

Kurt opened the envelope with delicate precision, knowing that with his luck he'd probably end up tearing something important if he wasn't careful. He slipped a single piece of paper out of the envelope.

"Well, this looks nice and official," he murmured as he scanned over his own name at the top of the page, under the title *Plaintiff*. Below that was the information for Sean Jeffries and the rest of the teachers' union, who were apparently called the *Respondents*.

"It says that we are hereby summoned appear before the court," Kurt read. "In thirty days." He glanced up from the paper and looked at Blaine. "Normally I would be impressed with myself that I just managed to read a whole bunch of legal gibberish without asking you to help translate, but they're taking our case, Blaine."

He was surprisingly calm, cool and collected on the outside. Blaine tried to match his composure, but he couldn't resist letting his own excitement show.

"Oh my god, Kurt!" He giggled in disbelief and wrapped Kurt in a hug. "They're taking it! They're actually taking it!"

"I can't believe it, Blaine. This is *huge*." Kurt smiled breathlessly. "How many other lawyers can say they've argued before the highest court in the nation before they even turned thirty?"

"This is...surreal," Blaine admitted, but he was still smiling. "I am so happy though, Kurt. I promise I'm going to do my best to win this case for you."

Kurt took his hand. "Not just for me," he said softly with warm affection in his eyes. "For all of us. The whole gay community. Anyone who was ever told 'no' because of who they are. I have all the confidence in the world in you, Blaine. If anyone can win this, it's you."

Blaine leaned in closer and gave him a hug. "I'm going to give this my all for you, Kurt," he promised, then smiled as he considered what Kurt had just said. "And for all of us."

Kurt held him closer and let his eyes flutter closed as a blissful smile took over his whole face. He had never been more proud to call Blaine Anderson his boyfriend. This case was going to have a huge impact, he could already feel it. He had the sense that he and Blaine could really change the world together if they wanted to.

He didn't think about the fact that this could, ironically, put some distance between them. It never once crossed his mind that that was exactly what might happen. All he cared about was that he had the best damn attorney and boyfriend he could ever ask for, and that was that.

Chapter Twenty-One

News traveled relatively quickly in Chicagoland. Not long after the official decision had been made, it seemed everyone knew that Kurt Hummel and Blaine Anderson were taking a case all the way to the Supreme Court.

Since Mr. Hummel and his boyfriend had been really into the whole gay rights thing lately, Michael Horowitz wasn't surprised to learn that his teacher had managed to pull something like this off. And as clueless as he was about the legal process, he found himself praying to a God he wasn't sure if he believed in that they would win – for Michael's own sake and for all the other kids like him. The whole thing seemed stupid anyway...nobody should be excluded from anything just for being gay or bi or whatever, Michael thought. As much as it bothered him that a case like this should even have to be argued, he was full of hope for it. If anyone could win this, it was Mr. Hummel and his boyfriend. From what Michael understood, Blaine Anderson was a damn good lawyer.

It was about a week before the last day of school when he got a call one evening from Chloe Alexander, one of the girls who was also in Mr. Hummel's class with him. He was confused when he saw her name on his caller ID, because he had never talked to her much, but he shrugged and answered anyway.

"Hi, Chloe," he greeted her when he answered, trying not to sound all rude and confused as to why she was calling. "What's up?"

"Okay. We have a really good idea," she said without so much as a *hello*. He could hear the smile in her voice from the other end of the line.

"Who's 'we'?"

"Me, Christina, Andre and Bruno were all talking about this on the bus on the way home today," Chloe explained. "Y'know how Mr. Hummel and his boyfriend have that big court case they're taking to the Supreme Court over the summer?"

"Yeah...," he trailed off, wondering where she was going with this.

"Well, we all started talking about it and we think it would be really cool if our class could do something for him," she said. "It would have to be sometime this week, since school's almost over. But we all agreed

that he's been really awesome to us, and we should show him our support with something this big and important."

Michael considered this. "I agree," he told her. "I mean...he was the first person I came out to. He was really cool about it. Plus, I feel like he's the only teacher in the whole school that actually *cares*, y'know?"

"Exactly, which is why we want to do something," Chloe said. "Are you in?"

"Definitely," he said, nodding even though he knew she couldn't see through the phone. "What kind of stuff were you thinking of doing, exactly?"

"We came up with a couple ideas, but nothing's official yet," she said. "What do you think about...?"

She told him a few of the ideas that the four of them had come up with, and Michael listened intently. When she was done saying what she needed to say, he couldn't help letting her know how cool he thought it would be.

"I love that," he told her. "I think it would be really cool for him."

"So do I," Chloe said happily. "Okay, now that we've got a few people on board, I'm gonna finish calling everyone else in the class to see what they think." She paused. "Hey, but could you do us a favor?"

He shrugged. "Sure."

"Could you...," Chloe trailed off for a second, "...we thought it would be kind of cool if Blaine Anderson were there, too. Since he's Mr. Hummel's lawyer for this thing and also his boyfriend. Would you maybe want to call him and see if he could come help surprise Mr. Hummel? I mean, I can call him if you don't want to, but we were thinking it would mean a lot more coming from you."

"That's a great idea, but why me?" Michael asked. "Because I...came out to his boyfriend?"

"Well, I didn't exactly want to say it like that, but yeah," Chloe admitted. "Just tell him who you are, what you told Mr. Hummel, and explain our whole plan to him. Tell him that it would really mean a lot if he were there for this. I think once he hears your story, he'll definitely be willing to help us out."

"Okay, sounds good," Michael agreed. "I'll look up his number online and give him a call. Let me know if there's anything else I can do to help."

"Will do!" she promised. "See you tomorrow at school."

They said their goodbyes and Michael hung up, actually feeling pretty awesome about this. He'd never been a part of anything like this before, probably because none of the kids in his class had ever really had a teacher like Mr. Hummel before. He'd changed all twenty-four of their lives, whether he'd known it or not. Michael only hoped that their little plan would let their teacher know just how much they all appreciated him.

For a moment, he considered looking up Blaine Anderson's number on his law firm's website and calling him right then and there, but decided against it. It was getting pretty late, and even if Michael *did* find his work number online, Blaine probably wouldn't be there to answer it. Michael wasn't too sure how late lawyers usually worked, but he assumed that most of them were typically home by 9:30 p.m. He would just wait and call tomorrow.

xxx

Unbeknownst to Michael, though, Blaine still hadn't left his office.

It was already pretty dark outside but he made no effort to get up and turn on the lights. The city glittered outside his large windows and the only light from inside the room came from the glow of his computer screen. It hurt his eyes to look at in the near-darkness, but he couldn't make himself get up and turn the lights on. He was almost finished writing his brief for Kurt's case, and he wasn't going to get up from this chair until he was done.

He loosened his tie and undid the top few buttons on his shirt, hoping it would make him feel more relaxed. It seemed unprofessional, but nobody else was around and Blaine honestly didn't care. He turned back to the computer screen and typed a few more sentences into the Word document that was already over ten single-spaced pages long.

There was no doubt in his mind that this was the longest and most important brief he'd written in his career, and also the most difficult to write. Not only was he taking this all the way up to the Supreme Court, but he was using it to represent *Kurt*, of all possible clients. He was going to argue a case that could

possibly change the way people had thought about the gay community, for the love of his life, in front of the highest court in the nation. It was a huge honor, but at the same time it absolutely terrified him.

His phone rang and suddenly Blaine stopped thinking. He answered and tried to respond in a calm and professional tone, one that didn't suggest how exhausted he was. "Blaine Anderson, attorney at law."

"Blaine?" It was Kurt, and he sounded worried. "Is everything all right?"

Blaine rubbed his eyes and tried to force them open as wide as possible. "Yeah, everything's fine," he replied. "I'm finishing the brief for your case. It's almost done. I want to finish it just so I can stop worrying about it."

"Oh, Blaine, it's so late," Kurt said, his voice so soft with concern that it nearly broke Blaine's heart. "You sound so tired. And we have a few weeks until our case, anyway. You need to rest."

"I want to get this submitted as soon as I can. The justices have to review each lawyer's brief before we can appear in court," Blaine explained, then managed an exhausted smile. "And it's *your* case. My name didn't appear anywhere on that court summons. I'm doing this for *you*, because I love you and I want to fight this for you."

Kurt sighed. "Now I feel more guilty. I don't expect you to stay there so late working just because of me."

"Don't feel guilty," Blaine insisted. "I'll be home as soon as I can, I promise."

"Okay," Kurt said softly. "I love you."

"I love you, Kurt," Blaine swore to him. "I'll see you in a little bit."

He hung up the phone and resumed staring at the computer screen. He wanted to make this absolutely perfect for Kurt, but he couldn't help but feel overwhelmed by this whole thing already. It already felt like he was in way over his head, and there was no way back to the surface.

Without even thinking, he added a few more sentences to the end of his brief, then printed out the whole thing. After hours of slaving over this thing, he'd done the best he could. All they could do now was wait.

xxx

When Blaine finally made it home that night, Kurt was stretched out on the couch in the living room watching some late-night sitcom that had a loud laugh track.

"You didn't have to stay up and wait for me," Blaine said apologetically, greeting his boyfriend with a kiss.

"Too late," Kurt said with a smile. "I'm already up." He smiled and took Blaine's briefcase. "Now I don't want you to think about this case any more for the rest of the night. I ran a bubble bath for you in our bathroom so just go soak up and relax, okay?"

"God, Kurt, I love you. That sounds amazing," Blaine practically moaned. Before he turned to leave the room, though, he snatched his briefcase out of Kurt's hand and opened it. "I would invite you to join me, but there's something I'd like you to read, if you don't mind. Or at least look over. You don't have to read the whole thing."

He pulled out a blue folder and handed it to Kurt, who opened it and began flipping through the pages attached to the prongs inside.

"Oh my goodness, Blaine," he murmured in awe, glasz eyes wide. "This is..."

"The brief for your case. We submit this to the court, and the nine justices read and review it before we go in and argue the case in front of them. The opposition submits one, too, just so they can get an idea of what both sides are arguing," Blaine explained. "I wanted you to see it first, just to make sure everything sounds okay. It's not the most exciting thing in the world to read, but just look it over and let me know what you think."

"Okay." Kurt smiled and gave him a hug. "Thank you so much for doing this, Blaine. I can't even imagine how much work you put into this."

"You're worth it." Blaine stood up from the couch and kissed Kurt's forehead. "Now if you'll excuse me, that bubble bath you were telling me about sounds incredible."

xxx

After the most relaxing twenty minutes of his day, Blaine stepped out of the master bathroom into his and Kurt's bedroom wearing sleepwear he'd "borrowed" from his boyfriend: one of Kurt's old New Directions

t-shirts from high school and a pair of his boxer briefs. Kurt was already in bed waiting for him; the blue folder was on the bedside table next to the alarm clock.

Blaine crawled into bed next to Kurt and giggled when he realized his boyfriend was wearing nothing but a pair of boxer briefs similar to the ones Blaine himself was wearing. "You make me feel overdressed."

Kurt folded his arms around Blaine and pulled him closer so that Blaine's head was on his naked chest. "You look sexy in my clothes, though," he murmured.

"Mmmm," Blaine hummed contently, letting his eyes fall closed. This was what he'd been looking forward to all day – lying in bed all snuggled up with his amazing man. Blaine always felt so relaxed and protected in Kurt's arms. He opened his eyes a little bit and took a moment to just take in how amazing his boyfriend looked up close and personal, unhidden from all those layers he liked to wear so much. Kurt had more muscle on him than a lot of people would probably think. His chest was sturdy and broad; his arms were strong and defined while at the same time tender enough to hold Blaine with so much affection. Blaine turned his head slightly and placed a soft kiss on Kurt's toned bicep. Underneath all those layers of clothing, Kurt's body was so beautifully masculine, like a marble statue of some venerated Greek god.

"I read through your whole brief," Kurt said softly, stroking his fingers through Blaine's curls.

"You did?" Blaine asked, and Kurt nodded. "I said you didn't have to read the whole thing."

"Yeah, well, I read the whole thing anyway," Kurt said with a tiny smile. "It was amazing, Blaine. I...I still can't believe you're doing this for me."

"What was I supposed to do?" Blaine asked rhetorically. "I wasn't just going to watch you go through this alone when I had a perfect opportunity to help you. Especially because I knew it had the potential to be huge." He paused for a second and looked up into Kurt's eyes. "I want to change the world with you, Kurt."

He loved the way he could feel Kurt's heart pick up pace in his chest as soon as he finished saying that.

"Well, you're *my* world," Kurt murmured, pressing a tender kiss to the top of Blaine's head. "And I never want that to change."

"That part won't change, I promise," Blaine giggled. He paused for a second, just looking up at Kurt and drinking in how divine he was.

"How did I get so lucky?" Blaine whispered after a brief silence.

A tender smile touched Kurt's lips. "I ask myself the same thing every day," he said softly.

"I love you so much," Blaine swore as he picked his head up off of Kurt's chest and gave him a kiss. "I love you *so* much."

His heart swelled with unimaginable emotion when he felt Kurt's lips curving up into a smile beneath his own as they shared more sweet kisses. It was moments like this when it seemed that they were the only two people in the world. Blaine adored the way Kurt's soft lips seemed to fit perfectly with his own, as if the two of them had been designed specifically for each other. Even more thrilling was the fact that those plush, perfect lips were his to kiss any time he wanted. Like now, for instance. Blaine would have been perfectly content simply kissing Kurt for the rest of his life, he mused dreamily.

"You didn't even give me a chance to say it back," Kurt gasped with a breathless smile when they finally broke away. "I love you, too." He took Blaine's hand and placed it on his bare chest, right over his own heart. "It's all yours."

Blaine always got the same unexplainable feeling at moments like this, when it was especially clear to him that Kurt had given Blaine a part of himself that he could very easily break. The fact that Kurt was able to trust him so completely and implicitly with his fragile heart made it especially clear to Blaine that they truly were destined to be together. Still, he found it difficult to believe that someone so perfect could have been made just for Blaine. He ran his fingers lightly over the defined musculature of Kurt's chest, just marveling. *Mine. All mine.*

They lay there for a while longer, just looking into each other's eyes and whispering tender words of affection and exchanging soft little kisses late into the night. Blaine was no longer thinking about legal briefs or court cases or the fact that there were people out there in the world who thought that what the two of them shared together was immoral and wrong. As far as he knew, the world did not exist beyond the comfort of Kurt's arms. He was completely content to be wrapped up in his own little universe with his boy. He couldn't have asked for a better ending to his long, exhausting day. This was all he needed for the rest of his life.

He eventually began to drift off to sleep, soothed by the music of Kurt's heartbeat and the rhythm of his breath. Unfortunately, though, the moment he decided to try and slip into unconsciousness, he started

thinking again. He would never admit it out loud, because he didn't want to risk losing the amazing trust Kurt had placed in him, but he was absolutely terrified about the weeks to come. Here he was, about to face the most pivotal case of his career - at only twenty-seven years old, for crying out loud. He *had* to win this - for Kurt, for himself, for the millions of others out there who had been rejected because of who they were - and really, what member of the LGBT community hadn't? If he didn't win this case, he'd be letting down every single one of those people, regardless if they knew it or not. He knew he had already been very fortunate in the amount of success he'd achieved relatively early in his career. He only hoped he hadn't peaked too soon.

As he was thinking about all this, his thoughts were interrupted by a gentle press of lips to his forehead. He almost opened his eyes, but forced himself to keep them shut. Kurt thought he was asleep.

"You're adorable when you're sleeping," Kurt whispered tenderly. "I love you so much, Blaine, I can't even describe it. I just...I love you. I love you."

Blaine had never been all that great at feigning sleep. It was especially difficult now that Kurt was murmuring sweet professions of love to him. He couldn't help letting a huge smile spread over his face even with his eyes still closed.

He felt the rumble of Kurt's quiet laughter through his body as the realization struck. "Oh my god, you're totally awake, aren't you?"

"Maybe," Blaine murmured, still smiling. He didn't open his eyes.

"Go to sleep, Blaine," Kurt demanded teasingly. Blaine could hear the smile in his voice.

"*You* go to sleep, Kurt," he shot back in a drowsy mumble with a smirk on his face.

"I will," Kurt insisted with a giggle. He kissed Blaine's forehead again. "Seriously, though, I love you."

"Seriously, though, I love you too," Blaine told him. He snuggled closer against Kurt's chest and his boyfriend's arms gently constricted even tighter around him.

This time, he was able to keep his mind completely clear of all thoughts that were not of Kurt as he nodded off. There was no reason for his mind to be as preoccupied as it was earlier, anyway. He was safe from the weight of the world here in Kurt's arms.

xxx

Michael came directly home from school the next day instead of heading off with the guys to the vacant lot where they normally played baseball. He had to call Blaine Anderson at some point this week, and the sooner he got ahold of him, the better.

His father wasn't home yet. That was good. Michael knew his dad sometimes stopped home on the way from one job to another in the middle of the day, so the timing was perfect and he had the entire tiny house to himself.

He tossed his books down on the sofa, then booted up the old, decrepit computer and waited impatiently for the crappy internet connection to pull itself together. Fifteen minutes after he'd booted the thing up, he was finally staring at the Carter & Anderson law firm website.

Thankfully, the site itself was pretty easy to navigate. Michael found the number for Blaine's office and dialed it without really thinking about what he was doing. It wasn't until he heard the phone ringing on the other end of the line that he really started to get nervous. What was he supposed to say?

Unfortunately, he didn't have much time to think about that because all of a sudden there was an answer. "Blaine Anderson, attorney at law."

"Um, h-hi," was Michael's intelligent reply. "My name's Michael Horowitz. I'm in seventh grade at Buckley Middle School."

Blaine Anderson's voice sounded less official and more friendly after Michael introduced himself. "Hi, Michael. How can I help you?"

He decided not to think about what he was going to say and just go for it. "Uh, well...me and some of my friends at school are trying to get something done for Mr. Hummel. He's our music teacher and I know you guys are together and you're gonna be his lawyer for his big court case. We were wondering if you'd be willing to help us out."

He hesitated for a second. "We all just wanted to do something that lets him know how awesome we think he is. He's the best teacher most of us have ever had. He's the only teacher at Buckley who really seems to care about us and wants to see us do well. Like for me, personally...he was the first person I ever came out to. He gave me some really good advice and made me feel a lot better about everything. I know a ton of

other people in the class go to him whenever they need to talk about something. He's always really cool about it, so we wanted to show him how much we appreciate him before you guys go to Washington this summer. Will you help us?"

"Absolutely," Blaine Anderson said right away, and Michael felt like a huge burden had just been lifted off his shoulders. "What did you have in mind?"

Michael explained to him what Chloe had told him on the phone the night before. Blaine Anderson listened intently, not interrupting him or asking questions. When he was done explaining, he waited nervously to hear what he thought.

"Oh my god, that sounds amazing," Blaine said. It sounded like he was smiling, so that was a good sign. "Kurt will *love* that. I'm so excited that you guys want me to be a part of it."

Michael thought it was a little weird at first how he'd called Mr. Hummel by his first name, then remembered who he was talking to. Blaine probably didn't call him "Mr. Hummel." That would just be weird.

"Thank you so much. Everyone will be so excited when I tell them you're in," Michael told him sincerely. "That's just a basic plan of what we're going to do. Do you want me or someone else to call when we figure out more details?"

Blaine didn't reply right away. There was a slightly muffled sound that sounded like he was clicking something on a computer.

"Y'know what, I'm actually going to be in and out of meetings for the rest of the week, so I have no idea when I'll be in my office. Calling might not be the best idea," he said. "If you want, you could email me. I'm constantly on my email, so that would probably work better."

"Okay, that works," Michael told him.

"Cool, sounds good," Blaine Anderson said. "And you guys were planning on doing this on Thursday, right?"

"Yeah, this Thursday. Our class starts at 12:30. Can you be there?"

It was silent for a moment before Blaine responded. "Yep! Luckily for us, that's one of the only slots of free time I have this week. I'd love to come if you guys want me there."

"We do," Michael told him. "We thought it would be especially nice if you were there. Plus, it'll be an even cooler surprise for Mr. Hummel."

"I'm a surprise. Got it. Okay," Blaine said. He laughed a little bit. "Thanks again for thinking of me. I know Kurt really cares about you kids and it's so neat that you want to do this for him."

"No, thank *you*," Michael said sincerely. "This will really mean a lot to all of us."

"You're so welcome," Blaine Anderson said. For some reason, he was a lot easier to talk to than Michael had thought he'd be. "Talk to you later, Michael. Thanks for calling."

"No problem, see you later this week."

It looked like Michael's streak of good timing continued, because his father came in through the front door just seconds after he hung up the phone.

He clicked the red X in the top right corner of the screen to close the browser window that still had the Carter & Anderson site open, then shoved his phone into his pocket so his father wouldn't see if, God forbid, Blaine Anderson decided to call him back right away for some reason. He tried to remain as calm as possible as he said, "Hey, Dad."

"How was your day?" his father asked as he turned his back to Michael and opened the refrigerator, not particularly caring to hear his son's answer, so Michael didn't even bother to respond.

He turned back to the computer, opened up a new internet window and stared blankly at the Google homepage, waiting for his father to leave so he could call Chloe and tell her Blaine Anderson was in.

"My shift might be over a little early tonight. Want me to pick you up anything for dinner?" his father asked as he cracked open a can of soda from the fridge.

Michael turned to look at him in confusion, not quite sure he'd heard him right. His dad offered to get something for dinner maybe once in a blue moon. Usually it was up to Michael to fend for himself. He decided to take advantage of this rare opportunity.

"Uh, sure. Just get anything," he said. Then, out of pure curiosity, "Why, though?"

"Got a little bonus on my last paycheck. Probably due for a raise sometime soon," his dad said. "Either way, we'll definitely have a bit more money around here than before."

Michael wasn't quite sure how to respond to this. As much as he hated his father's close-mindedness, he had to admit his dad worked as hard as he possibly could to make ends meet. He had three jobs, for crying out loud. His dad deserved credit for *that*, at least.

But before he could even think of a response, his father stepped towards the couch and picked up the folded white t-shirt Michael had brought home from school today. He'd tossed it carelessly on the couch with his books and forgotten all about it. And now his dad had *picked it up* and was *holding* it. Michael stopped breathing. He couldn't let his dad unfold that shirt and see what it said.

"What's this shirt doing out here?" his dad asked.

Michael jumped up and snatched it out of his father's hand. "Oh. That. I found it in my gym locker today at school. I must have forgotten about it. I brought it home so I could wash it."

To make the lie even more believable, he headed into the cramped laundry room and opened the washer so he could toss the shirt inside.

"Whatever you say. I'll be home around six," his father said. He didn't seem suspicious, so that was a good sign.

"Okay," Michael called after him as his dad headed out the door. "Bye, Dad."

He stayed frozen in place beside the open washing machine until he heard his father's clunky old pickup truck pull out of the driveway and head off down the street. His heart rate significantly slowed down as he reached into the washer to retrieve the shirt. After closing the washer, he unfolded the shirt and spread it out on top of the machine.

All twenty-four kids in Mr. Hummel's class had gotten a shirt like this today. They would be wearing them as part of the plan to surprise him. Chloe's aunt ran a small t-shirt press shop, so she had agreed to make these for their whole class free of charge. The design itself was relatively simple – a plain white shirt with large black lettering on the front that read *Team Hummel*.

Michael couldn't even imagine how his dad would have reacted if he'd unfolded the shirt and seen what it said. He didn't even want to think about that.

For whatever reason, though, thinking about his intolerant father's possible reaction to the shirt gave him an idea. He headed out of the laundry room and out into the kitchen, then rooted around in the junk drawer until he found a Magic Marker.

Once again, he spread the shirt out so that *Team Hummel* stared back up at him. He uncapped the marker and began to write below the screen-printed letters.

No, really, I literally play on the same team as him, he wrote, and I'm proud as hell of who I am.

xxx

Blaine should have taken that long night he spent in his office typing Kurt's brief as a hint. In reality, though, the nature of this case didn't really hit him until he found himself staying late at work almost every single day, either in meetings or making other preparations for the case. He never had to stay as late as that first night, but it was still hard – especially because Kurt kept blaming himself for it. He could see it in Kurt's eyes when he came home every night. He knew his boyfriend somehow felt that he was responsible for all the stress Blaine had been under as of late, and he hated being the one to make Kurt feel that way.

But if anything could make up for it, it would be the surprise that all the kids in Kurt's class were planning for him. In fact, Blaine had fudged the truth a bit when that Michael kid had originally called him. Blaine *did* have something going on this coming Thursday afternoon. He was supposed to be meeting with the attorney for the other party to get some things straightened out for the case, but he'd called the guy and postponed the meeting as soon as he'd gotten off the phone with Michael. Right now, he needed to be there for Kurt. He only hoped this would make his boyfriend feel better about things.

"We don't have to do this, Blaine," Kurt said one night that week when Blaine finally made it home. "I don't want you to wear yourself out. Can we cancel our case somehow?"

Blaine immediately set his briefcase down and took both of Kurt's hands. "Be honest with me. What do *you* want to do? Take me out of the equation completely. Pretend you have some other lawyer. Do you really want to let it go, or do you want to fight it?"

Kurt looked away. "I want to fight it," he said to the floor.

Blaine shook his head. "Come on, Kurt. If you mean it, look at me when you say it. I know you have more in you than that."

Kurt cleared his throat. "I want to fight it," he repeated, his voice more firm this time as he looked at Blaine straight on.

"That's what I thought." Blaine squeezed his hands and smiled. "Now I don't want you to feel guilty about this. I wouldn't have become a lawyer if I didn't think I could handle having so much to do. It kind of comes with the territory. And now I'm going to put those seven combined years of college and law school to good use and win this case for you, okay?"

Kurt nodded and, for the first time since beginning the conversation, smiled. "Okay. I have full faith in you, Blaine. I just don't want you to wear yourself out trying to put this together for me."

"Hey," Blaine commanded teasingly. "What did I say about making yourself feel guilty?"

Kurt rolled his eyes but kept that smile on his face. "Okay, fine, I won't." He hesitated for a moment. "And thank you. I feel like I don't say that nearly enough. Thank you, Blaine. For doing this case for me, and...for everything."

"Anything for you." Blaine returned his smile and gave him a kiss.

Kurt kissed him back for a moment, then broke away with a suggestive glimmer in his eyes. He kept his face close to Blaine's as he spoke.

"Y'know," he said slowly, "if you really want to relax, I got a bubble bath all ready for you, since you seemed to like that last time." He paused for a second and continued in an even lower voice. "I was wondering if this time I could join you?"

He was coming off as so coy and innocent that it was almost sinful. Blaine could have sworn he even saw him flutter his eyelashes a little bit. Kurt was probably the only person in the world who could do that and not look dumb, he thought.

Blaine gave him a flirtatious smile and spoke with his voice just as low. "That doesn't even need to be a question, Kurt. You think I could say no to that even if I wanted?"

Kurt slinked away from his grasp and stepped just out of Blaine's reach. He unfastened the top few buttons on the button-down shirt he wore under his favorite Alexander McQueen vest. Blaine watched with a blank, lustful stare as Kurt raised one eyebrow and smiled enticingly, crooking one finger towards Blaine in a seductive come-hither sort of way. "*Venez avec moi.*"

Shit. French, too? Blaine thought the newly exposed sliver of creamy skin at the top of Kurt's chest, just revealing enough to tease, was enough to do him in. Now he had to go and start speaking *French*.

"*Vous avez travaillé si dur aujourd'hui.*" Kurt turned to start down the hall towards the master bedroom and the cozy little tub with a nice bubble bath awaiting them in the bathroom there. He still had that sly little smirk on his face, sexy as all hell. "*Vous avez besoin pour vous détendre.*"

He started walking away, swinging his hips with a sexy, confident kind of swagger. For a second Blaine couldn't do anything but stare at his ass, which looked *amazing* in the tight black pants he'd worn today, then he finally snapped out of his trance and followed Kurt down the hall.

xxx

Even though Blaine had asked him not to feel guilty, Kurt still did. He felt terrible that his boyfriend was putting in countless hours at his office getting this case ready and Kurt himself wasn't doing anything. He'd tried asking Blaine a few times if there was anything he as the client could do; Blaine always told him that there was not. So Kurt was left to continue his daily routine as usual when Blaine got home late every night.

He couldn't get his mind off of all this as he sat in his classroom, waiting for his students to arrive. Today's class would probably just be pointless – it was the second to last day of school, and he was just as anxious for the school year to be over as the students were. The sooner the school year ended, the sooner he and Blaine could go to Washington D.C. to argue their case. And the sooner they got that over with, the sooner things could get back to normal.

The bell rang to signal the end of the preceding class period and Kurt went to stand by the door to greet the kids as they came in, just like he always did. But something wasn't right. He stood there for the entire four minutes that was allotted to students in between classes, and not one of them came.

That was definitely strange, Kurt thought. Sure, he knew kids skipped class sometimes, but *everyone* skipping the *same* class on the *same* day? That seemed unlikely, and so did the possibility of all twenty-four of them being home sick. *Where in the world could they all be?*

He stood there for a moment longer, but when none of them appeared, he headed back into the classroom. He figured he would make a call up to the office and figure out what was going on. There was a chance that they wouldn't even know, since the administration here never really seemed to know anything, but it was worth a shot.

The door fell shut as he sat behind his desk and picked up the landline extension. He'd never had occasion to use this phone before, so he had to scan the list of preprogrammed numbers that was printed beside the handset. *Main office – 1*. Kurt shrugged and dialed 1.

He heard the secretary pick up on the other end. "Yes, Mr. Hummel?"

But before he could respond, suddenly his classroom door opened. Kurt froze in place, still holding the phone to his ear, as his class began filing in.

The very first thing he noticed was that they were all wearing the same shirt. Every kid had on a white t-shirt with large black lettering that read *Team Hummel*. They all smiled and said hello to him as they came in, not acknowledging the shirts at all, acting as if it were a completely normal day. Instead of taking their usual seats, they walked to stand together in a close-knit clump in the middle of the half-circle of chairs.

The secretary's voice from the office came through the phone again. "Kurt? Is everything all right?"

He still didn't respond, because at that moment one more person came into the room. Blaine was wearing a *Team Hummel* shirt just like all the students. He had Kurt's favorite smile on his face and he was carrying a bouquet of dark red roses.

"False alarm," he whispered into the phone, then hung up before the secretary could say anything else.

He stood up from behind his desk, eyes wide as he tried to figure out what was going on. "Oh my goodness, you guys...Blaine...what's going on?"

"Surprise!" the rest of them, including Blaine, said in unison.

Blaine stepped forward and handed Kurt the flowers he was holding. "These weren't part of their plan to surprise you, but I wanted to bring them anyway."

"Oh my god...," Kurt murmured in disbelief. "I'm guessing *you* were part of this plan, though?"

Blaine smiled. "Yes, I was part of the plan. They called me and asked if I would come here today to help surprise you."

He leaned in and gave Kurt a hug, earning a smattering of "Aww!"s from some of the girls, but Kurt held Blaine captive in his arms for a bit longer than usual so he could ask him something without any of the kids hearing.

"I thought you had a meeting today," he said, confused. Blaine had just mentioned it this morning before he'd left for work.

"I did," Blaine said. He pulled back and smiled, but kept his voice quiet. "But I cancelled it and rescheduled when the kids asked me to do this. I might be your lawyer for this case, Kurt, but first and foremost I'm your boyfriend. And it's really important to me that you never doubt that."

"This is so sweet," Kurt said sincerely, his face touched with a tender smile. He turned away from Blaine slightly so he was facing the class. "But...why, though? How come you guys are surprising me?"

Blaine pulled up two of the empty chairs, then took Kurt's flowers and set them gently on his desk. "How about you and I have a seat and these guys will tell you all about it?"

Kurt warily sat down in one of the chairs and Blaine took the empty seat beside him. He reached for Kurt's hand and held it as Michael, who was standing in the front row of the conglomeration of students, began to talk.

"Mr. Hummel, you've done so much for us just during the short time you've been teaching here," he began. "We know the two of you are headed off to D.C. in a couple weeks to argue a big case for the Supreme Court, so all of us just wanted to show you our appreciation before you set off to do this."

He paused for a moment. Blaine squeezed Kurt's hand.

"Mr. Hummel, you were the first person I ever came out to. Growing up in my house, with my dad...I always felt like there was something wrong with me for liking other guys. You were the first person to make me feel *normal* about it. You taught me how to be proud of who I am, and I can't thank you enough for that."

He bowed his head humbly and stepped aside. For the first time, Kurt noticed that Michael had written something else on his t-shirt underneath the large black letters that said *Team Hummel*. He squinted the tiniest bit and was able to read it: *No, really, I literally play on the same team as him and I'm proud as hell of who I am.*

Christina, the girl who had been standing beside Michael, stepped to fill the empty spot he'd just vacated and began to speak.

"Mr. Hummel, when you first came here to teach this class, they took me and twenty-three other kids who weren't currently signed up for an elective and had us take it. And I'll be the first to admit that I wasn't really all that excited about it at first, but that quickly changed. Coming here to your class is always the best part of my day. I've discovered that I love to sing, which is something I probably never would have found out about myself had it not been for you." She smiled. "And on top of that you've taught us all so much more than just music. So...thank you."

She stepped out of the way when she was done speaking, and Andre stepped in to take her place.

"Mr. H., I remember that first day I stayed after class to talk to you. I was kinda acting all cocky that day, but it was all just to cover up the fact that I was real upset because my brother had just got shot." He paused reflexively for a second. "He's all better now, by the way. But anyway, talking to you about that and just kind of venting...made me feel like I was *worth* something. None of the other teachers here ever make us feel like we're worth anything, but you're different. You actually care. And I think that's why lots of us really look forward to coming to your class every day." He gave Kurt a small but sincere smile. "Thanks so much."

Kurt watched with rapt attention as the rest of the students each stepped forward one at a time to say their individual piece. The best part of it all was the fact that he could tell that every single word came from the heart. He felt tears welling up in his eyes as he listened to what his students were telling him.

"Mr. Hummel, you taught me how to be more accepting of people who are different from me. I never would have met some of the best friends I've ever known if it hadn't been for you."

"Mr. Hummel, I've learned so much from you...not just about music, but about myself. I have no problem saying that you've made me a better person, because it's so true...you've helped me feel happy about who I am for the first time in my life."

"You showed me that being different and standing out from the crowd is actually really neat, and that I need to stop worrying about what other people think of me."

"You made me realize that no matter how tough things may seem, I need to keep going and make my dreams come true for myself. Nobody else is going to do it for me."

"You care so much about all of us, and it shows. You've shown me that when people do what they're really good at and what they're passionate about, it can really make the world around them a better place."

By the time they'd all spoken, Kurt had given up and let the tears fall. Blaine let go of his hand so he could wipe away Kurt's tears with his thumb.

"Oh my god, you guys made me cry," he told them all, smiling despite his tears. "But...I feel like I should be thanking *you*. I love being your teacher, and believe it or not, you guys teach *me* something new every day. So thank *you*. I mean that."

Michael, who was back at the front of the group since he'd been the first one to say his individual piece, smiled and spoke again. "Since you're obviously a music teacher, we thought that the best way to show our appreciation for you would be through song. We all got together every day this week, either after school or later in the evening, to practice this. We hope you like it."

Blaine took Kurt's hand again. They both watched expectantly as Michael began the song a capella, singing the first line solo.

"Don't cry, open up your eyes and know there's someone else out there that feels this way."

Christina, back in her original spot beside Michael, took over to sing the next line in her pretty alto tone.

"I'm singing to you, cause I know what you've been through and now..."

Michael joined his voice back in again, and the two of them blended together in unison.

"It's not so long ago I felt the same."

Michael and Christina kept singing, but Andre and a few of the other kids around them joined in for the chorus so that there was a slightly greater swell of voices that was still somewhat subdued. Kurt thought they sounded amazing so far. Had he really taught them how to do this?

"Like soldiers, march on

If we can make it through tonight we'll see the sun

March on, march on."

Kurt leaned his head against Blaine's shoulder and smiled as he unsuccessfully tried to blink back more tears. The second verse began with just the girls, all the altos and sopranos singing in unison.

"I remember summer nights alone

Fireflies the only thing we own

All we had were dreams of California."

The boys joined in on a lower harmony while the girls kept up the melody. Kurt felt a chill race down his spine.

"And I remember winters were so cold

Hunger was the only thing we know

And rock and roll dreaming was what saved us."

Everyone sang the chorus this time in full unison. The chills still weren't going away, but Kurt didn't mind.

"Like soldiers, march on

If we can make it through tonight we'll see the sun

March on, march on."

Blaine let go of Kurt's hand and wrapped his arm around his waist instead. Kurt smiled up at him as the boys took over this time, launching into a powerful bridge.

"Til we see the sun, march on."

They sang the next line as well, but Kurt was pleasantly surprised when he heard them split into two-part harmony. Normally he just had all the male voices sing one baritone part instead of dividing specifically into tenor and bass. The boys had somehow managed to teach themselves how to harmonize within the group.

"Til we see the sun..."

The entire male section dropped out and the girls took over, starting with the altos.

"Through the good times, through the bad times."

The alto section kept the melody strong while the sopranos went up to a higher harmony. Kurt couldn't believe *them* now, either. He usually just had the altos sing a harmony while the sopranos had the melody. They'd taken what he'd taught them and tried something new with it, and he absolutely loved it.

"Through the long days, through the hard nights."

The boys joined in again and the entire choir split off into a breathtaking four-part harmony that made Kurt tremble closer to Blaine.

"Keep on til we see the sun."

The entire group cut off abruptly after building up that crescendo. The boys who had sung the bass part began the chorus quietly, in deep contrast to how the whole choir had just sounded. They sung the chorus twice, and every few lines the next voice part – tenor, alto, then soprano – would join in.

"Like soldiers, march on

If we can make it through tonight we'll see the sun

March on, march on

Like soldiers, march on

If we can make it through tonight we'll see the sun

March on, march on."

The entire group kept singing in perfect harmony for the last few lines. Kurt had resorted to accept the fact that there would always be tears on his face and chills would forever be racing down his spine, since neither seemed to be going away anytime soon.

"Even when there's no one there for you, march on

Even when the days are long for you, march on

Like soldiers, march on."

The entire group watched Kurt and Blaine with expectant, almost shy smiles after they finished the song. Kurt shifted himself out of Blaine's arms and sat up straight. He smiled through his tears as he applauded them; Blaine joined in a few seconds later.

"Wow," was all Kurt was able to say. "Just...wow. That was spectacular."

Chloe, who had been standing on the end of the front row next to Andre, spoke up. "We never would have been able to pull that off if it weren't for you," she said. "You taught us how to do something really amazing with music."

"Yeah, and like a bunch of people said before, you've taught us more than just music," Andre said. "A lot of us in here don't come from real good situations and you showed us that we just have to keep on marching. Y'know, like the song."

Kurt smiled and stood up. "You are amazing," he told them. "Every single one of you. Teaching you and getting to know you has been the most incredible experience. You all have changed *my* life in the best way possible, and this year has been phenomenal. For those of you who aren't in eighth grade and graduating, I hope I get to see you all in my class again next year."

He wasn't even sure how it happened, but suddenly they were all coming forward and wrapping him and Blaine in a massive group hug. Kurt closed his eyes as they surrounded him and smiled blissfully. When he opened his eyes, he was looking right at Blaine.

"I love you," Blaine said, just quietly enough so that Kurt could hear.

"I love you," Kurt whispered back. He didn't think he'd be able to stop smiling even if he tried. He had all he could ever need right here with him.

xxx

Blaine ended up having to go back to work after Kurt's class that day, and the students of course had to go on with the rest of their school day. When the last of them had left, he found himself alone in the empty classroom. There was nothing quite like the feeling of sudden loneliness when one has just been surrounded by so much love, Kurt thought.

Usually he stayed after his class and got things ready for the next day, but today there was no reason to do that. Besides, it killed him to think about the possibility of spending more time alone in the bleak classroom. He wanted to get out and go somewhere – and he had the perfect idea of where to go and what to do.

His mind was filled with nothing but thoughts of Blaine as he gathered up his things and got ready to leave. There was something he'd been thinking about doing for a while now – something that terrified him to think about, but there was nothing else he would rather do. He knew he loved Blaine more than life itself, and the fact that his boyfriend had come today to be a part of his students' special surprise meant

the world to Kurt. There was no doubt in his mind that he had to do what he'd been dreaming about for a while now.

According to the dashboard clock that lit up when he started his car, he still had about another hour and a half before he needed to go pick up Ellie from school. That would be plenty of time – he hoped. The process itself shouldn't take very long, but he also wanted to take his time with it. He wanted to make this so special for Blaine, who had done more for him than Kurt had words to describe. This was going to be the perfect way to show Blaine just how much Kurt loved him. All he had to do was make the right choice when he arrived at his destination.

It was the middle of the day, so traffic downtown wasn't too horrible. Kurt parked his car in one of the public underground garages near Millennium Park and strutted down the Magnificent Mile to the swankiest jewelry store on Michigan Avenue. He was feeling more hopeful and confident every second. The thought that he was actually doing this thrilled him to the core.

The inside of the jewelry store was air conditioned, which was a nice contrast to the unmerciful heat of the downtown street just outside. Kurt barely noticed as he entered the store with a breathless smile.

Right away, one of the employees – a blonde thirtysomething woman with long nails – stepped forward and greeted him cheerfully. "Hello! Can I help you find anything today?"

Kurt's heart started pounding, but he couldn't stop smiling. He couldn't believe he was actually here to do this.

"Men's engagement rings," he said with an exhilarated smile. "I want to propose to my boyfriend."

The woman just stared at him for a second. Kurt could immediately tell from her expression when the realization set in.

"Oh my god," she said. "I've seen you on the news before. You're...Kurt?"

He nodded. "That's my name, don't wear it out."

"Oh my god," she said again. "You're Blaine Anderson's boyfriend! This is so exciting! I can't believe—"

"Shhh." Kurt quietly cut her off as he glanced around at the few other customers perusing the merchandise in the glass display cases. Thankfully, none of them seemed to have heard her little excited outburst.

"Please don't tell anyone I was here," he begged in a whisper. "I want it to be a complete surprise when I propose to Blaine. If this gets out and he discovers I was out ring shopping...it won't be as special for him. Can you please keep this between you and me?"

She nodded. "Okay," she said with an understanding smile. "My lips are sealed."

Kurt smiled. "Thank you so much. If he says yes and our engagement gets publicized somehow, you can say you knew about it first."

"Sounds good!" The jewelry woman seemed to like that. She was still smiling as she turned towards the back corner of the store. "If you want to follow me, most of our men's jewelry is back here in these cases..."

Kurt spent a long time looking over practically every single ring design the store had. The woman was even nice enough to take some of them out of the case and look at them up close. It took him a while, but he finally found one that he thought would be perfect for Blaine.

"This one," he said at long last, handing it back to the woman so she could see. The design itself deviated from tradition just a bit – it was solid platinum, adorned with a simple diagonal row of diamonds set into it. He slipped it onto his own finger just to get an idea of how it fit. It fit perfectly on his own finger, and Blaine's hand was around the same size. It was perfect.

He handed it back to the woman who had been assisting him. "What do you think?"

"This one is gorgeous," she commented, looking it over. "Did you see the inside? It comes with an engraving." She handed it back to Kurt, who looked closely at the inside of the band. For the first time, he noticed the words *All my love forever* inscribed there.

"I love it," he told her sincerely. "This is the ring I can see myself proposing to him with."

"That's good," she said, nodding. "If you can see yourself getting down on one knee with this – or however you plan on popping the question – that's the most important thing. That's when you know you made the right choice."

He nodded. "Yeah. I can see it," he told her. "Can I buy it today?"

"Absolutely!" she told him. Kurt followed her to the register, heart pounding wildly the entire time. This was happening. He was about to do this. He was purchasing an engagement ring that he was going to give to Blaine. It all seemed so surreal.

The ring ended up costing him nearly his entire paycheck. Kurt was immediately glad he'd just gotten paid the day before, otherwise there was no way he'd be able to buy this today. He left the store with the ring in a black velvet box and unimaginable thrill in his heart.

He had a ring. He had a plan. He had an incredible man with whom he wanted to spend the rest of his life. If everything fell into place, his life would pretty much be perfect. As strange as it seemed for him to use the word "perfect" to describe his life with everything that had happened to him, he knew it was true. Blaine made his life perfect. After all the tears and all the hurt and all the pain, Blaine had made his life worth living again.

Chapter Twenty-Two

On Kurt's first official day of summer vacation, he tried to remain relatively calm that morning as Blaine got ready for work and Ellie got ready for school (the inner city district where Kurt worked got off for the summer about a week before the suburban district where his daughter attended school). He had unexplainable excitement bubbling up inside of him as he chatted amiably with his family over breakfast, but did his best to contain himself. Occasionally he would let his gaze wander to Blaine's left hand as he thought about the ring he'd purchased that was currently hidden in its little box at the back of his sock drawer. He couldn't help smiling as he pictured what the ring would look like on his boyfriend's finger.

His daughter, of course, caught him smiling to himself.

"You look really happy, Daddy," Ellie commented as she swirled a piece of sausage around in the puddle of syrup on her plate.

Blaine studied Kurt's face for a few seconds before a knowing smile of his own took over his expression. "She's right, Kurt. You seem awfully cheerful this morning."

"Oh, I'm just happy it's summer." Kurt sighed blissfully. "I'm getting coffee with Savannah and Emily this morning. I'm excited to see them."

Really, though, he had invited the girls out for coffee so that he could break the news of his engagement plans to them. He was aching to tell *someone*, and who better than his favorite girls to share the news with?

"Sounds more fun than sitting in meetings all day, that's for sure," Blaine admitted.

"Or going to school," Ellie chimed in.

Kurt giggled. "Sweetie, you don't even drink coffee."

"But I don't wanna go to school," his daughter said. "I want it to be summer."

"Just think about it this way," Blaine told her. "At this time in a week, it *will* be summer. It's really not as far as it seems, I promise."

He smiled at Kurt even as he continued speaking to his daughter. "I think this summer is going to be amazing."

Kurt took Blaine's hand – his left hand, coincidentally – and gave it a little squeeze. He played with his fingers a little bit and smiled.

"You have no idea," he said softly.

xxx

Emily thought she knew Kurt Hummel well enough by now to be able to tell exactly how he was feeling in any given moment. He pretty much wore his emotions on his sleeve, which made it easy for her to tell if something was wrong or if he was especially happy about something. As she waited in line with him and Savannah at Starbucks that morning, she could definitely tell that the latter was the case. Kurt was biting his lip in an unsuccessful attempt to hold back a smile and he was practically bouncing up and down with excitement.

"Okay, Kurt, now seriously," she said to him once their little trio was seated with their coffee. "You have had this adorably excited smile on your face ever since we got here. What's the big news you said you had?"

"Oh." Kurt ducked his head, but not before Emily noticed him blushing. "I was really smiling that much?"

"Mmm-hm," Savannah said as she sipped her latte. "Just tell us. Please?"

"Okay!" Kurt giggled. He shot a quick glance over his shoulder, checking to make sure nobody was within earshot. Nobody was. He leaned in closer anyway and continued.

"The other day," he said slowly, and Emily didn't think he'd be able to stop smiling even if he tried, "I went ring shopping."

Savannah grabbed Emily's hand and gave her a knowing smile that lingered for a second before they both turned their attention back to Kurt.

"And what kind of ring did you get?" Savannah asked, still smiling.

"I bought a platinum band set with princess-cut diamonds that has *All my love forever* engraved along the inside." Kurt somehow managed to say this all in one breath. "It's an engagement ring. I'm going to ask Blaine to marry me."

"Oh my god, Kurt!" Emily turned towards him in her chair to the best of her ability and pulled him into a hug. Her heart was immediately overflowing with so much genuine happiness for her friend. She kissed the soft skin of his flushed cheek and pulled back to look into his eyes, which were sparkling with pure joy. "This is so amazing!"

"Thank you!" Kurt was so giggly and completely blissed out that it was hard to believe how much he'd been hurt earlier this year. This right here, Emily thought, was living proof of how much Blaine had changed his life for the better. "I think I'm going to propose when we're in Washington. I just...I don't know. I love the idea of that. Proposing to my boyfriend in the capital city of a nation where our love is still not recognized in all places. I think the significance of that would be amazing."

"I love that," Savannah said, nodding. "I think it would just kind of represent how your love can overcome everything, even if some states still don't recognize it." She shrugged. "Just a thought. Also I think it would symbolize hope and change for the future. That maybe someday the whole nation will recognize your love and all that."

"Exactly!" Kurt said cheerfully. He closed his eyes and breathed an exhilarated sigh. "I'm so happy. I know it seems a little soon, but we've known each other for ten years...and he's done so much for me just in the time we've been together. I came here because it was safe for Ellie and me, but I never expected I would find the love of my life. He showed me that it was possible to love and be loved again. I love him more than anything in the world."

"I can tell," Emily said. She gave his hand a gentle squeeze. "And he loves you, too. Anyone who thinks being gay is unnatural or wrong or whatever...every single person who thinks like that just needs to take a look at you and Blaine and *then* try saying that."

Kurt smiled softly. "Really?"

"Kurt, you're so cute. Yes, really." Emily returned his smile and rubbed her thumb across the back of his hand. "I know there's no such thing as an absolutely perfect couple, but you two are the closest thing I've ever seen. You boys are beautiful together. I can't wait to come to your wedding."

"Wedding," Kurt repeated. His jaw dropped slightly. "I was so happy about the thought of spending the rest of my life with him that I didn't even think about how we're going to be planning our *wedding*." He hesitated and his smile immediately returned. "This is going to be so fun!"

"You already have a wedding photographer." Savannah winked at him.

"You want to do it?" Kurt asked with a hopeful smile.

"I would love to," Savannah told him. Emily noticed happily that her girlfriend's eyes were lighting up with excitement, just as they always did when she thought of some new photography-related idea. "Oh my god, and the engagement photo shoot. I have so many amazing ideas for you two already. Can I please?"

"Absolutely," Kurt told her. "I have to admit, I went on your website and looked through a whole bunch of your pictures after Blaine gave me the pictures you took of him for my birthday. You're amazing. If Blaine's okay with it, which I think he will be, I would love to hire you as our official photographer."

"Ahh, yay!" Savannah clapped a little bit with excitement and Emily almost swooned over how cute she looked. "I seriously love you, Kurt. If both of us were straight and you didn't have plans to marry your handsome lawyer boyfriend, I'd totally go for you."

"Aww, that's the strangest compliment I've ever received," Kurt told her with a smile. "Thank you. Y'know, I think the nonexistent heterosexual version of me would be okay with that, actually."

Emily shook her head but couldn't help smiling. "You two are so weird, and yet I still love you both." She picked up her coffee cup and lifted it in the air above the center of the table. "To Kurt and Blaine. You two deserve nothing but happiness and a beautiful life together."

"I'll drink to that." Savannah lifted up her cup as well, then looked at Kurt.

Kurt smiled shyly and raised his cup as well. They toasted and drank to the life that he and Blaine would spend together.

xxx

While his boyfriend was off sharing coffee and engagement plans with two of the couple's best friends at Starbucks across town, Blaine was sitting in his office dreading the knock that would come to the door.

He'd already put this meeting off once, so there was no way around it now. He knew he had to meet with the other party's attorney at some point to make arrangements for the case. This was never something he enjoyed doing, especially now that he had such a monumental case on his hands, but he figured that he would rather just get it over with.

When the knock finally came to his door, Blaine closed his eyes and took a deep breath before standing up and going to answer it.

The man standing on the other side of the door didn't look much older than Blaine, but he was much taller. He spoke with a clear, deep voice. "Blaine Anderson, I'm assuming?"

Blaine smiled politely and extended his hand. "Your assumption would be correct."

The other attorney shook his hand. "Justin Wheeler. I'll be representing Sean Jeffries and the teachers' union."

"Great. Thanks for coming today, I'm so sorry I had to cancel last time," Blaine said. He stepped aside so Justin Wheeler could step into his office. "Something came up last minute...it would have been a mess." He turned to the coffee maker on the shelf next to his desk. "Coffee?"

"Oh, sure, that would be great," Wheeler said. He was glancing around the large space, obviously impressed by the magnitude of Blaine's office. "This is...really nice."

Blaine laughed a little bit as he handed Wheeler the cup of coffee he'd just poured. "I know. I'm still not used to it." *This isn't as bad as I thought it would be*, he thought. Justin Wheeler seemed like a nice enough guy. He could only hope the rest of the meeting would go smoothly.

But now he noticed Wheeler checking out his large desk. His eyes landed on the framed photo Blaine had of himself and Kurt.

"That your boyfriend?" he asked, nodding to the frame.

Blaine smiled. "Yes. My boyfriend-slash-client," he said. He turned towards the arrangement of armchairs across the office from his desk. "If you want, we can sit over here...seems less imposing that way..."

Wheeler followed him across the office and sat down in one of the armchairs. He set his cup down on the coffee table and continued the conversation where they'd left off.

"I didn't know you were allowed to argue a case for your own boyfriend," he said.

Blaine sipped his coffee. "There's nothing that says we can't do it," he said coolly.

"Oh. Well, you seem like a smart guy. I'm sure you're right." For some reason, Blaine got the impression that Wheeler had a problem with him representing his own boyfriend. "All right. We appear in front of the justices starting June 26. My wife and I were planning on flying into D.C. on the twenty-third. I don't know if you've booked a flight or anything yet, but I think we should get there on the same day, in case we need to meet up again before court starts."

"Actually, Kurt and I were looking into leaving on the twenty-second," Blaine said. "But that works, too."

"Great, so the twenty-third it is," Wheeler said. He typed something into his iPhone, then looked back up at Blaine. "Can I ask you something?"

Blaine shrugged. "Sure, anything."

"Why are you even doing this?" Wheeler asked. "I mean, people are obviously uncomfortable with your...boyfriend being in the union. Why would you want to make this a bigger mess than it already is?"

Blaine set down his coffee and looked at him straight on. "Doesn't he have as much right to be there as anyone else?" he asked in response. "This has nothing to do with a bunch of close-minded conservatives who can't tolerate anything different. It has everything to do with the fact that my client-," he made sure to say *client*, as opposed to *boyfriend* in this situation, "is being denied equal treatment and benefits for something he has no control over."

Justin Wheeler scoffed. "You expect me to believe this whole gay thing isn't a choice? I think that's a load of bull. I think people like you and him and everyone like you are just trying to get attention. 'Oh, look at me, I like boys. Treat me with equal respect.' Bullshit, Anderson. If your 'client' really wanted to be in the union and treated like everyone else, maybe he should stop rubbing this whole gay business in everybody's face."

Blaine gripped the arm of his chair to prevent himself from leaping up and ripping this guy a new one. He could feel the anger building up inside him, threatening to overflow and explode at any second, but he forced himself to keep calm.

"I think you could really learn a lot from Kurt. He's an excellent teacher," he said. "I've visited his class. Not only do his students love and appreciate him, but they *know* he's gay and they don't give a shit. And you know *why* they don't give a shit? Because their generation is desensitized to the whole gay thing. And I think that's a good thing. I *know* that's a good thing. They see it as completely normal, and I *love* that. The problem is that some people from our generation still won't accept it as normal, which is why I think we still have a long way to go before we see full equality for the gay community. When Kurt's students grow up and get old enough to vote...*that's* when we're going to start seeing real change. But that doesn't mean I'm going to just sit back and watch until that happens. I'm going to do whatever I can right now to make sure that each and every single one of us has the same human rights as everyone else."

He sat back in his chair and crossed his arms. "So to answer your question, Mr. Wheeler, that's why I'm doing this."

Justin Wheeler stood up. "I can't do this," he said, pacing quickly across the room towards Blaine's desk. He picked up the framed photo of Blaine and Kurt. "I can't deal with someone who thinks *this* is normal." He slammed the photo down on the desk face down, and Blaine winced. "We'll just have to see how this case goes, then."

Blaine decided to be the bigger person here. He simply stayed seated and watched Justin Wheeler storm out of his office, slamming the door behind him with so much force that Blaine's framed law school certificates shook on the wall behind his desk.

In the abrupt loneliness, Blaine stood up and crossed the room to his desk. He hesitantly picked up the picture frame that Wheeler had thrown down and slowly turned it over. Before he even saw the front, he was expecting to have to buy a new frame.

But when he saw the front of the frame, he knew that that would be unnecessary. He looked past his own face to Kurt's bright eyes and lively smile. The glass had not been shattered at all.

xxx

"Are you ready to talk now?" Kurt murmured as Blaine settled into his arms.

"I guess," Blaine said absentmindedly. "Basically, today was frustrating. I got nothing accomplished, and the lawyer I'm arguing against is a complete douche. Not to mention totally homophobic."

He closed his eyes and let himself sink lower into the soapy water. The second Blaine had gotten home from work this evening, he'd only had to say the magic words – "Bubble bath?" – and Kurt had happily obliged. It was almost a nightly ritual now that Blaine had so much on his plate. Kurt knew it was quickly becoming Blaine's favorite way to relax and to tell the truth, Kurt loved it too.

He began massaging Blaine's shoulders, gently kneading the stressed muscles with just the right amount of pressure. Blaine couldn't hold back a moan. "God, Kurt, keep doing that. You have no idea how good that feels."

"You know I love to make you feel good, baby," Kurt murmured with a smile. He pressed a kiss to the back of Blaine's neck as he continued rubbing his shoulders. "Do you have to meet with him again before we leave?"

"I don't know, that's the thing," Blaine said. "He literally stormed out of my office today when I tried to explain to him that being gay is totally normal."

Kurt rolled his eyes. "Oh, god. Don't tell me he's one of those 'being gay is a choice' people. I might just have to punch him in the face."

Blaine chuckled a little bit. "You would do that?" he asked incredulously.

Kurt considered this for a second. "No, actually, I wouldn't," he said. "But I will give him a very, very dirty look from across the courtroom."

"I thought your *dirty* looks...," Blaine said in a seductive murmur as he shifted himself around in Kurt's arms, "were only for me." He smirked and pinched one of Kurt's nipples, causing the younger man to yelp.

Kurt collapsed into giggles. "You know what I meant," he sighed as Blaine attached his mouth to his neck and began nipping at the pale skin.

"I know, I know. I'm just teasing," Blaine murmured against Kurt's skin. He kissed the little bite he'd just created and moved his face up closer to his boyfriend's lips. "But if I'm being honest, you punching Wheeler in the face would actually be pretty hot."

"Oh my god, I am not going to punch him in the face." Kurt rolled his eyes but smiled, keeping his lips close to Blaine's. "Why don't you tell me what else you think would be hot and I'll try to make up for it?" he suggested coyly.

"Hmmm." Blaine pretended to consider this, then whispered his suggestion in Kurt's ear.

Kurt bit his lip and giggled when he heard what Blaine had to say. "Oh, Blaine Anderson, you naughty boy." He stood up and stepped out of the bathtub, letting Blaine drink in his entire body in all its naked glory. "Come with me. I'll see what I can do."

Blaine, still sitting in the tub, couldn't help reaching up and playfully grabbing Kurt's ass as he was just about to reach for a towel. Kurt immediately turned around and raised one eyebrow as Blaine withdrew his hand.

"Did I say you could touch?" he asked, smirking as he turned so Blaine could see him from the front. "You can look, but no touching. Yet."

"Gotcha." Blaine pulled the drain to let the water out of the tub, then stood up and reached for a towel of his own. He wrapped it around his waist, knowing full well that Kurt would be doing away with it soon in just a little bit anyway. "This is going to be fun."

Kurt had already dropped his own towel in the doorway that led from the bathroom into the master bedroom. Blaine bit back a smile as he followed his boyfriend. Suddenly it seemed that he couldn't get to the bedroom fast enough.

Kurt practically threw open the drawer of the nightstand where they kept the lube and grabbed the bottle, then turned around without bothering to shut the drawer. He turned around and smirked as he backed Blaine into an empty corner.

"Would you like me to stretch you out?" he asked, making sure he was standing in such a way that his hard length was pressed right up against Blaine's.

Blaine shook his head and took the bottle out of Kurt's hands. "Can I touch now?"

"Oh, go right ahead," Kurt told him with a playful smile.

Blaine uncapped the bottle and squirted some lube into his hands so he could slick Kurt up. He relished the sounds his boyfriend made as his hands moved carefully over his cock.

When he was all lubed up, Kurt grabbed the bottle out of Blaine's hands and tossed it aside, then wrapped his arms around Blaine's waist and lifted him up. Blaine curled his legs around Kurt's waist to help support himself as Kurt pushed him up against the wall and slammed into him without warning. Blaine wailed Kurt's name as his boyfriend managed to hit his sweet spot with the very first thrust.

"Shit, you're not going to last very long," Kurt teased as he pulled out and pushed back in with slightly more force. The tight heat of Blaine practically sucked him in; the sensation was overwhelmingly invigorating. "That's okay, though. Doesn't mean this can't be fun."

Blaine sunk his teeth into Kurt's shoulder and moaned against his skin. "Fuck, that's good. Harder, Kurt. *Harder.*"

Kurt was more than happy to oblige. He gave up his effort to thrust in and out with an even, steady rhythm and instead resorted to hurriedly fucking his boyfriend senseless. He loved the sound of his skin slapping against Blaine's and the noises – mostly curses and Kurt's name - that escaped the older man's mouth as Kurt repeatedly pulled in and out of that tight heat below. He closed his eyes and basked in the pure noise of the moment for a few seconds.

Sure enough, Blaine was finished before long. He came between them with a deep moan of Kurt's name. It wasn't long before Kurt hit his climax as well, and before they knew it they were collapsed in a sweaty, sated heap on the floor against the wall.

"Good?" Kurt asked, smiling expectantly even as he gasped for breath. He gently pulled out of Blaine but stayed draped on top of him.

Blaine let out an exhilarated sigh. "Better than good. You're *amazing*, Kurt." He grinned. "Plus, now I can cross 'get fucked against a wall by the hottest man alive' off my bucket list. I've always kinda fantasized about that."

Kurt reached up to grab the box of tissues off of the dresser beside them and began pulling Kleenex out of the box so they could wipe themselves off. "I'd be interested to see what else is on this bucket list." He looked up into Blaine's warm hazel eyes, bright even in the darkness, and smiled. "I'd be even more interested in helping you cross some more things off of it."

"I wouldn't be opposed to that," Blaine said quietly. He wrapped his arms around Kurt and pulled him up closer. "Come here."

Kurt was already smiling even before his lips met Blaine's. The kiss itself was innocent – no frustration, no urgency. Neither of them even opened their mouths. It was simple and sweet and lingered to the point that both of them wanted more when they broke away.

Blaine let a tiny, satisfied smile of his own slip onto his face as Kurt's gentle hand rubbed up and down his chest and stomach. He always felt like he could just dissolve under Kurt's touch.

"Mmmm, this is why I love being gay," Kurt murmured absentmindedly as he let his fingers curl through Blaine's chest hair. "Boys are *gorgeous*."

"My boy is gorgeous," Blaine said proudly. He cupped Kurt's cheek in his hand, stroking the soft skin with his calloused musician's thumb. A blush warmed Kurt's face. Blaine felt the heat from it travel through his hand to his entire body.

Kurt was still smiling even as he suddenly stood and reached down to pull Blaine up as well. "Come on, let's get in bed."

"Kurt, I don't even know if I can *move*," Blaine said with a slight giggle. He took Kurt's hand and stood up all the same.

"The bed is a lot more comfortable than the floor," Kurt said with a smile as he pulled the sheets down. "And after-sex cuddles are *amazing*."

Blaine lay down and opened his arms. "I wouldn't argue with you on that," he said as Kurt settled into his embrace.

Kurt yawned and closed his eyes, suddenly aware of how exhausted he was. He burrowed his face into Blaine's chest.

"I love cuddles with you," he murmured drowsily in a way that Blaine found absolutely adorable.

Blaine kissed the top of his head. "You are so utterly precious and cuddly and kissable and downright sexy all at the same time. I don't know how you do it," he said with amazement. "Get some sleep, cutie."

"Mmmkay," Kurt sighed. He picked up his head from Blaine's chest even though his eyes were struggling to stay open. "I want a kiss."

Blaine happily gave him his kiss. "I love you, baby boy."

Kurt smiled and let his eyes fall closed as he snuggled back against Blaine's chest. "Love you too, sweetie."

He fell asleep almost immediately and had sweet dreams of his and Blaine's wedding.

xxx

The next morning, Kurt went into his daughter's room as usual to wake her up for school.

"Ellie?" He leaned down and kissed the top of her head. "It's time to get up for school."

Ellie attempted to open her eyes, then gave up and yanked the covers over her head. "No."

Kurt wasn't surprised by her reaction. Sometimes Ellie got up right away, sometimes she was like this. He never really knew what to expect when he went to get her up.

"Come on, you only have five more days left," he said encouragingly. "The sooner you get up, the sooner you can get to school and get them over with."

"I don't wanna get up." Her voice was muffled under the covers. "I'm scared to see him."

Kurt hesitated for a moment, then sat down on the edge of her mattress.

"Scared to see who?" he asked gently.

"Blaine," was all she said.

Kurt frowned. "Why would you be scared to see Blaine?"

"Because he was being mean to you last night. I heard him yelling at you and screaming your name and he was cussing. I thought that wasn't gonna happen anymore."

Kurt's eyes went wide as the realization dawned on him. For a second he wondered if he was still asleep, because there was no way this horrendously awkward situation was real, then realized his mind could not have conjured this up on its own. He was absolutely mortified. He wanted to die.

"Oh, sweetie, that wasn't anything to be worried about," he told her as reassuringly as he could.

She pulled the covers off of her face and looked up at him uneasily. "So he wasn't hurting you?"

"No! Not at all!" Kurt laughed a little bit to ease the tension. "Get up and get dressed. Blaine and I will explain everything."

She got up out of bed and Kurt quickly left the room. He hurried down the hall to his and Blaine's bedroom, slamming the door behind him with just a little more force than necessary.

"Everything okay?" Blaine called out from the bathroom.

"She heard us." Kurt stepped through the open bathroom door to find Blaine wearing an undershirt and boxers and shaving in front of the mirror. "Ellie heard us last night."

Blaine dropped the disposable razor he was using into the murky white water that filled the sink. "*What?*"

"Oh yeah. She heard." Kurt stepped up to the mirror to inspect his own face, frowned when he saw stubble, and picked up the bottle of shaving cream so he could squirt a dollop into his own hand. "But that's not even the worst part. She thought you were *hurting* me."

"Oh, god." Blaine turned to leave the bathroom, face still partially covered in shaving cream. "I need to go explain—"

"No, just stay here." Kurt reached out to hold him back with the hand that wasn't covered in shaving cream, and Blaine stepped back into the bathroom and picked up his razor again. "I told her to get ready

for school and the three of us will talk," he said as he rubbed the shaving cream onto his face and picked up his own razor. "How do I *explain* that to her, though?"

Blaine thought for a moment as Kurt started to shave, looking distressed the whole time. "I guess we should just explain that what she heard was absolutely normal and that nobody was being hurt. We were doing something that adults do when they love each other and want to show it."

Kurt snorted. "I think there's a bit of a difference between me fucking you senseless up against the wall in our bedroom and me making nice, sweet love to you, Blaine."

Blaine considered this as he rinsed his face off. "True, but the point is that you and I are consenting adults and we love each other and there is nothing for her to worry about," he said, then paused for a second and chuckled. "I'm surprised this is the first time she's heard us, actually. We're not exactly the quietest when it comes to sex."

"Interesting point." Kurt took a deep breath and finally managed to make his hand stop shaking as he shaved. "Okay. I think we can handle this."

"I *know* we can handle this." Blaine smiled and gently turned Kurt around so he could give him a kiss. Kurt laughed a little bit when they broke away and he saw that some of his own shaving cream had managed to transfer itself to Blaine's now-clean face.

"I just got you all messy again," he giggled, taking a towel and wiping Blaine's face off with it.

Blaine smiled. "I don't mind, because you still look cute even with shaving cream covering half your face."

"*You* look cute even with your hair all soft and natural before you gel it," Kurt observed. He ran one hand through Blaine's dark curls before turning back to the mirror to finish shaving.

Blaine blushed. "I don't know what to do with my hair lately now that this case is coming up," he commented as Kurt finished up and rinsed his face. "They say you shouldn't wear a ton of product in your hair in court, because it makes you look dishonest. So I usually tone it down a little on the gel on days when I'm in court. But this is the *Supreme Court*, which is a really big deal, so I'm thinking maybe I shouldn't wear any just to be on the safe side. But without any gel, I look even younger and more inexperienced than I already am. What do you think?"

Kurt smiled. "I think you're stressing yourself out too much," he said. "I would just wear your hair the way you normally wear it in court. You may be young, but you're sure as hell not inexperienced."

He pressed a kiss to Blaine's clean-shaven cheek and stepped out into the bedroom. "Now get dressed. I don't know about you, but I want to get this discussion over with."

xxx

Ellie made sure to sit a little closer to her daddy than to Blaine when they sat her down on the couch that morning to have a little talk. She was really scared about the noises she'd heard coming from her daddies' room last night. She would be absolutely heartbroken if Blaine was hurting her daddy. Blaine was supposed to love her daddy. Plus, her daddy didn't deserve to be hurt more. He'd had enough of that.

"Sweetie, I know you heard some strange things coming from our bedroom last night," her daddy started slowly. "We just wanted you to know that what you heard is nothing to be worried about. It's totally normal. You're a little young to know the exact details of what we were doing, but it's something that two adults do when they love each other very much and want to show that love to each other. Sometimes it can get a little noisy, which is what you heard." He laughed a little bit. "Okay?"

Ellie thought about this for a second. "Is it like kissing? Because I've seen you kiss Blaine before and it's never loud."

Her daddy and Blaine shared this look where both of their eyes got all wide.

"It's a little bit more involved than just kissing," Blaine explained gently. "You'll learn about it in a couple years."

Ellie was still confused. "But you were yelling at Daddy and saying bad words," she said to Blaine.

"Oh, he wasn't yelling at me," her daddy mumbled, but smiled a little bit as his face turned all red. He cleared his throat and started talking louder. "Sometimes when you're in that moment doing that with the person you love, you lose control a little bit and you say things that you normally wouldn't say."

It still didn't make complete sense to Ellie, but she figured she would learn more about whatever they were doing when she was a little older. Maybe then it would be less confusing.

Blaine took her daddy's hand and put his other hand on Ellie's shoulder and looked her in the eyes. "Ellie, I just want you to know that I love him more than anything. You and him mean the world to me. I would never be able to live with myself if I hurt either one of you. What he and I were doing last night was completely safe. Nobody was being hurt, I promise."

That didn't make her any less confused about what they were doing, but at least she knew Blaine wasn't hurting her daddy. That was the only thing she cared about.

"Okay." She nodded and smiled up at Blaine. "I know you would never hurt him."

"I'm so glad you know that." Her daddy stood up from the couch and kissed her on the forehead. "You two can just chill here. I'm going to go get started on breakfast."

Blaine reached for the remote and turned on the television as her daddy headed out into the kitchen. Ellie looked at him for a second before scooting closer to him a little bit so she could snuggle up next to him.

xxx

Meanwhile on the wrong side of the tracks, the Horowitz family was just sitting down to breakfast. Michael knew that whatever his father was about to tell them was going to be important, because they never ate together. But apparently he had big news, so he'd asked Michael and his older brother Kyle to stick around for breakfast so he could say whatever it was he needed to say.

Michael had his beat-up baseball glove sitting beside him on the table as he ate week-old Frosted Flakes, ready to head out and play ball as soon as he was done eating. Across the table, Kyle was staring blankly down at a single piece of burnt toast. He already smelled like weed. Michael started breathing through his mouth so he wouldn't have to smell it.

"Boys, I've got some good news for you," his father said, taking his usual seat in between Michael and Kyle at the small table. Both boys looked at him expectantly. "We're moving out."

Kyle raised one eyebrow and kept staring at his toast. Michael dropped his spoon in the bowl and said, "What?"

"Just got a hell of a raise and a promotion. McDonald's decided they want me as their new manager," he explained. "Don't need the other two jobs anymore...well, I might need one, but we'll see. And I found us a nice little condo down in Lincoln Park. Little small, but it's a hell of a lot nicer than this dump."

"Wow," was all Michael could say. This was the biggest streak of luck that had ever fallen on their little family. He knew it would be a while before it sunk in.

"And we'll be in a bit nicer school district over there, so no more of this inner-city crap for you boys," his father continued. "You're gonna get a *real* education."

"No!" Michael protested without thinking.

His father narrowed his eyes. "Excuse me?"

"You *like* that shitty school?" Kyle spoke up for the first time.

Michael tried to think fast. "I, uh...I only have one more year there and then I'm done," he said quickly. "I'll be in eighth grade. I don't just want to leave my friends and start all over. Could I just finish out at Buckley and go someplace nicer when it's time for high school?"

Really, though, he didn't want to leave behind the amazing experience he'd had in Mr. Hummel's class, which he was planning on taking again. That class had been an unlikely combination of the most amazing classmates and the most amazing teacher. He knew it sounded dumb, but he didn't just want to leave all that behind. That entire group accepted him exactly as he was. He didn't know what people in the rich school district thought about gay kids. The thought of leaving a group that had always been accepting and respectful absolutely terrified him, but he would never admit it out loud. Especially not to his father.

"I guess that makes sense," his father said. "If you really want to stay at Buckley, go ahead. You'll have to take the bus, because it'll be too far of a walk."

Michael shrugged. "That's fine."

His father turned his attention to Kyle to talk to him about switching to the rich high school. Michael tried to eat the rest of his cereal, but suddenly he had no appetite. Things were finally starting to look up for their family, but for some reason he couldn't shake the uneasiness building up inside him.

xxx

Later that evening, Kurt sat down at the kitchen table with Blaine so they could start going over everything they needed for the trip and the case.

"I already told Wheeler we would be there on the twenty-second," Blaine said in a tone that suggested he wasn't too thrilled about the change in their original plans. "Is that all right with you? We can always stick with the twenty-third like we were planning; I haven't booked a flight yet..."

"The twenty-second is absolutely fine," Kurt told him with a smile. "You're going to be arguing with this guy enough as it is. No need to stir up something else."

"All right." Suddenly Blaine's expression changed; Kurt couldn't read it at all. "Do you think we should take Ellie with us? I hadn't even thought about that, but we need to book the flight probably no later than tomorrow and I need to know how many seats to reserve..."

Kurt considered this. "I would love for her to come, but at the same time I don't think it would be very fun for her," he said. "We're going to be in court all the time. She's not even seven years old. I want her summer vacation to be more fun than just sitting in a stuffy courtroom." He paused to think for a moment. "I know when we were in Ohio, my dad mentioned something to me about maybe taking some time off this summer. I can call him tomorrow and see if he and Carole maybe want to come out here and spend some time with her. They'll get to see Chicago, and Ellie will be able to have a normal summer vacation like a normal kid."

"Okay," Blaine said, nodding. "That makes sense. I think she'd have a lot more fun if she stayed here. Maybe we can take her to D.C. when she gets a little older."

He picked up his briefcase from the floor beside his chair and set it on the table in front of him. "All right. Now let's get started on the stuff for the actual case."

Kurt tried not to freak out as Blaine started pulling pages upon pages of legal documents out of his briefcase. Blaine, as usual, picked up on this and smiled to reassure him. "Don't worry about any of this. It's just boring lawyer stuff. I don't want you to freak out about anything. I'll do all the work, all you have to do is tell the truth. Okay?"

Kurt nodded. "Okay."

Blaine set the briefcase down on the floor again and smoothed all the papers he'd taken out of it into a neat stack. He set them down on the table and looked Kurt in the eyes as he began to speak. Kurt knew full well that Blaine was not his boyfriend at the moment, but rather his attorney.

"I just want to go through this procedure with you step-by-step so you know what to expect," Blaine explained to him. "When we get there on the first day, Wheeler and I will give our opening statements. Keep in mind that we've both already submitted our briefs to the justices, who have read them just to get kind of a preliminary idea of what each side is arguing. I'll go first, because I have the burden of proof and the petitioner's side always goes first for everything in civil cases. After I give my opening statement, Justin Wheeler will give his. He will more than likely try to convince the judges to adhere to *stare decisis*."

Kurt had opened his mouth to ask what this complicated-sounding legal term meant, but as usual Blaine read his mind. "That means he's going to ask the judges to uphold a previous decision, in this case, the *Boy Scouts v. Dale* decision that allows groups and organizations to forbid homosexual members from joining. He doesn't want that decision overturned. He's going to do everything in his power to convince the judges that this decision should stand, right after I do everything in *my* power to convince them to change it."

Kurt bit his lip. "That sounds intimidating."

"Don't worry about it," Blaine told him again. "The only thing you need to worry about is the next part. Direct and cross examination."

Once again, he was able to perfectly read the worried expression that took over Kurt's face. "And there's really nothing to worry about," Blaine reassured him. "All you have to do is be completely honest."

"Okay," Kurt told him. "I can do that."

"I know you can," Blaine said with a reassuring smile. "Now who do you think is going to go first, you or Sean Jeffries?"

Kurt thought about this for a second. "Me," he said. "Because I'm the petitioner."

"Very good. See, you're catching on," Blaine told him. "Yes, you're going to go first. When you get to the stand, the clerk will swear you in with an oath. He or she will ask if you so solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth so help you God, and you say..."

He trailed off to give Kurt a chance to guess. Kurt took a shot in the dark. "I do?"

As soon as the words were out of his mouth, he couldn't help but think about that ring. It was even harder not to think about it when Blaine smiled softly and repeated the words to let Kurt know he was right.

"I do," he said. "You're better at this than you think you are. After the oath, either the clerk or myself will ask you to state your name and spell it for the record. After you do that, we start the direct examination. I'm going to ask you some questions, and all you have to do is answer them honestly to the best of your knowledge. We can practice sometime if you want, just so you get an idea of what I'll be asking."

"That's probably not a bad idea," Kurt admitted. "What next?"

"Then it's time for the cross examination. Justin Wheeler is going to ask you some questions. He's going to try to trip you up, but all you have to do is be honest and answer the questions as best as you can, just like before. If I have a problem with anything he's asking you, I can object. They'll either sustain my objection, which means you don't have to answer the question, or they'll overrule it and you have to answer it." He paused. "You okay on everything so far?"

Kurt nodded. "It's overwhelming, but I understand it all."

"Good," Blaine said. "After he cross-examines you, we repeat the same process on the respondent's side. Justin Wheeler will directly examine Sean Jeffries, then I'll do my cross-examination. After that comes the closing arguments, and then court is recessed while the justices decide on a verdict." He smiled ruefully. "And after that, there's nothing else we can do. You ready?"

Kurt reached for Blaine's hand and squeezed it, erasing the line between attorney and boyfriend. "Absolutely," he said, his voice soft but firm.

"Me too." Blaine started to play absentmindedly with Kurt's fingers, but kept his eyes locked on Kurt's as he spoke. "I'm ready to win this for you."

Chapter Twenty-Three

Saying goodbye to Ellie was harder than Kurt thought it would be. He knew his daughter would be in good hands with his parents, but that didn't make it any easier for him to walk away from her at the airport and head to the security checkpoint with Blaine. He'd been hugging her for what seemed like a full minute when his father finally spoke up.

"Kid, you've got a plane to catch," Burt Hummel reminded his son gently. "She's in good hands, I promise."

He pressed a kiss to the top of Ellie's head and stood up straight. "I know," he said. "I know I'm probably overreacting, but it's just the first time I've been away from her since...since everything happened, and I..."

He trailed off, not knowing how to finish that sentence. Blaine curled an arm around his waist and gave him a reassuring little squeeze.

"I understand," Carole told him with a caring smile. "And you're not overreacting. You're being a good dad."

Her words did wonders to calm Kurt's uneasiness. He let a relieved smile spread over his face and knelt to give Ellie one more quick hug.

"Sweetie, I don't think we'll be gone for very long. Two weeks at the most, probably, right?" He glanced up at Blaine to make sure he was right.

Blaine nodded. "And probably not even that. We've got the very last case of this Supreme Court session before they recess for the summer. The justices are probably anxious to get out of there and take a break, so I doubt they'll drag this out." He smiled at Burt and Carole. "We'll just kind of play it by ear and see how things go. As soon as we hear that they've reached a decision, I think it'll be safe to book a flight home."

Carole pulled him into a hug. "I know you're going to do amazing so you don't need it, but good luck. I'm so excited for the two of you."

"Thank you," Blaine said with a humble smile. He looked at Kurt with nothing but pure love and affection glowing in his hazel eyes. "I just...I want to win this for him."

Kurt smiled tenderly and grabbed his hand, swinging their arms playfully in between them. "Ready to go?"

"Yeah, we should get going," Blaine said. He leaned down to give Ellie a hug and a kiss on the top of the head. "I love you, sweetie. Have fun with Grandma and Grandpa."

They finished saying their goodbyes and headed off towards the security checkpoint. After making it through without any trouble, there was nothing left to do but sit on the concourse and wait.

"I think we're a little early," Kurt pointed out as he glanced around them. Not many people were here waiting for the Chicago-to-DC flight yet, save for a middle-aged woman doing a crossword puzzle and a man about their age who was zoning out as he listened to his iPod.

"Good," Blaine said, closing his eyes and leaning his head against Kurt's shoulder. "Maybe I'll take a little nap."

Kurt smiled affectionately and ruffled his hair. Blaine hadn't gelled it today, so it was easy for Kurt to pull his fingers through. "Sleepy?"

"Yeah," Blaine admitted. "I didn't sleep well last night. Too nervous."

"Don't be," Kurt reassured him. "You're an *amazing* lawyer, Blaine. I know you can do this. I have all the confidence in the world in you."

Blaine picked his head up off of Kurt's shoulder and looked at him with wide eyes. "Really?" he asked warily.

"Really," Kurt repeated with a smile, then gave him a kiss on the cheek for good measure.

The woman doing the crossword puzzle, who was sitting in the row of chairs across from them, suddenly spoke up. "Excuse me, but do you two mind taking your affection elsewhere?"

Kurt raised one eyebrow and leaned forward a little bit. "Excuse *me*, but is there a problem with me giving my boyfriend an innocent little cheek kiss?"

She put her pen inside the crossword book to mark her place and set it aside. "Actually, there is. It's making me extremely uncomfortable and I'm asking you politely to stop."

"What about it makes you uncomfortable, exactly?" Kurt asked in response, and Blaine had to bite the inside of his cheek to hold back a smile. Kurt was the only person he knew who could tear down ignorant bigots like this woman. He would have made a damn good attorney himself.

"The fact that you're both men...I'm sorry, please don't think I'm being rude, but it utterly disgusts me," she said, wrinkling her nose in disapproval. "You're both very handsome, don't get me wrong. I'm sure you would have no problem finding some nice young women to go out with instead of...this." She gestured to the two of them the way someone might point out the bloody, run-over remains of a dead animal in the road.

Kurt did his best to force a polite smile and scooted forward on his chair a little bit so he was even closer to her. "I'm sorry, I don't think I've formally introduced myself. My name is Kurt; this is my boyfriend and attorney, Blaine. We're on our way to the Supreme Court of the United States to argue a discrimination case that will teach narrow-minded people like yourself a very important lesson about acceptance and tolerance."

He sat back in his chair and inspected his fingernails. "And for the record, I think you *are* being quite rude," he added coolly.

The woman ignored this and instead looked at Blaine in his Chicago Bears tee and jeans, hair curly and natural. "This man is a lawyer?" she asked incredulously.

Blaine immediately stood up and fished his wallet out of the back pocket of his jeans. He pulled out a small card and handed it to the woman with his trademark Polite Attorney smile. Kurt knew that smile well by now. He wondered if there was a required class in law school that taught all budding attorneys how to smile like that. "Hi. Blaine Anderson, attorney at law."

The woman studied the business card he'd just given her, glanced up at Blaine, then looked back at the card with her eyes wide in disbelief. Kurt saw the shock set into her expression as she recognized the prestigious law firm name on the card and realized that this man must have been one of the partners at said prestigious law firm.

"Carter & Anderson," she said under her breath, then set the business card on the empty chair beside her where she'd already put the crossword puzzle book. "Excuse me, I have to..."

She stood up and walked quickly away without even finishing her sentence. Kurt couldn't help but notice that she'd left her crossword puzzle book behind.

He looked up at Blaine, who was still standing, unable to contain the satisfied grin that spread over his face. Blaine immediately pulled Kurt up to a standing position beside him, cupped his face in both hands and, without caring about their fellow passengers that were starting to filter onto the concourse, planted a big kiss on his mouth right in front of the crowd. Nobody even dared say a word to them.

xxx

The two-hour flight went smoothly, and soon enough Kurt found himself in the passenger seat of the Accord they were renting as Blaine drove to their hotel. He couldn't help but stare in awe as the scenery of Washington D.C. raced by outside his window. The famous cherry blossom trees were in full bloom; the bright pink of their petals gave Kurt a sense of renewed hope. He'd never had an ounce of doubt in Blaine, but now that they were actually *here* it seemed very possible that they could win this thing.

When they arrived at the hotel, Blaine parked the rental car since they didn't have much luggage to unload, then they made their way into the lobby to check in. They didn't make it very far inside, though, before Blaine suddenly let go of the handle of the wheelie suitcase he'd been dragging and reached out his arm to hold Kurt back from walking any further.

Kurt opened his mouth to ask what was going on, but Blaine told him, "Just stay here," in a hasty whisper before he could even speak. He looked straight ahead to see what had caught Blaine's attention and saw nothing out of the ordinary, just a bellhop pushing someone's loaded luggage cart towards the elevator and a couple checking in at the front desk.

As it turned out, said couple ended up being exactly what Blaine was apparently afraid of. Kurt picked up on this when his boyfriend muttered, "Oh, *shit*," when they turned around and began gathering up their luggage to take it to their room. Before Blaine could get Kurt to make any kind of escape, the man immediately said something to his wife, set his luggage down and began crossing the lobby over towards Kurt and Blaine.

"Blaine Anderson!" The other man's voice was dripping with false courtesy as he greeted Blaine. "What a coincidence, huh? Didn't think we'd be here at the exact same time."

Blaine cleared his throat. "Hello, Justin," he said politely, and Kurt realized this must have been the other attorney for their case. The woman, who Kurt presumed to be his wife, scurried up to his side so she wouldn't miss the introductions, which Blaine promptly made. "This is my client, Kurt Hummel...Kurt, this is Justin Wheeler."

Based on what Blaine had previously said about this guy, Kurt didn't mind at all that he'd used the word "client" as opposed to "boyfriend" when introducing them. Less drama, he supposed. He forced himself to smile as he extended his hand. "Hello, Justin. I've heard *wonderful* things."

Kurt knew and Blaine knew and Justin Wheeler knew that it was a total lie, but Wheeler shook his hand anyway. "I'm sure you have."

He broke the handshake and turned to acknowledge the slender brunette at his side. "This is my wife, Sarah," he told them. "It's actually our six month wedding anniversary today. We're actually married, y'know, because national law *allows* us to be married."

Kurt immediately thought back to when he'd joked with Blaine about punching this guy in the face. Thirty seconds after meeting him for the first time, he was already tempted to do so.

His hand was curling into a fist at his side when Sarah Wheeler gently took ahold of her husband's arm and looked up at him with soft eyes. "Honey? That wasn't necessary, was it?"

Kurt breathed a sigh of relief as his hand relaxed. Blaine, sensing he'd been tense, placed a comforting hand on the small of his back. At least Sarah seemed nice enough, Kurt thought.

"Actually, as of last month, Illinois law allows *us* to be married as well," Blaine informed Wheeler politely. "And that's our state of residence, so nothing can stop us there."

Kurt felt his face warming with a blush as he bit back a smile and thought about the engagement ring he'd zipped into the secret pocket of his Louis Vuitton suitcase. Blaine was casually talking about the possibility of them getting married, and he was still completely unaware of Kurt's plans.

"We shouldn't be arguing about this," Kurt said quickly before it could escalate any further. "Save it for the courtroom, y'know?"

Blaine sighed. "Good point," he said. "I'm going to go get us checked in. I'll see you both later."

He headed to take a place in the short line that had formed at the front desk during their conversation. Justin Wheeler turned to head towards the elevator, but Sarah immediately grabbed his hand to stop him.

"You head on up to the room," she said, then smiled at Kurt as she surveyed his entire outfit. "I've got a fashion question for this guy. He seems like he has a great sense of style."

Wheeler rolled his eyes as he turned away. "Make it quick. You know how I feel about people like that."

Kurt did not appreciate being spoken of as if he weren't there. But before he knew what was happening, Sarah had grabbed his arm and was pulling him into the empty continental breakfast room, out of view of the front desk and of Blaine.

"I don't understand why you couldn't just ask me out there, but what's your question?" Kurt asked, trying not to sound anxious. Suddenly he didn't trust this woman as much as he initially thought he did.

Sarah didn't say anything. She sat down on top of the nearest table with her legs spread, then reached out and grabbed Kurt's wrist to pull him towards her. Before he could back away, she had her legs around his waist and her arms around his neck and her lips at his ear.

"I don't know what it is about you, but you're *so* hot," she whispered, then giggled a little bit. "While our men are off doing whatever lawyer things they need to get done, we should fuck."

Kurt felt his expression break into an extremely uncomfortable smile. "Okay! I see nobody's taught you the fine art of subtlety." He managed to reach behind himself and pull her arms off from around his neck as he set his face to serious and shook his head. "And that's not happening. No. Never in a million years."

Sarah pouted and adjusted her position so that Kurt had a clear view down her already low-cut shirt. He made a point not to look at it. "But why not?"

He looked straight into her eyes so she knew he meant business. "I'm gay," he said, his voice as careful as if he were speaking to a small child. "And besides, I have a boyfriend. I love him. I'm not going to do that to him."

Now that he was thinking of Blaine, he started hoping furiously that his boyfriend hadn't finished checking them in yet. Otherwise he would probably wonder why the hell Kurt was taking so long to answer a question about fashion.

"But that will just make it so much hotter," Sarah insisted, trying unsuccessfully to pull him closer as he finally managed to break free of the vice grip her legs had around his waist. "Have you ever been with a woman before?"

"No, and I don't plan on it. Ever." He raised his eyebrows and pressed his lips together.

"Come on, Kurt," she pleaded. "Neither of them has to know. It'll be our dirty little secret."

"I said *no*," he snapped. "Now if you don't have a serious clothes question for me like I thought you did, I'm leaving."

She leaned forward from where she sat on the table and licked her lips. "The only interest I have in your clothes is getting you out of them."

"Ew," was all Kurt said, and he turned on his heel to leave the room. Suddenly it seemed that he couldn't get up to the front desk fast enough.

The timing couldn't have been more perfect. Blaine was just getting finished checking in. Had Kurt been a few seconds late, his boyfriend probably would have started to get suspicious.

"Hey," Blaine said as he turned away from the desk, room key in hand. "Everything okay?"

Kurt bit his lip and hesitated. He couldn't bring himself to tell Blaine what Sarah had suggested. Even the thought of mentioning it seemed like he was being unfaithful. He decided to stick with the part of their conversation that had taken place before Sarah had taken him into the breakfast room, the part Blaine had actually been around to hear.

"Um, yeah. Everything's fine," Kurt told him, trying to ignore the ache in his heart that told him he had basically just lied to the love of his life.

Blaine nodded. "Okay." He began pulling his suitcase towards the elevator and there was nothing Kurt could do but follow him with the luggage he'd been carrying.

"We're on the eighth floor," Blaine explained as they stepped through the sliding doors into the elevator. Kurt couldn't help but notice that he was unsuccessfully attempting to hold back a smile. Once the elevator doors were shut, Blaine gave in and let his overjoyed expression spread across his face. "Oh my god, I'm

sorry. I'm acting like a six year old on Christmas morning. I'm just so excited to be here, doing this for you. My biggest dream is finally coming true."

Kurt couldn't help giggling at his boyfriend's genuine happiness. For a moment, he'd forgotten the ache in his heart. "Your biggest dream, finally coming true? Have you been secretly planning this all along?" he asked playfully. "When you were being sworn into the bar, were you thinking, 'I want to go to Washington D.C. and argue a Supreme Court case for Kurt someday'?"

Blaine considered this. "Not exactly," he said as the elevator doors opened to empty them out onto the eighth floor. "I know this sounds a little vague and unspecific, but my biggest dream was always just to do something absolutely amazing for you. Something that could change history. And here we are."

He stopped outside a door that Kurt took to be their room. "This is it," Blaine said as he slid the keycard in and unlocked the door.

Kurt stepped into the room and set the luggage he'd been carrying down and out of the way. They would put it away later. "Really?" he asked, turning to Blaine with a small smile on his face. "You wanted to do something like that...like this...for me?"

"I never thought it would be on this big of a scale, in front of the Supreme Court and everything, but yeah," Blaine admitted. "I never really had a specific idea in mind of what I wanted to do for you, but now I know this is it."

Kurt suddenly found himself weak in the knees. He somehow managed to step closer to Blaine and take both of his hands.

"You've already given me everything," he whispered, looking into Blaine's warm hazel eyes. "I...Blaine, with everything I've been through, I never expected anything good would come out of it, but now I'm *here*. With *you*. And these next few days are going to be absolutely life changing for us. I...", he trailed off as his voice broke, then finally managed to continue. "I don't even know what to say."

"You don't have to say anything," Blaine said softly before closing the distance between them with a kiss.

Kurt giggled as Blaine backed him further into the room without ever breaking the kiss. When he felt the backs of his knees hit the bed, he let himself collapse backwards onto it and pulled Blaine down with him.

Blaine immediately flipped the two of them over so that Kurt was on top of him; Kurt took advantage of this new position to lean down and suck a quick hickey into Blaine's collarbone.

"There," he whispered, pressing a soft kiss to the mark he'd created on Blaine's skin. "The shirts you wear to court will cover it, but it'll still be there to remind you that you're mine."

"Yours," Blaine murmured in contentment. He gently slipped one hand under Kurt's shirt, sliding it up the sensitive skin of his chest until it was resting over his heart. The gesture was more romantic than sexual, and Kurt closed his eyes and lost himself in the moment as his heart beat into Blaine's palm.

They stayed perfectly still like that for a while, just *being*. Things had been pretty hectic the last few weeks while they'd been getting things together for this trip; it had been hard for them to just stop and appreciate each other like this. Kurt slowly let his eyes drift open and his heart immediately started racing when he saw the simple but tender gaze Blaine had fixed upon him. He blushed when he realized Blaine undoubtedly had felt the sudden increase of his heart rate, but he couldn't think about it for very long because those *eyes*.

Blaine slid his hand out from under Kurt's shirt and cupped his blushing cheek. "You're so beautiful," he murmured with absentminded adoration, studying Kurt's face like it was some kind of artistic masterpiece. "My beautiful man."

Kurt's heart started to flutter even faster in his chest. Even the simplest professions of reverence from Blaine made him feel like he could float away from sheer bliss.

"I'm nothing compared to you," he whispered softly with a bashful smile. Tilting his head down the slightest bit, he pressed the gentlest of kisses to the corner of Blaine's mouth.

Blaine shook his head and smiled. "Oh, no. I only wish you could see yourself right now," he countered. "The way the light's coming in the window from behind you and kind of lighting up your whole face. You look like an angel."

Kurt felt yet another wave of heat rushing up to color his face. "I don't think angels blush nearly this much," he said flatly.

"My angel does," Blaine said tenderly, then giggled a little bit. "Okay, that was beyond cheesy. But you still love me, right?"

Kurt touched his lips to Blaine's with a soft caress that lasted only a fleeting second and left his boyfriend aching for more. When he spoke a few seconds later, he couldn't help but smile.

"How could I ever stop?"

xxx

Exhausted from traveling, the two spent the night in, cuddling and watching TV for most of the afternoon and Skyping with Burt, Carole and Ellie back in Chicago that evening. Kurt smiled as his father expressed his excitement for trying authentic deep-dish Chicago style pizza and Carole gushed about all the cute little shops downtown. It made him happy to see that his parents were enjoying themselves in his new hometown, but as the day went on he still felt awful for not telling Blaine about Sarah Wheeler's attempt to seduce him. It almost felt like he was lying to Blaine – who was he kidding, he already *had* lied to Blaine.

He fell asleep in Blaine's arms as they were watching some old black-and-white movie that both of them had forgotten the name of. The next morning, still unaccustomed to the time change, he woke up early.

He'd been gazing at Blaine's peaceful, serene face for about fifteen minutes when he finally woke up and immediately picked his head up to give Kurt a kiss good morning before either of them said a word. Kurt's eyes widened at the unexpectedness of it but after a few seconds he let his eyelids flutter closed and smiled as he relaxed into the kiss.

"Good morning," Blaine whispered when they broke away.

It wasn't that different from any other morning, really – they were 700 miles away from home and sleeping in a hotel bed, but there was still the same comforting familiarity of waking up next to Blaine. Suddenly Kurt's mind started wandering. This situation was similar to what he always imagined their honeymoon would be like...

No. He couldn't think about that now. Not when the ring was still hidden away in his suitcase and not on Blaine's finger.

Blaine noticed that Kurt must have been lost in thought, because his expression quickly changed to one of concern.

"You okay?" he asked gently as he traced the line of Kurt's jaw with his thumb.

Kurt managed to nod. "I'm fine," he said. "Just thinking."

"Mmmm." Blaine shifted and pulled Kurt back into his arms. "What's on your mind?"

Another thought suddenly occurred to Kurt. He couldn't exactly tell Blaine that he was thinking about their honeymoon – not when he still had yet to propose. But there was something else he could get off his chest.

"Let's get up and get ready," he suggested. "I'll tell you over breakfast."

xxx

But talking over breakfast turned out not to be the best idea, Kurt soon realized. The second they entered the continental breakfast room, scene of the previous day's crime, he immediately realized what a terrible idea this had been. Just *being* in here made him feel disgusting. He spotted an elderly couple sipping coffee at the table Sarah had been sitting on yesterday and practically shuddered.

They sat at a tiny table for two on the outskirts of the room. Blaine gave Kurt a tiny smile as he pulled the lid off of his cup of strawberry yogurt.

"Ready to talk?" he asked gently.

Kurt took a deep breath. "It's just...y'know yesterday when Justin Wheeler's wife said she had a 'fashion question' and was talking to me while you were checking us in?"

"Yeah." Blaine nodded. "What was up with that, anyway?"

"That's exactly what I wanted to talk to you about," Kurt said, and without hesitation he proceeded to tell Blaine exactly what had happened the previous afternoon. Blaine's expression remained calm and attentive the whole time, which was a good sign. It was hard enough to tell his boyfriend that someone else – a *woman*, for crying out loud – had made such a brazen attempt to seduce him. He didn't think he could handle seeing Blaine look so hurt on top of all that.

But Kurt also knew that the attorney in Blaine had gotten very good at hiding his true emotions while listening to someone tell him something he didn't necessarily want to hear. He could only imagine what

this was doing to him inside. Even worse, the lack of responsive emotion on Blaine's face made it difficult to predict how he was going to react.

He let out a resigned sigh when he finished recounting what had happened and finally managed to look into Blaine's eyes.

"So that's what that was *really* about yesterday," he said. "I felt like you deserved to know. I'm sorry for not telling you right away, but I...I don't know." He shook his head. "I was afraid. That's not an excuse, I know. I'm sorry, Blaine. I'm so sorry. I..."

He was cut off when Blaine stood, leaned across the table and kissed Kurt's forehead gently to calm him down. Immediately the worry lines creasing his skin faded away. Kurt felt himself relax the second he felt the familiar press of Blaine's lips, and a part of him was secretly thrilled that his boyfriend felt comfortable making such an affectionate gesture in the middle of such a crowded room.

"Kurt, I love you," Blaine told him after he took his seat again – as if Kurt needed any reminding, but it was still nice to hear. "I'm not mad at you, if that's what you're thinking. In fact, I can't say I blame her for wanting you so much."

Kurt felt his face heating up, but at the same time Blaine's response was making him feel a hundred times better about the whole situation. He gave Blaine a tiny smile and linked their hands together on top of the table. Blaine rubbed his thumb over Kurt's fingers as he continued.

"But thank you for telling me," he said. "You were honest. That's the only thing that matters. Your honesty is just one of the things I love the most about you."

"Oh, don't even get me started on what I love the most about *you*. We would be here all day and then some," Kurt giggled. He squeezed Blaine's hand blissfully, feeling completely rejuvenated. "So I was thinking we could go for a walk around town today. See all the famous sights before we get busy with court, y'know? What do you say?"

Blaine's expression fell and Kurt immediately took that as a bad sign. "Baby, I'd love to, but I need to start my opening statement."

Kurt blinked in confusion. "I thought you already started that. You said you were almost done..."

Blaine sighed. "I know, but that was before I met Justin Wheeler for the first time." He rolled his eyes. "Now that I know what this guy believes and what kind of attorney he is, I need to rework my whole argument. I tried going through what I had so far and revising it, but soon enough I realized it would probably just be easier to start over from scratch."

"Oh." Kurt picked at his Styrofoam coffee cup, trying not to look too disappointed. He knew Blaine's job was important – after all, that was the reason why they'd come here to D.C. in the first place – but he'd really been looking forward to spending some time with Blaine outside of the courtroom as well.

"You're disappointed," Blaine observed.

"What? No!" Kurt countered immediately, his voice slightly higher pitched than usual for some reason. "I understand, Blaine. Please don't worry about me." He paused reflexively for a moment. "But I *do* think I'm going to run out and get some souvenirs to send back to Chicago for my parents and Ellie. Do you mind, or...?"

Blaine shook his head. "No, go right ahead. Take advantage of the fact that at least *one* of us doesn't have to work." He smiled and slipped his hand completely into Kurt's, lacing their fingers together.

"Are you sure?" Kurt asked warily.

"I'm positive." Blaine brought Kurt's hand to his lips and affectionately kissed his fingertips. "Right now, I'd just rather get this done. I'm sure we'll have lots of time to spend together while we're here."

Neither of them knew just how wrong he would be.

xxx

It was a beautiful summer day in the nation's capital city. Kurt smiled to himself the tiniest bit as he entered the cute little bookstore-slash-gift shop down the street from their hotel and began browsing. As much as he wished Blaine were here, it was nice to have just a little bit of time to himself. Not having anyone here with him made it easy to clear his head and just enjoy his free time. Besides, being here alone meant he could pick up something for Blaine, too. He knew his boyfriend would be working hard today; he thought it might be nice to bring back a little surprise. About an hour after he'd first arrived, he left the shop with a Nationals baseball cap for his dad; a coffee mug for Carole; a red, white and blue teddy bear for Ellie; and some gourmet chocolates in a cheesy novelty box shaped like the Capitol Building for Blaine.

He wanted to give Blaine some more time to focus on writing his argument, so he didn't want to go back to the hotel just yet. After pulling out his phone and messing around with the Maps app for a few minutes, he discovered he was only a few blocks away from the Supreme Court building. This wasn't surprising – Kurt knew Blaine had purposely booked one of the closest hotels to the courthouse, but now that he was aware of his proximity he decided there was no problem in going to check it out.

It only took him about ten minutes to walk to the famous building. Court wasn't in session today – it wouldn't be until he and Blaine presented their case a few days from now. The large steps leading up to the building were overrun with tourists. Kurt found a section of the stairs that was significantly less crowded and sat down.

He took out his phone again, turned around and snapped a picture of the building in all its *Equal Justice Under Law* glory, then opened a new picture message.

Decided to go for a walk...look where I ended up, he typed to Blaine. Hope it's going well. I bought a little something for you at the souvenir store, too. :)

After he sent the message, he barely had to wait two minutes before his boyfriend responded.

Ahhh! Awesome! (the fact that you're at the SCOTUS building and the fact that you got me something are both awesome lol). Love you bunches! xoxo

Kurt knew he probably looked like a complete idiot, sitting on the steps of the Supreme Court building and grinning at his phone, but he couldn't help smiling as he responded.

You're such a dork, but I can't help but love you bunches as well :) I'll be back soon.

He sat there for a few more minutes, people-watching and drinking in the scene, before he finally decided to get up and walk the few blocks back to the hotel.

When he arrived back at the room, he found Blaine exactly where he'd left him – hunched over his laptop at the desk, eyes glued to the screen as he typed. His hair was becoming disheveled from constantly running his hand through it – a habit of Blaine's that kicked in when he was frustrated. Kurt shut the door behind him as he stepped into the room and headed over to where Blaine was working at the desk.

"You're working hard," Kurt observed as he gave his boyfriend a kiss hello.

Blaine gave him an exhausted smile. "How can you tell?"

Kurt perched on the edge of the desk next to Blaine's computer and reached out to run his fingers over the slight shadow of stubble on his face. "You're getting scruffy," he pointed out as he moved that same hand up to fluff through Blaine's curls. "And you've been running your hand through your hair."

"You know me too well," Blaine admitted, saving his document and closing his laptop.

Kurt swung his legs back and forth over the edge of the desk. "Want your surprise now?"

Blaine nodded eagerly. "Yes, please."

"Close your eyes," Kurt instructed, and Blaine obeyed. Kurt opened the bag from the souvenir store he was still holding and extracted the campy box of chocolates, rolling his eyes as he opened it. "Now open your mouth."

Blaine grinned. "I hope this is going where I think it's going, because you're in a really good position right now for me to just-"

"You are such a pervert, stop." Kurt laughed and swatted Blaine's shoulder lightly as he cut him off. "I told you I bought this for you at the souvenir shop. I'm not about to put my dick in your mouth, if that's what you're thinking. Can you please just open?"

Blaine did as he was told and Kurt selected a piece of chocolate from the box. He placed it on Blaine's tongue and watched a smile grow on his boyfriend's face as he chewed.

"Y'know? This isn't so bad, either," Blaine laughed as he opened his eyes. He took a piece of chocolate out of the box and fed it to Kurt.

"Yeah, and thanks for not making fun of me for the box," Kurt told him as he chewed the piece Blaine had fed him. "I know it's not the most romantic-looking thing ever, but you've been working hard and I thought you deserved a treat." He giggled. "But apparently you and I were thinking of two different types of treats."

"You're such a tease, you know that?" Blaine grumbled, but allowed Kurt to feed him another piece of chocolate all the same.

Kurt grinned. "But you love me." He tilted Blaine's face up and gave him a light kiss on the lips before hopping off the desk. "I think I'm going to get changed and head to the exercise room on the fifth floor to work out. Do you want to come with, or are you still working?"

Blaine glanced at the clock on the bedside table. "I still have a lot to write, but I'll come down there with you and maybe do the treadmill for half an hour or something," he said. "If I sit here any longer, my head is going to explode."

Kurt laughed as he slipped out of the shirt he'd been wearing and pulled a tee more suitable for working out over his head. "And I don't think Housekeeping would appreciate having to clean up your brains," he joked, tossing another one of his t-shirts to Blaine, who caught it one-handed.

"Oh, and don't let me forget," Blaine said suddenly as he got changed, "I was talking to Wheeler while you were out shopping. He and I decided to meet up and go over some stuff later on this evening. I can't forget that."

"What time are you meeting him?" Kurt asked.

"Not til eight, but I set the reminder on my laptop. The only way I'll remember is if I'm actually *on* my laptop sometime before eight," he joked. "We decided that neither of us will be able to handle this case well if we don't at least treat each other like human beings. We're just going over stuff for court. That's all. Hopefully he sticks to his word and doesn't let his stupid prejudices get in the way."

Kurt gave his boyfriend a genuine smile. As much as he disliked Wheeler, he was glad they'd finally agreed to settle their differences and discuss things in a civil manner.

"I'll have you back by eight," he promised. "Now let's get you on that treadmill."

xxx

I can't believe this. Fuck you. You need to stop. Stop being so goddamn sexy. Stop with those gorgeous muscles. Just stop. ...Or, carry on. Yes. Please carry on. I'll admit, I love watching this.

Such were Blaine's thoughts as he watched Kurt from the treadmill. His boyfriend was working the chest press machine a few yards away, completely oblivious to the fact that Blaine couldn't keep his eyes off him. Blaine stared at him, watching the way the muscles in his arms moved as he pushed the handlebars of

the machine back and forth. He couldn't tell how much weight Kurt was using, but however much it was, Kurt was making it look effortless.

Just as Blaine was thinking about this, Kurt stopped for a moment and took a swig from his water bottle. He took the pin out from under the amount of weight he'd been using and put it down even further to increase the poundage. As he started back up again, Blaine went right back to staring at his arms and the way his sweat shone off his pale skin.

Out of the corner of his eye he noticed someone getting situated on the elliptical next to the treadmill he was using, but didn't pay attention to who it was. It wasn't until he heard a vaguely familiar voice greet him by name that he turned to see who it was.

"Shit," he muttered under his breath when he recognized Sarah Wheeler.

"It's so weird to run into you here like this!" she chirped as she adjusted the settings on her elliptical and started to go.

Blaine glared at her and made no attempt to continue her small talk. "Stay away from my boyfriend."

Sarah looked taken aback. She pulled one of her iPod earbuds out of her ear so she could hear him better. "He told you about that?"

"Yes, he told me. We tell each other everything." He shot a quick glance over towards Kurt, who was still in the zone over at the chest press machine. It didn't seem like he'd even seen Sarah come in at all. "He wants *me*, okay? Look right here. Look at what he did to me." He slowed down on the treadmill a bit and turned so that she could see the hickey that Kurt had sucked into his collarbone. "This means that I belong to him, and he to me. And we're strong enough not to let someone else come between us."

Sarah was silent for a few passing seconds before she spoke up defensively.

"I never said I wanted any kind of relationship from him. I just thought it might be fun if he and I could fuck while you and Justin were doing whatever you need to do before court," she said. "If I'm being honest, my husband hasn't quite been able to get it up lately...and ugh, just *look* at him." It took Blaine a few seconds to realize that she was talking about Kurt as she stared longingly. "His body is *amazing*. He's probably fantastic in bed."

"He is, but that's none of your business," Blaine acknowledged. "And even if he and I weren't together, he would never want you."

She pouted. "But why not? How do you know that?"

Blaine rolled his eyes and threw his hands up in exasperation as he kept running. "Because he's *gay*, Sarah."

"My husband believes homosexuality can be cured," she countered.

Blaine scoffed. "No offense, but your husband is an idiot if that's what he thinks." He had wanted to just say *your husband is an idiot*, but decided to be the bigger person here and soften the blow. "I don't even know why we're still having this conversation. Kurt is gay, he will never be attracted to you, and he wants to be with *me*."

Sarah marinated on this for a second. "But hypothetically speaking, what if he decided he *didn't* want to be with you anymore?"

He shrugged. "Then I would let him go. It would be very hard for me, but at the end of the day all I care about is his happiness. If he decided that being with me made him unhappy, I wouldn't try to make him stay. I love him enough that I'd be able to accept that."

As he spoke, he happened to glance over to the chest press machine again. Kurt was standing up from the seat and it looked like he was about to make his way over to Blaine and Sarah.

"And we're not talking about this anymore, because he's coming," Blaine hissed in a hasty whisper.

The only sound was the whirring of the elliptical and treadmill as Kurt approached them with a tired smile on his face. Blaine immediately turned off his machine and stepped off of it to greet his boyfriend.

"Hi!" Kurt sounded unnaturally cheerful considering the fact that he was dripping in sweat. He gave Blaine a kiss on the cheek and didn't acknowledge Sarah at all, even though Blaine knew Kurt had seen her.

Blaine immediately grabbed Kurt's face with both of his hands and gave him a proper kiss right on the lips. Kurt played along, making a big show of licking his lips and grinning as they pulled away.

"How's my hard-working man?" Blaine asked, rubbing Kurt's forearms gently.

"Sore," Kurt admitted, then moaned quietly as Blaine kept rubbing up and down his arms. "Oh, but keep doing that, please. It feels amazing."

"How about a massage when we get back to the room?" Blaine suggested. It probably wasn't the best idea – he still wanted to get some work done on his opening statement before his meeting with Justin Wheeler later on. But he knew Sarah was hanging on their every word and this would absolutely *kill* her. And besides, the more he thought about it, the more appealing it sounded.

Kurt seemed to like his idea, because his eyes lit up with a glimmer of hope. "Really? That would be incredible."

"Yes, really," Blaine told him. He took his hand and began leading him towards the door. "Come on, let's go get those muscles relaxed."

Sarah, still working away at her elliptical, called out as they were leaving. "Kurt! Hi!"

"Hello, Sarah," Kurt called back in a bored voice, for the sake of politeness more than anything.

The second they had stepped out into the hallway outside the workout room, Blaine burst out laughing. "Okay, I'm sorry. I love us."

"I love us, too. That was hilarious," Kurt agreed. "What all did she tell you, anyway?"

As they stepped into the elevator, Blaine began telling Kurt everything that had happened since Sarah came into the workout room. When he was done and they were outside the door to their own room, Kurt laughed as he inserted the keycard. "She really doesn't get it, does she?"

Blaine shook his head. "I guess not."

"Well, thanks for trying to help get my point across." Kurt turned around and gave him an appreciative smile and a quick kiss. "Now about that massage..."

Blaine gently guided him further into the room. "On the bed. Shirt off."

Kurt pulled his sweaty shirt up and off over his head and began heading towards the bed as Blaine quickly washed his hands and rooted through his bag of toiletries to find a bottle of lotion that would substitute for massage oil.

"Okay," he said as he made his way over to Kurt. "Where do you want me to start?"

"Chest," Kurt said. Blaine mentally facepalmed himself for even asking; Kurt was lying on his back, after all. "Then my shoulders and back. And arms. My whole upper body is sore."

"Not for long." Blaine climbed onto the bed and squirted some of the lotion into his hands, rubbing his palms together to warm it up. Kurt closed his eyes as Blaine placed both hands on his chest and began slowly massaging.

Kurt inhaled a deep breath and let it out slowly as Blaine's hands worked the sore muscles of his chest. He kept his eyes closed and focused on his breathing and on Blaine's soothing touch. A sigh of pleasure escaped his lips every so often when Blaine gently rubbed out the soreness in a spot that was particularly tender.

He remembered the first time Blaine had ever touched him like this. Back then, he'd been covered in hideous bruises and had wondered if anyone would ever want him again. Now, he thought happily as he slowly opened his eyes, he couldn't believe how much things had changed since then. He remembered the way Blaine had looked him in the eyes and said *You're beautiful, Kurt*. The implications of that had been unclear at the time, since that was back before they'd confessed their love, but as he looked up into Blaine's eyes he realized that his boyfriend was silently telling him those same three words even without speaking. The way Blaine *looked* at him made him believe he was beautiful.

"Flip over onto your back," Blaine instructed gently, and Kurt did as he was told. He closed his eyes again as he felt Blaine straddling his waist and heard the sound of lotion squirting out of the bottle. Before long, there was a gentle touch and sudden coolness being applied to his back as Blaine rubbed the lotion in. He gently kneaded the muscles along Kurt's spine and shoulder blades before directing his attention to his arms. Kurt hadn't even realized how sore his arms had been until Blaine started massaging his biceps. Suddenly he couldn't hold back a quiet moan.

Blaine did not let this go unnoticed. "You like that, huh?" he whispered with a smile, his breath warm on Kurt's ear.

Kurt nodded to the best of his ability.

"Tell me what else you like," Blaine murmured. He sucked Kurt's earlobe into his mouth. Suddenly his opening statement and planned meeting with Justin Wheeler were the furthest things from his mind. All he could focus on was the fact that he had this beautiful man completely at his mercy. He was so far beyond the point of giving a fuck about anything else.

It took Kurt a few seconds to remember how to speak. "Y-you know what I like."

"But I want to hear you say it." Blaine's mouth had moved down to the ivory column of Kurt's neck. "Out loud."

Kurt let his eyes fall closed again. There was nothing left to do but succumb to Blaine.

xxx

Blaine opened his eyes only to see that the summer sunlight streaming in through the window was a brilliant orange.

"Shit," he muttered under his breath, throwing the bed covers off of himself and onto Kurt as he began pulling on clothes, not paying attention to whether or not they were his own. One glance at the clock told him he was completely fucked. The glowing red numbers informed him that it was eight forty-two.

Kurt sat up from the bed and rubbed the sleep from his eyes. "Blaine? What's wrong?"

"I've still gotten absolutely nowhere on my opening statement, and even worse, I fell asleep and forgot about the fucking meeting. *That's* what's wrong," Blaine snapped.

His tone was borderline rude and teeming with frustration. He didn't even notice the offended look on Kurt's face as he grabbed his phone off the desk and turned it on, cursing under his breath when he realized he had three missed calls from Wheeler and one text message: *Where the fuck are you, Anderson?*

Without thinking, he immediately called Wheeler back. The planets must not have been aligned in his favor or something, because it went straight to voicemail.

"You've reached Justin Wheeler, attorney at law. I can't come to the phone right now, but please your name, number and a message at the tone and I will return your call as soon as possible." *Beep*.

Blaine began speaking frantically as soon as the *beep* sounded. "Justin. Hi. It's Blaine. Listen, I, uh...I'm so sorry. I was...um, I was writing my opening statement, I've been working on it all afternoon and I completely lost track of time. Just please, please hear me out on this. I'm sorry. I hope we can get together some other time before we present our case. Let me know. Bye."

He hung up the phone and tossed it angrily on the desk with a grunt of annoyance. Kurt flinched.

"No answer?" he asked warily. Blaine couldn't help but notice that he was sitting up in bed, still naked from their sexual encounter of a few hours ago.

"No, hence why I left the voicemail." Blaine curled his fingers through his dark hair and clenched his hands into fists. "God, I can't believe myself. I've fucked everything up. Now it looks like I can't stick to my word and remember to come to a fucking meeting. And you know damn well Wheeler won't keep quiet about this. He'll tell everyone how unprofessional I am, and..."

He was too angry to finish that sentence. All he could do was continue pacing and try not to rip his own hair out.

Kurt moved over to the edge of the bed so he could reach out and wrap his arms comfortingly around Blaine's waist. "Baby, if it makes you feel any better, I..."

"Please get off of me." Blaine hastily stepped back out of Kurt's embrace. "Kurt, I need to be a lawyer. I can't be your boyfriend now."

The seemingly offended look that had been on Kurt's face a few minutes ago was nothing compared to how deeply hurt he looked now. They both stared at each other for a few silent seconds as Blaine wished more than anything in the world that he could take his words back.

"Kurt, I..," he began, but he wasn't quite sure how to finish that sentence.

Without saying a word, Kurt got out of bed and began silently pulling on clothes in the most dignified manner possible. When he was completely dressed, he picked up his suitcase and began heading for the door.

"Wait – where are you going?" Blaine called weakly after him.

Kurt paused and turned around. His hair was still messy and disheveled from sex and he'd just thrown on the first t-shirt and pair of jeans he'd touched, but nothing compared to the look in his eyes. Blaine had no words to describe just how hurt he looked.

"I'm going down to the front desk and getting my own room." It sounded like he was trying very hard to keep his voice from breaking. "I need to give you your space."

"Kurt -," Blaine tried to protest, but it was no use. The noise the door made when it fell shut behind Kurt may as well have been a gunshot.

Chapter Twenty-Four

"Do you think we should get her up?" Burt Hummel asked his wife, referring to their granddaughter as he picked up the remote and turned on the television.

Carole shook her head. "Let Ellie sleep. She's too young to really understand what's going on," she said as Burt turned the channel to the local news station. "All she knows is that her daddies are in Washington, D.C. to present a big, important court case. She has no idea what the Supreme Court is or what any of this means."

"I'm not even sure *I* know what any of this means," Burt admitted. "Blaine was trying to explain the whole procedure to me the night before they left, when we first got here, and I kept getting lost."

"That's probably a good sign," Carole told him. "He knows what he's talking about. That's the important thing."

"You have a point," Burt said, then stopped talking as the screen cut from the two anchors talking at the news desk to a live shot of a female reporter standing outside the Supreme Court building in Washington, D.C.

"Good morning. Today in our nation's capital, two of Chicago's finest attorneys will be going head to head in what is sure to become a landmark Supreme Court case," the reporter said into her microphone. "For those of you who are unfamiliar with the facts of the case, Kurt Hummel, a music teacher at Buckley Middle School, was recently denied acceptance into the Chicago public school teachers' union because he is openly gay. His boyfriend and counsel, Blaine Anderson, will be arguing the constitutionality of union president Sean Jeffries's decision against Justin Wheeler, who represents Jeffries and the rest of the union."

Burt couldn't help but scoff. "'Two of Chicago's finest attorneys?'" he repeated incredulously. "I mean, I can believe that about Blaine, because from what I understand he's a damn good lawyer. I haven't heard one good thing about this other guy."

"The media has to be objective," Carole informed him gently. "They can't make it look like they're favoring one side over another."

Burt reached over to grab his coffee mug from the table next to the couch. "Whatever you say," he told her, taking a long sip and settling in to watch his son's fate unfold onscreen.

xxx

Their tiny home was practically bursting at the seams with boxes as they prepared for the move, but Michael was glad that his dad hadn't packed their crummy television set yet. He'd gotten up early just to watch this – since Washington D.C. was an hour ahead of Chicago time – and was trying to keep his eyes open as the reporter on the screen blabbered on and on about the details behind Mr. Hummel and Blaine Anderson's case.

This must have been a pretty big deal, Michael thought. Mr. Hummel and Blaine and the guys they were arguing against hadn't even shown up yet, but he could already see a large crowd gathered on the steps of the famous court building behind the reporter. And the more he thought about it, the more it started to sink in that this *was* a big deal. If Mr. Hummel and Blaine couldn't win this case, there was a chance that maybe someday *he* would be in a position like this. This case, if they won, wouldn't just be a victory for Mr. Hummel – it would be a victory for Michael and all the other kids like him. They would be able to grow up without fear of being rejected because of who they were.

And even though Michael felt bad for Mr. Hummel that *he* had been rejected – in a way, it almost made his teacher a martyr for the cause. If he and Blaine Anderson could pull this off, it would truly change the way society saw gay people. Michael might not have known much about how the Supreme Court worked, but he was pretty sure this had the potential to change history.

Suddenly he heard the sound of his father's heavy footsteps coming from down the hall. Almost instinctively, he scrambled for the remote and flipped the channel to ESPN.

"Morning, Dad," he said nonchalantly.

His father stopped and squinted at SportsCenter on the television. "Sox manage to win last night?"

Michael hadn't been paying as much attention to his favorite baseball team lately. He took a shot in the dark. "Uh, I think so." He turned his attention back to the television, which showed the White Sox players flooding out of the dugout to congratulate a player who had hit a walk-off home run in the ninth inning to win the game for them. "Yeah, guess they did."

"Good." His father headed out to the kitchen to pour himself his morning cup of coffee, but paused and turned around. "Hey, and don't turn on the news today."

Michael thought back to the coverage of the Supreme Court case he'd been watching just moments ago.

"How come?" he asked, playing dumb.

"Those two faggots are taking their case to the Supreme Court today and the local media's going apeshit," his father explained disapprovingly. "You don't need to be watching that."

"You mean Kurt Hummel and Blaine Anderson?" Michael said defensively without even thinking.

His father, who had started towards the kitchen again, froze abruptly and turned around. It was as if he were legitimately angry to learn that the two men had actual names. "*What?*"

Michael tried to keep his voice steady as he responded. "They have names, y'know. Just cause they're gay doesn't mean they're not people, too."

"I don't give a damn what their names are. They're both faggots," his father shot back. "And if I catch you watching anything about them on the news...you'll be sorry."

He turned and headed out to the kitchen without saying a word. Michael unfolded the ratty blanket that was draped over the back of the couch and pulled it tightly around himself. His father's threat had left him with an unexplainable chill.

xxx

"Do you remember the last time we were here?" Emily asked as Savannah wheeled her to their usual table in the corner of the sleepy coffeehouse. "Just a couple weeks ago, with Kurt. Now look where he is."

She smiled as she placed their drinks on the table and glanced up at the television monitor that was mounted to the wall, tuned to the local news. From what she could tell, there was already a huge crowd gathered in front of the Supreme Court building even though Kurt and Blaine didn't appear to be there just yet.

"I know, it's so crazy," Savannah agreed, her face softening into that smile Emily adored. "He was just telling us about how he's going to ask Blaine to marry him; now they're about to go argue in front of the Supreme Court." She sipped her coffee and stared thoughtfully at the scene unfolding on the television for a few seconds before she continued. "And you gotta figure Blaine's probably psyched as hell to be there, but he doesn't even know that the best is yet to come."

"I'm so happy for them," Emily mused without taking her eyes off the TV. The screen cut to a shot panning the crowd gathered on the steps. She couldn't help but notice that a lot of the people had brought rainbow gay pride flags or homemade signs that spelled out their support for Kurt and Blaine. "And just *look* at this. I think every single person there is rooting for them. I don't see any 'Go Sean Jeffries & Justin Wheeler' signs. That's amazing."

She had turned towards Savannah with an elated smile, but her girlfriend immediately grabbed her hand and pointed back at the television. "Oh my god, maybe this is them."

The screen was filled with a shot of an important-looking black car with tinted windows, so it was impossible to see who was inside. For whatever reason, Emily found herself holding her breath as the car onscreen pulled to a stop. After a few seconds, the door opened and Blaine stepped out, black briefcase in hand. Kurt followed immediately after. Both looked extremely handsome, wearing suits that Emily guessed Kurt had gotten specifically for this occasion.

"It *is* them!" she squealed, gripping Savannah's hand even tighter. Onscreen, the car had pulled away but Kurt and Blaine stayed exactly where they were, engaged in what appeared to be an intense conversation. It was impossible to hear anything they were saying, due to the fact that the reporter at the scene was explaining to the viewers that Kurt Hummel and Blaine Anderson had arrived (but really, Emily thought, was there anyone in Chicago who *didn't* know who they were?).

But the strange part was that Blaine seemed extremely uneasy. Emily had never seen him so nervous. Then again, she supposed she couldn't blame him – he was about to argue in front of the *Supreme Court*, for crying out loud. She was starting to get a little nervous herself, but all that trepidation immediately left when she saw Kurt smiling the tiniest bit and placing a reassuring hand on Blaine's shoulder as he said something that appeared to be putting the other man at ease. He set his face to serious as he turned around and began heading towards the steps; Blaine stared after him for a second before snapping back into reality and quickly pacing to catch up with Kurt, a newfound confidence in his step.

Emily felt her own smile widen when Savannah leaned over and kissed her on the cheek.

"Here they go," she said softly.

xxx

The car ride, like their relationship over the past few days, had been relatively silent. Blaine had spent the majority of it gripping his briefcase with clammy palms and running through his oral argument in his head while Kurt gazed thoughtfully out the window, seemingly unfazed. When the car finally rolled to a stop in front of their destination, it was the latter that broke the silence.

"You ready?" Kurt's voice didn't sound nervous at all. In fact, there was a slight undertone of excitement, if Blaine wasn't mistaken. He'd always loved how confident Kurt was in situations like this...but he couldn't let himself think about that now. For the past few days, he'd been trying to think of Kurt strictly as a client, but it was hard for him not to get weak in the knees when those immaculate glasz eyes were watching him expectantly.

There were so many things he wanted to say to Kurt, most of which included some form of apology, but now was not the time. Blaine had forced himself to draw a strict line between boyfriend and attorney, and he couldn't cross back over to the former side until all had been said and done in court. So he pushed aside all nonprofessional thoughts and finally said, "Yeah, let's go."

He opened the door and stepped out into the blinding sun of the sticky summer morning. It seemed to have warmed up by about ten degrees since they'd left the hotel; Blaine couldn't believe how humid it was. He felt himself starting to sweat, which didn't do much to soothe his frazzled nerves. In fact, it seemed to have the opposite effect.

"How are you feeling?" Kurt asked once he'd stepped out of the car as well.

Blaine looked into his eyes and for a moment considered telling the truth. *I'm running on about two hours of sleep. I guess that's partly due to nerves, but most of it is because I haven't been sleeping well for the past few nights without you there. My head is pounding, I have about a million thoughts racing through my mind at any given second and I feel like I'm about to throw up. But then again, I don't know if that's because I'm nervous about this or because I feel so bad about how I treated you the other day. Maybe both. ...Definitely both.*

But he couldn't say that, because that would require breaking down completely and crossing over to the Boyfriend side of the line he'd drawn so clearly in his mind.

He stared at the scene in front of him for a few seconds, taking in the crowd of supporters on the steps and the media, which had been confined to a corner of the property. He let his gaze travel up the building itself, scaling the tall columns until he could read the famous inscription at the top: *Equal Justice Under Law*. Something struck him upon reading those four simple words, and he turned back to Kurt with a note of despair in his voice as he spoke.

"This is it," he said. "I'm here, I'm twenty-seven years old and I'm about to present a case to the Supreme Court of the United States. This is the high point of my career. Nothing I do after this will ever be as important as this. This is it, Kurt. I've hit my peak, and so early. Which way do I go from here?"

He drew in a sharp breath when Kurt placed a gentle hand on his shoulder to calm him down. It was the first physical contact they'd made in almost two days.

"Think about it this way," Kurt said. "If you can pull this off, you can do anything. Think about how much credibility you'll have after this. Other lawyers you argue against will automatically be intimidated when they find out you argued in front of the highest court in the nation. At the end of the day, it'll just be another major accomplishment to add to the long list of great things you've already achieved."

He smiled the tiniest bit, but it was enough to immediately drown away all of Blaine's tension. He wanted to kiss Kurt so badly, right there in front of everyone. It took every single crumb of his willpower to restrain himself.

Kurt kept smiling as he continued. "So to answer your question, the only way to go...," he squeezed Blaine's shoulder and glanced back towards, the building, "is up."

He turned on his heel and began strutting confidently towards the steps, back straight, chin up, the picture of confidence. There was nothing left for Blaine to do but follow after him, toward the crowd of supporters on the steps who started to cheer now that Kurt and Blaine had arrived, toward the doors that led to their destiny.

xxx

Strangely enough, Kurt wasn't nervous at all as they entered the inner chamber where the proceedings would take place. His knees didn't even shake as he took his seat at their table at the front of the room, next to a podium where the attorneys would give their arguments and facing a row of nine high-backed chairs for the justices. He didn't even break a sweat until a few seconds after he'd taken his seat, when Blaine pulled out the chair next to him and sat down.

Kurt's breath hitched when Blaine's arm brushed against his own as he snapped open his briefcase. This was arguably the closest he'd been to Blaine since their sexual encounter of two days ago before everything had blown up right in their faces.

Kurt had spent the last two days trying his best not to wallow in self-pity. He knew he'd brought this on himself. He could accept that. He never should have put his own sexual desires over Blaine's priorities.

But where did this leave them? Kurt had spent a lot of time thinking about that as well. He had made no move to approach Blaine, mostly because he hadn't wanted to interfere any more with the preparations Blaine was making for court. He'd decided from the get go that he would wait for Blaine to come to him, but that hadn't happened yet. Kurt couldn't decide if that meant Blaine was legitimately busy, or if he wanted nothing more to do with his boyfriend-turned-client. He couldn't help feeling that it was a little bit of both.

And of course there was the ring. Kurt had been trying so hard not to think about it, still tucked away in his suitcase, but his mind kept coming back to it. Even if things managed to fall back into place, should he still propose? Would Blaine even dare entertain the thought of marrying him? Kurt knew that *he* sure as hell wouldn't want to marry someone like himself if he were in Blaine's shoes. And he hated himself even more because of it – he'd spent so much money on a beautiful ring and had been secretly planning out his question-popping method in his head for weeks now, but now it probably wasn't even going to happen because he'd been too selfish.

All of this was racing through Kurt's mind as the court was called to order and the proceedings began. He wasn't even paying attention, even though he could feel countless eyes boring into the back of his skull from the gallery. Everyone was watching him, and *why*? Why him? Why couldn't they be staring at the back of Sean Jeffries's head, over at the respondent's table on the other side of the podium? Why were they so focused on what *Kurt* was going to do?

The chief justice said something that Kurt didn't hear because he hadn't been paying attention, then all of a sudden Blaine was standing up from his seat and walking to the podium.

Kurt wondered if it would be inappropriate to smile reassuringly at Blaine before he began his argument. He settled for letting the tiniest smile possible pull up at the corners of his lips and hoped his eyes reflected some reassurance. The grateful look in Blaine's hazel eyes let Kurt know he'd gotten the message. Kurt's heart started to beat faster even as Blaine turned away from him and looked to acknowledge the nine justices. *We don't even need words to communicate.*

Blaine swallowed and bit his lip as he glanced down at his notes on the podium, but all traces of inhibition were completely gone from his demeanor as he looked up at the bench and began to speak in a loud, clear voice.

"May it please the Court," he began formally, "my name is Blaine Anderson and I am here to represent the petitioner, Mr. Kurt Hummel of Chicago, Illinois."

He paused for a fleeting second. "Buckley Middle School in Chicago first expressed interest in creating some kind of arts program about two years ago. It seemed unlikely that they would be able to pull it off. In fact, many people were surprised they even had the money, however little it was. For the longest time, the school had difficulty trying to find someone who would like to teach the class. But in April, everything fell into place when Kurt Hummel was hired to teach the first-ever visual or performing arts class in inner-city Chicago schools.

"Mr. Hummel is an excellent teacher, as is reflected in the grades of his students. His class average is the highest of any teacher in the school. He has the remarkable ability to communicate with his students on a personal level and express a genuine interest in their lives. These students truly matter to him, which unfortunately can't be said about a lot of teachers in the inner city. He always takes the time to find out what the kids are having trouble with and is willing to work with them until they grasp the concept. They know that they can talk to him about anything, which is especially nice considering that many of them don't feel that connection to any other teacher in their school. Mr. Hummel is truly improving his students' lives.

Blaine paused for effect, never once taking his eyes off the justices on the bench. Kurt watched him with rapt attention, his heart picking up speed in his chest as Blaine continued.

"But in spite of all this, in spite of the success Mr. Hummel has already achieved, there's something wrong. He was denied admission to the local teachers' union. He was told that a few of the members would be 'uncomfortable' if he were to be included. And the cause of this supposed discomfort comes from the fact that he is openly gay.

"What kind of world do we live in if we are unable to open our hearts and minds and allow one of the best – if not *the* best – teachers in the school district to enjoy the same benefits as everyone else? This is just an extension of the fight for full equality that the gay community has been struggling with for decades. And sometimes it doesn't even seem to be going anywhere. Each time we take a step forward, we take a step back. For example, our great home state of Illinois made history last month when we voted to allow same-sex marriages. That was a remarkable accomplishment. But when something like this happens, and some regular old lawyer from Chicago like myself finds himself in front of the Supreme Court of the United States to fight for justice, it seems that total equality may not be as close as we think it is."

Blaine stopped again and this time Kurt could swear he saw his attorney shoot him a quick glance out of the corner of his eye. For a fleeting second, it almost seemed that he was nervous, but all traces of fear were gone when he began to speak again.

"The great legal mind Robert H. Bork, nominated to the Supreme Court by President Ronald Reagan, once wrote that 'our freedoms do not ultimately depend upon the pronouncements of judges sitting in a row. They depend upon their acceptance by the American people.' And he was right."

All of a sudden Blaine turned away from the podium, away from the justices, so he was facing out into the gallery and addressing those who had come to witness the hearing. Kurt immediately bit his lip to hold back a gasp. He was pretty sure that turning one's back to the judges was probably a huge no-no, but what did he know. He trusted Blaine; he knew the other man wouldn't be doing this if he thought it wasn't right.

"At the end of the day, this decision doesn't belong to these nine distinguished men and women seated behind me. It belongs to you, the American people. They may write the opinion, but it's up to *you* to put it into action. If all of us could just open up our minds a little bit more and be willing to accept someone who is different, no matter who they are, our nation would be a much better place."

He turned back toward the justices again and continued, his voice swelling just slightly with emotion as he continued.

"Unfortunately, the Chicago teachers' union could not open their minds in this way. They didn't even want to make any sort of an effort to get to know Mr. Hummel and work with him in a civilized manner. And thus we find ourselves here today. Now, I'm not here just to represent Kurt Hummel and ask that the Court overturn its previous decision in the *Boy Scouts v. Dale* case. I'm also here to represent the entire gay community and to ask the American people to *stop* this discrimination, this utter intolerance. It's gone on for far too long, and things need to change."

Blaine's impassioned speech continued for the remainder of the half hour allotted to him. A few of the justices asked him questions from the bench, all of which he answered politely and thoroughly before returning to his prepared argument. When he was given the signal that time was up, he immediately stopped talking and returned to his seat next to Kurt.

Kurt, meanwhile, found himself blinking his wet eyes rapidly to hold back tears. Somehow he got the feeling that crying in front of the Supreme Court wouldn't do the two of them any favors, but he couldn't help it. The passion and intensity Blaine had put into his argument reminded Kurt of why he'd fallen in love with him in the first place. Blaine had literally thrown his entire heart and soul into this for Kurt.

The doubts he'd been feeling earlier were completely gone from his mind. And he knew they still had some things to work out between them, but that was a part of life. They weren't going to get along perfectly all the time, but Kurt was willing to work with Blaine through anything. Blaine's mindblowing argument had just made it crystal clear to Kurt that this was the man he wanted to marry.

xxx

Blaine asked Kurt to get lunch with him after the hearing, and Kurt had agreed. It was nice to spend more time with Blaine, even if it was under more professional than romantic circumstances. Kurt was unshy about telling Blaine how amazing his argument had been; Blaine blushed and smiled shyly before giving his thoughts about how the rest of the hearing that morning had gone. For that one brief second, though, Kurt felt a sense of hope. Blaine still got flustered whenever Kurt complimented him like that. He'd never seen Blaine get like that around anyone else. At that moment there was no doubt in his mind that Blaine's feelings for him were still incredibly potent, even if the two of them were on a break (or whatever this was). And Kurt knew that his own feelings, of course, had never decreased in intensity. He still loved him just as much as always – in fact, after that incredible argument in court, Kurt found that he loved Blaine more than ever before, and it broke his heart to think that he couldn't tell him.

They talked about nothing but the case the entire time, and when they were done eating they headed back to their hotel. Blaine rode the elevator with Kurt up to the fifth floor, where Kurt's new room was located, even getting off and walking him to his door.

Kurt's heart was pounding the whole time as Blaine down the hall with him. Maybe this was it and Blaine was going to let him know it was okay to come back. Maybe the strange tension that had filled their relationship for the past few days was finally coming to an end.

But when they found themselves standing outside the door to the room that Kurt had checked out for himself, Blaine seemed to be having difficulty even meeting his eyes.

"I gotta go up to...m-my room and work on something," he stammered. "I'll see you later?"

Kurt nodded. When he spoke, his voice was small.

"Yeah," he said. "Do whatever you need to do, I don't want to interfere. See you later."

Before he turned away, Blaine stepped closer and pressed a tender kiss to Kurt's cheek. It was soft and gentle and lingered for a few seconds longer than it probably should have, considering their circumstances. Kurt closed his eyes and didn't open them again until Blaine's lips had left his skin.

Their eyes met for a brief second, then Blaine looked down at the floor as he turned away to head back to the elevator.

Kurt stared after him, making no move to take his keycard out of his wallet and open his door. He raised one hand to his face and held it to his cheek where Blaine had kissed him, as if he were trying to keep the press of Blaine's lips ingrained in his skin forever.

When the elevator doors slipped open and Blaine stepped inside, Kurt forced himself to turn away. He fished his wallet out of his pocket and pulled out his keycard to unlock the door.

Out of the corner of his eye, he caught sight of the door to the exercise room swinging open. He vaguely recognized the person who stepped out of the room into the hallway, but the last thing he wanted to do was glance up and look directly at them to see if it was who he thought it was. He sucked in a paranoid breath as he attempted to insert the keycard into its slot again.

The little red light flashed to signal that the door hadn't been unlocked. Kurt rolled his eyes and tried it again. It didn't work the second time, either. And the person who had just come out of the exercise room was coming down the hall closer to him; Kurt panicked and hoped against hope that he would be able to get into his room before she saw him...

But of course, luck wasn't on his side at the present moment. As he attempted to slide the keycard into the slot for a third unsuccessful time, the voice called out to him.

"Kurt? What are you doing down here?"

Now, don't get Kurt wrong, he didn't hate women. Just because he wasn't sexually attracted to them did *not* mean he didn't respect them. In fact, one of his biggest pet peeves was when some people assumed that all gay men were misogynists. But even with all that being said, hearing the voice of one Sarah Wheeler coming his way made him want to punch a wall.

Her sweaty brown ponytail swung from side to side as she quickly walked up right next to him, clad in a hot pink athletic tank and black workout pants. He chose to ignore her and tried the keycard again. It didn't work, but what else was new. He groaned in frustration and jiggled the handle quickly a few times before kicking the door with the tip of his shiny black Prada dress shoe.

Sarah tried again, choosing to ignore the fact that he was obviously frustrated beyond belief. "Why are you down here, anyway? I thought you and Blaine were staying up on the eighth floor—"

"It's none of your business!" Kurt shouted without even thinking, turning away from the door to face her head on. He could only imagine what his face must have looked like, all red and twisted with rage and hopefully unattractive enough to make her back off some.

Sarah flinched, then immediately regained her composure and gave him what was probably supposed to be an enticing smile.

"You're even hotter when you're mad, you know that?" Her voice was low as she slid her hands up his chest and snaked her arms around his neck.

Kurt closed his eyes and took a deep breath, trying to force himself to calm down. He couldn't explode angrily like he just had; that would probably just encourage her. He had to stay as calm as possible and hope she somehow understood.

He opened his eyes and reached behind himself to gently unwind her arms from around his neck, placing them back at her sides as he spoke with his voice as even as possible.

"Sarah, please. It's really none of your business why I'm down here." He forced himself to keep his eyes locked on hers to emphasize how serious he was about this. "I just have a lot of things going on in my life right now and if you have any iota of respect for me at all, you'll accept that. Please."

She looked back into his eyes and nodded after a few seconds. "Okay."

There was a brief hesitation, then she reached into her cleavage and extracted her room keycard. Kurt made a valiant effort not to visibly wince as she held it out to him between her fingers and said, "But if you ever want to blow off some of that steam, I'm in room 614. Justin usually goes down to have a few drinks at the hotel bar every night and I'm all alone. Come see me, I can take care of you."

Kurt carefully pushed her arm away from him, making sure not to touch the keycard that was probably covered in gross boob sweat. "No, thank you."

She pouted and tucked the keycard back into her cleavage, but Kurt wasn't done yet. "Look, Sarah. I'm...flattered that you find me attractive."

She giggled. "Attractive? Kurt Hummel, you are one *delicious* piece of man candy."

Kurt tried not to make some kind of strange face. *Who even talks like that?* "But can you please do me a favor?" he said, then continued without waiting for her to respond. "Justin is your *husband*. I may not be a huge fan of him personally, but you made a commitment to him when you got married, and what you want to do with me isn't fair to him at all. Your marriage to him is actually legally recognized in all fifty states...unlike, say, if Blaine and I were to get married."

Just the fact that he had said those words out loud made his heart start beating a little faster, but he forced himself to continue.

"You and Justin have something that Blaine and I might not ever have in our lifetime," he said softly. "Full public acceptance of your love and commitment to each other. Please don't take that for granted. If you want to cheat on him...only you can make that decision. But I don't want any part of it."

She looked at him for a long time. Kurt was about to ask if something was wrong, because she didn't say a word for almost a full thirty seconds. Finally she inhaled a deep breath and nodded as she said, "All right."

Kurt felt like the weight of the world had been lifted off his shoulders. "Thank you."

Sarah gave him an understanding smile before turning to head toward the elevator. "You're a good guy, Kurt," she said. "Blaine's lucky to have you."

If you only knew, Kurt thought sadly before returning his attention to the keycard that had failed to unlock the door on his several previous attempts. He gave it one more try, not surprised in the least when it didn't work again.

Kurt sighed as he pulled the card out of the slot and looked at it up close to make sure nothing was wrong with it. It appeared normal – it seemed like there should be no problem, but there was one thing that caught Kurt's eye.

This hotel printed all the room numbers on the corresponding keycards. Upon further inspection, Kurt noticed the number *810* in the upper right hand corner. This was the key to the room upstairs that he had previously shared with Blaine. He'd never taken it out of his wallet. No wonder it hadn't been working.

He pulled out his wallet again and put the offending keycard back inside, making sure he took the right one out this time. He got the door open on the first try.

xxx

Three floors above, Blaine was booting up his laptop and getting impatient when the main screen wouldn't load fast enough. There was something he needed to look up online, but the planets must not have been aligned in his favor or something because it seemed like his computer was doing everything in its power to boot itself up as slowly as possible.

He rolled his eyes and turned to grab the Capitol Building-shaped box of chocolates that Kurt had bought for him, lifting the lid and choosing one at random as his computer slowly but surely whirred to life. Blaine popped the piece of candy in his mouth and chewed thoughtfully. It was caramel, his favorite, but somehow it didn't taste as good as it had a few days ago, when Kurt was sitting on the edge of the desk and giggling as they fed each other the chocolate.

Blaine put the lid back on the box and tried not to think about that. *Finally* his desktop screen had loaded. He stood up from the desk and moved to sit on the bed with his laptop, forcing himself to look past the picture of his and Kurt's smiling faces that filled his background as he clicked hastily on the internet icon.

He squinted in confusion when a different window that was definitely not the internet came up onscreen. It took him a few seconds of staring blankly at the thumbnails to realize that he must have clicked on his Media folder by accident. All of his image and video files were arranged by date in neat little rows.

Without thinking about what he was doing, Blaine clicked on the most recent video file, dated three days ago. The first night they'd been here in D.C., they had Skyped with Kurt's parents and Ellie back in Chicago for about an hour. After logging off from the video chat session, Blaine had somehow gotten the idea to make a goofy video of the two of them to celebrate their arrival in the nation's capital.

It was this video that filled the screen a few second after Blaine clicked on the icon. It had been late at night when they'd made this, so Blaine had his glasses on and a visible shadow of scruff covering his chin and neck. Kurt's hair was uncharacteristically messy and he looked adorably exhausted from their long day of traveling.

"Hello, hello, hello! We've finally made it to Washington, D.C.!" Blaine winced when his onscreen self began to speak in an excited, boisterous voice. Did he *really* sound like that? *"My name, for those of you who don't know me, is Blaine Anderson."*

Onscreen Kurt spoke next. He was sitting with his knees pulled up to his chest, arms wrapped around his legs as he giggled. *"Blaine, you dork, who's even going to watch this?"*

"Oh, yes!" Blaine's on-camera self said. The view onscreen shifted; Blaine recalled picking up the laptop and turning it so the webcam was focused directly on Kurt. *"Joining me this evening is my gorgeous boyfriend, the one and only Mr. Kurt Hummel."*

Blaine couldn't help but smile the tiniest bit as Onscreen Kurt squeaked with embarrassment and threw the covers over his head. His voice was muffled when he spoke. *"Blaine! Get that out of my face! I look terrible!"*

"No, you don't." Blaine watched himself ease the covers off of his boyfriend and gently rub one hand up and down his back as Kurt shot the camera a shy glance. *"And to answer your question, we're making this*

video for future generations so they can get a glimpse of what life is like just days before we go argue our landmark Supreme Court case. Say hi, Kurt."

Kurt rolled his eyes and looked pointedly at the camera with a polite smile. *"Hello, future generations. My name is Kurt Hummel and I usually look much better than this, but I've been traveling all day and I still have major jet lag."*

"Don't listen to him. He never gives himself enough credit," Blaine heard himself say. *"You look amazing, Kurt."*

In a sarcastic attempt to express his doubt, Onscreen Kurt shot the camera a coquettish glance, his bottom lip protruding in a little pout. Suddenly Blaine felt his pants growing just a little bit tighter, particularly in the crotch area. It wasn't fair that Kurt could look so desirable despite being completely exhausted. If anyone looked horrible, Blaine thought, it was himself.

He watched himself lean over on the bed towards Kurt to kiss his pout. The next second, Blaine was offscreen again, but he could still hear his own voice. *"Look at yourself. You know what that look does to me."*

Kurt giggled playfully. *"What does it do to you, Blaine? Why don't you tell our future generations exactly what it does, how it makes you feel?"*

"Because it's inappropriate," Blaine's voice said. In the next second, the view onscreen shifted as Kurt picked up the computer and faced it towards Blaine, who was lounging on the other side of the bed. *"There could be, like, little kids watching this in the future. We don't want to corrupt them."*

There was a sigh from offscreen, courtesy of Kurt. *"Fine."* He had picked up the computer again and turned it so the webcam was trained on himself. *"Kids, let's just say that when I look at Blaine like that, it makes him feel really good."* Kurt spoke slowly and carefully, throwing in an exaggerated wink for good measure.

Blaine couldn't help but giggle a little bit at that. A tiny smile remained on his face as he continued to watch.

Kurt paused for a moment, frowning and wrinkling his nose a little bit, making that adorable scrunchy face he always got when he was confused. *"Wait a minute, why are we watching me again?"* He picked up the computer a third time and shifted the focus, this time bringing it up right next to where Blaine was

reclining on one elbow. Blaine cringed when his own face filled the screen and tried to focus on Kurt's gorgeous prerecorded voice floating through the speakers on his laptop.

"This is the guy you all should care about. He's the big hotshot lawyer who does all the work for this case. I'm just the little nobody music teacher who got mad enough to want to argue it."

Blaine watched his onscreen self give the camera a little wave before looking up at Kurt, who had been sitting on the other side of the screen. *"Come on, you get over here, too."*

He heard Kurt give a sigh of surrender and a few seconds later his boyfriend appeared, crawling across the bed from the other side of the computer. Blaine sat up and pulled Kurt into his lap, earning a giggle and a kiss on the tip of his nose.

"So now what do we talk about?" Kurt asked with a coy little smile. He walked his fingers up Blaine's chest before looping his arms around his boyfriend's neck.

"I dunno," Onscreen Blaine mumbled exhaustedly, letting his head fall lightly against Kurt's chest. Blaine closed his eyes and inhaled deeply as he listened to himself speak. He can still recall the intoxicating scent that was so purely Kurt. *"Let's just sleep. 'm tired."*

Blaine opened his eyes again when he heard Kurt's sweet little laugh. Onscreen, his boyfriend was playfully fluffing his fingers through Blaine's dark curls. *"You're so cute when you're sleepy."*

"And you are so cute all the time." Onscreen Blaine was rubbing up and down Kurt's back, but he stopped to tilt his head up. *"Now gimme kisses."*

Blaine felt a breath hitch in his throat as he watched Kurt delicately cup his face between both of his hands, letting his gaze linger for a second before bringing their lips together. It was tender and sweet for a few seconds before Onscreen Blaine decided to take over and gently push Kurt's lips apart with his tongue to allow himself access. For a brief second Blaine found himself thinking about the moan Kurt had emitted directly into his mouth when he'd done that, and suddenly there it was, somewhat muffled because of the intense proximity of their mouths but still erotic enough to make Blaine's toes curl.

Kurt broke away from the kiss with a breathless gasp and smiled. *"Easy there, tiger. What happened to the future generations of children that could end up watching this?"*

Blaine watched his onscreen self shrug one shoulder. *"Doesn't bother me if it doesn't bother them."*

"Oh, Blaine, think of the children!" Kurt shrieked sarcastically. He was still giggling when Onscreen Blaine pulled him in for another kiss.

Blaine watched them kiss with genuine interest, but looked past himself. Kurt looked absolutely beautiful when he was being kissed. His eyes were closed; Blaine loved the way his long eyelashes sloped gently down toward his cheek when seen from the side like this. His cheeks turned pink with a blush and there was still a hint of a smile on his lips as their mouths moved together

This time Onscreen Blaine was the one who pulled hastily away from the kiss. *"You're right,"* he said breathlessly. *"We need to think of the children Let's get some privacy."*

Kurt gave the camera a playful smirk as Blaine's onscreen self leaned over to turn the webcam off, and that was that.

Fully back in reality now, Blaine set his laptop aside and tangled both hands in his hair, clenching his fingers in tight fists around the curls. Seeing how playful and carefree the two of them had been just days ago shook him to the core as he thought about the tension that strained their relationship now. He wanted Kurt back more than anything in the world – maybe even more than he wanted to win this case. There was no doubt in his mind.

He inhaled deeply and let it out slowly, then picked up his computer again. He had some work to do.

xxx

"Do you think I should say something? Or am I doing the right thing by waiting for him to come to me? God, sorry for unloading all this on you, Dad, but I have no idea what to do."

Burt Hummel pulled open the refrigerator in the Hummel-Anderson kitchen as he listened to his son going crazy with worry through the phone. Kurt had just given him a rundown of everything that had happened over the past few days, from his falling out with Blaine to the hearing in front of the Supreme Court earlier that morning. Now that Kurt had finished telling Burt all he needed to know about the latter topic, he had reverted back to the former.

Burt couldn't lie, he felt terrible for the kid. The last thing Kurt needed in his life was any kind of relationship drama after what he'd been through with Dave earlier this year. But arguments like this were an unfortunate part of life, and Kurt had to realize that. Burt decided to be completely honest with his son.

"Okay. First of all, I think you're both partially at fault here." He pulled a can of soda out of the fridge and cracked it open, trying to keep his voice gentle but firm. "I'm sure Blaine didn't mean to be quite so harsh, but he probably should have thought before he opened his mouth. As for you, kid, you need to realize that he's got a *huge* amount of responsibility on his shoulders. I mean, the Supreme Court...that's a pretty big deal. You brought him to Washington with you as your attorney, not as your boyfriend. His responsibilities as a lawyer have gotta come first."

Kurt swallowed audibly. His voice was still thick with emotion as he spoke. "I know. I feel awful that I didn't respect that more," he admitted.

"And with that being said, I think you *are* doing the right thing. Just wait for him to come to you," Burt continued. "I'm not a lawyer. I don't know what the hell they need to do after they present a big case to the Supreme Court. You just need to give him some time to do whatever he needs to do, and I'm sure he'll come talk to you when he's ready."

"You're sure?" Kurt asked warily.

"I'm positive," Burt told him confidently.

"Okay." Kurt paused for a second and when he spoke again, his voice was soft with hesitation. "But what about...I still have the ring I was going to...propose to him with." He inhaled sharply. "Do you think I should still...?"

"Only you can decide that for yourself," Burt told him. "Do you *want* to marry him?"

Kurt's response was immediate. "Yes, absolutely," he said. "Watching him give his argument in court this morning...there was no doubt in my mind that he's the man I want to call my husband." He sighed. "But there's just been so much tension between us...and I mean, I knew I wanted to propose to him here, in Washington, but I don't know if I want to under...these circumstances."

Burt shrugged. "Well, in that case, if you're absolutely sure he's the one you want...I don't see any reason why you shouldn't," he said. "Wait until after you two have figured things out between yourselves, first. Then it's up to you when you want to pop the big question."

"You think it would be okay for me to do that?" Kurt asked.

"Sure, why not? The way I see it, this would just prove to him that you're willing to stay by his side for the rest of your lives, no matter what shit life throws at you. It'll show him that you'll always do your best to work things out when you two get in disagreements like this one. I don't see anything wrong with that."

Kurt was silent for a few seconds. Burt was glad to hear a smile in his voice when he spoke again.

"Okay. Thanks, Dad," he said. "I think I'm gonna get something to eat, so I'll let you go."

"All right. Take care, Kurt," Burt told him. "And good luck."

They said their goodbyes and Burt hung up the phone just as his granddaughter came into the kitchen.

"Hi, Grandpa," Ellie said. She pulled open the fridge and looked inside for a few seconds before taking out a juice box and shutting the door. "What else did Daddy say?" She had been the first person Kurt had talked to when he'd called, but Burt knew she'd always been a little busybody. And he knew exactly who she'd gotten that from.

"You are just like your dad. Always wanting to know everything," he told her with a warm smile. "He's doing...he and Blaine have been really busy."

He couldn't bring himself to tell her the whole truth, but what he'd said hadn't exactly been a lie, so that made him feel the tiniest bit better.

Ellie stuck the straw in her juice box and took a sip. "Are they coming home soon?"

"They'll be home as soon as they can," Burt told her.

She took a seat at the kitchen table and sipped the rest of her juice box until Burt could hear the straw pulling at empty air.

"I miss them," she said quietly, flicking the empty juice box over.

"I know, sweetie. I miss them, too," Burt told her. He smiled in an attempt to lighten the mood. "But y'know what? Your daddies wouldn't want us to be sitting around being all sad because they're gone. They'd want us to go have fun."

Ellie smiled a little bit. "Yeah, you're probably right."

Burt picked up her empty juice box and tossed it in the trash under the sink. "Go find Grandma Carole. I think it's a great evening to go to the park."

xxx

After Kurt hung up from the phone call with his father, he pulled the room service menu out of the nightstand drawer and glanced at it blankly. The words all seemed to blur together on the page; he couldn't make sense of what he was reading, let alone pick out something to order. It took him a few moments to realize that he couldn't read a word because a screen of uncried tears was blurring his vision.

He tossed the menu onto the bed and knelt down to unzip his suitcase. The pocket he was looking for was at the very bottom, underneath all his things. Kurt pulled the zipper open and extracted the tiny black box he'd been keeping there.

His hands were shaking as he opened the box and looked at the ring inside. This tiny platinum band symbolized all the hope and promise and dreams he had for their future together, but now Kurt found himself legitimately nervous about the idea of proposing for the first time since he'd bought the ring. His father had brought up some good points on the phone just now; it wasn't that Kurt didn't *want* to propose. He was more afraid of Blaine's response than anything else. Would Blaine want such a strong commitment to bind the two of them together after Kurt had been so selfish? For the first time, Kurt heard the little voice in his head asking the dreaded question. *What if he says no?*

There was no time for him to consider the answer to that question, because suddenly there was a knock on his door.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Kurt immediately dove for his suitcase and shoved the ring box back into the pocket where he'd gotten it. He knew it was silly, because whoever had just knocked obviously couldn't see through the door, but putting it out of sight made him feel better. He zipped up the suitcase and crossed the room to answer the door, taking a few deep breaths to calm himself down before he pulled it open, but even that small preparation did nothing to get him ready for what was on the other side. Or more specifically, *who* was on the other side.

The second he opened the door, he found himself staring directly into Blaine's hypnotizing hazel eyes. Kurt immediately hated himself for not looking through the peephole before he answered, because then he would have had a little bit more time to prepare his heart for this. Instead, he had to grip the doorframe with one hand to prevent himself from falling over. Blaine had been the last person he'd expected to see, but he was *here*.

"Hi," Blaine said with shy trepidation, nervously rubbing the back of his neck. "C-can we...can we talk?"

Kurt nodded. This was all he'd been wanting over the past few days. "Yes, absolutely."

He stepped aside to let Blaine through the doorway, but the other man stayed right where he was. "I...um, I have a lot I need to say," he started, and it seemed like he was having great difficulty meeting Kurt's eyes. "But I wasn't sure *how* to say it. And quite honestly, the thought of coming here to talk to you made me even more nervous than the thought of giving my argument in front of the Supreme Court this morning."

Kurt had to giggle at that. "Blaine, it's just me. There's no reason to be nervous," he said softly.

"Yeah, there is. I...wasn't sure what you'd think of me after what I said to you. You deserve better, Kurt. I guess I just wanted to let you know that I'm sorry and I want things to be right between us again."

Kurt nodded in agreement, trying to remain calm despite the fact that his heart had started doing little flips in his chest. "I do, too."

They just looked at each other for a second, letting their mutual understanding be known through their eyes, when Blaine cleared his throat and broke the silence. "Anyway, I...I thought for a long time about

what I wanted to say to you and then I realized that I'd probably do a much better job of conveying my feelings if I sang it to you instead."

He bent down and picked up his large black guitar case, which Kurt hadn't even noticed on the ground beside him. "Do you mind?"

Kurt shook his head. "No, not at all," he said tenderly, never one to pass up the opportunity of Blaine serenading him. "I would love that."

Blaine stepped into Kurt's room and sat down on the edge of his bed. He took the acoustic guitar out of its case and quietly tuned it before turning to Kurt, who had taken a seat beside him.

"I taught myself how to play this song back in high school, but I had to look up the guitar tabs online this afternoon to refresh my memory, so I might be a little rusty on the playing," he said apologetically. "But it's the best song I could think of to describe how I feel, so I hope you like it."

Kurt already knew he would love it. He tried not to let too big of a smile show on his face as Blaine plucked the first few notes and began to sing.

"Time to lay claim to the evidence, fingerprints sold me out

But our footprints washed away from the docks downtown

It's been getting late for days and I think myself deserving of a little time off

We can kick it here for hours and just mouth off about the world

And how we know it's going straight to hell

Pass me another bottle, honey, the Jager's so sweet

But if it keeps you around then I'm down."

Blaine wasn't looking at him the whole time, but that was okay. He would try to keep his eyes locked on Kurt's for a few seconds at a time as he sang before nervously letting his gaze flicker away. Kurt could see just how afraid Blaine was of messing this up. He could see it in the other man's eyes – Blaine was under

the assumption that if this didn't go well, it was all over. Kurt knew for a second that that wasn't true, he would keep Blaine no matter what, but it was still reassuring to see just how much he cared about this. He shyly brought his eyes up to meet Kurt's as he began the chorus.

"Meet me on Thames Street, I'll take you out though I'm hardly worth your time

In the cold you look so fierce but I'm warming up cause the tension's like a fire

We'll hit South Broadway in a matter of minutes, like a bad movie I'll drop a line

Fall in the grave I've been digging myself but there's room for two

Six feet under the stars."

Kurt already felt a tear slipping out of his eye and threatening to roll down his cheek. After a few fruitless attempts to blink it back, he let it go. Maybe Blaine would see just how much of an emotional impact this was having on him already and be put at ease.

"I should have known better than to call you out

On a night like this, a night like this

If not for you, I know I'd tear this place to the ground

But I'm all right like this, all right like this

I'm gonna roll the dice before you sober up and get gone

I'm always in over my head

Thames Street, I'll take you out though I'm hardly worth your time

In the cold you look so fierce but I'm warming up cause the tension's like a fire

We'll hit South Broadway in a matter of minutes, like a bad movie I'll drop a line

Fall in the grave I've been digging myself but there's room for two

Six feet under the stars."

By this time Kurt had completely given up and let his tears fall. It seemed to be putting Blaine at ease, as he'd hoped, because as he strummed into the most powerful part of the song he was able to meet Kurt's eyes without hesitation.

"Time to lay claim to the evidence, fingerprints sold me out

But our footprints washed away, I'm guilty but I'm safe for one more day

I'll be dressing underage, do you really need to see an I.D.

This is embarrassing as hell, but I can cover for it so well

When we're six feet under the stars."

The next chorus was quiet, but no less beautiful than the rest of the song had been up to this point. Kurt felt more warm tears on his cheeks, but he was beyond the point of caring. All that mattered was the fact that Blaine was *here* and Blaine was *singing* to him and Blaine seemed to want him back just as much.

"Meet me on Thames Street, I'll take you out though I'm hardly worth your time

In the cold you look so fierce but I'm warming up cause the tension's like a fire

We'll hit South Broadway in a matter of minutes, like a bad movie I'll drop a line

Fall in the grave I've been digging myself but there's room for two

Six feet under the stars

Six feet under the stars."

The last note hung in the air for a heavy silence during which Blaine suddenly became vulnerable again. He dropped his gaze and fiddled with the strap on his guitar as he waited for Kurt's reaction.

Kurt, meanwhile, needed to be close to Blaine. It was as simple as that. And he was no longer preoccupied with thinking about how things were going to end up between them, because after that beautiful performance there was no doubt in his mind that Blaine wanted him again. Without saying a word, he lifted the guitar over Blaine's head by its strap to get it out of the way, then set the instrument aside before crawling into Blaine's lap.

Blaine giggled and blushed shyly. "Hi there."

He was so cute that Kurt almost couldn't stand it. He wrapped his arms around Blaine's shoulders and pulled him closer, so that his cheek was resting against the top of his boyfriend's curly head. "Hi," he whispered.

"So, um...I'm taking this to mean that you liked the song," Blaine said softly with a little chuckle. "If you didn't like the song, this is a weird way of showing it. Not that I'm complaining."

"I loved the song," Kurt reassured him. He picked his head up and made sure his eyes were firmly locked on Blaine's as he continued. "And I love you."

He kissed his boyfriend's temple before continuing. "And I'm sorry, too. I should have been more understanding about the fact that I brought you here as my lawyer, not as my boyfriend. That should have come first, but I was too selfish to realize that."

"Oh, god, no," Blaine murmured passionately, burying his face in Kurt's chest. "I don't want to be a lawyer. Not right now. I just want my boyfriend back."

"I'm right here," Kurt promised, holding Blaine closer against him. "I promise. I'm not going anywhere."

Neither of them moved for a long time. They were both just content to be there, finally together again, holding each other and basking in the perfection of the moment. When Blaine finally picked his head up and placed a tiny, hesitant kiss on Kurt's lips, Kurt smiled and didn't let him get very far before chasing his mouth for another.

For the first time in what seemed like an eternity, Kurt was perfectly content. He knew it sounded cliché but having Blaine here with him made him feel whole again – like some part of him that had been missing over the past few days was finally back in place. Blaine's kisses were gentle and forgiving; he finally felt

loved again. He found it nearly impossible to stop smiling as he leaned back on the bed so he was lying down and pulled Blaine with him, neither of them breaking the kiss.

"I love you," Blaine gasped with a breathless smile of his own once they finally pulled away.

"You have no idea how happy it makes me every time you say that," Kurt said softly, reaching up to caress Blaine's cheek with his fingertips.

"Then I'll say it a thousand times. It's worth seeing you smile like that. I love you." He pressed a kiss to Kurt's forehead. "I love you." Another kiss, this time on the tip of Kurt's nose. "I love you."

He continued peppering kisses all over Kurt's face, a murmured "I love you" following each gentle press of his lips. Kurt closed his eyes and let a totally blissed-out smile stretch across his face as Blaine kept kissing him. He giggled when Blaine finished his ministrations by placing three more quick kisses on his lips, one in between each word: "I" – kiss – "love" – kiss – "you" – kiss. After the last one, Kurt reached up and placed one hand on the back of Blaine's neck to keep him in place, because he was never one to pass up more kisses.

"Mmmm, someone wants more, doesn't he?" Blaine murmured against Kurt's lips after his unsuccessful attempt to break away.

Kurt giggled into the kiss, a blush warming his cheeks. "Maybe he does, what's wrong with that?"

"You are so cute," Blaine whispered in between short, staccato kisses. "How could I ever deny you anything?"

"You don't," Kurt teased. "I've been told I'm quite irresistible."

After one more lingering kiss, he wrapped his arms around Blaine's neck and pulled him down even closer before continuing. "But I could say the same for you," he murmured.

As they lay there, wrapped around each other, Kurt let his mind wander as he absently traced his fingers up and down the defined muscle of Blaine's arms. It was just one of those moments where the whole world seemed all right again; one of those moments where he had to stop and ask himself if the horrible abuse he'd suffered earlier in the year had really happened, because his life now was pretty darn near

perfection. The only thing that would make it even more perfect, he reasoned after a few minutes of thinking silently to himself, would be if he could call Blaine his husband.

But there was only one way to do that, and Kurt had the power to make it happen. He knew what he had to do.

"Baby, let's go do something," he murmured, tracing his name in invisible letters with his index finger on Blaine's forearm.

Blaine hummed in content. "I'm up for anything, as long as it involves spending time with you."

Kurt's heart started pounding a little bit faster and he extracted himself from Blaine's arms so that his boyfriend wouldn't notice his sudden nervousness – or worse, ask him about it. He was actually going to do this.

"Let's go for a walk," he suggested. "Y'know, just look at some of the cool monuments and stuff, since we haven't exactly done the tourist thing yet."

"Sounds great," Blaine agreed. He sat up and glanced down at his feet, which were clad in loafers that probably wouldn't be suitable for a stroll around the nation's capital. "But can I run upstairs and change my shoes, first? I don't really want to be walking around in these."

That was actually perfect, because it got Blaine out of the way and gave Kurt a chance to grab the ring out of his suitcase, but he couldn't let onto that. "Oh, yeah, I totally understand. Meet me down in the lobby."

"Okay." Blaine made to stand up from the bed, but turned around to face Kurt again as he thought of something else he wanted to say. "Oh, and can we be roomies again? I don't sleep as well without you there to snuggle."

He pouted, so of course Kurt had to pull him closer and kiss his protruding bottom lip. "Yes, Blaine, we can be roomies again."

"Oh, good. Good." He pecked Kurt's lips one more time. "All right, I'll see you downstairs."

The second the door had fallen shut behind Blaine, Kurt was kneeling beside his suitcase on the floor and unzipping it once again. This time, though, he was feeling much happier than he had before. He extracted

the small black box again and smiled to himself when he lifted the lid to reveal the ring. It was going to look absolutely *marvelous* on Blaine's finger.

xxx

Back in Chicago, the sun was just slightly starting to dip below the skyline. Burt had to admit, it looked pretty damn cool in the city's reflection on the giant Bean sculpture.

For such a nice summer night, Millennium Park was surprisingly uncrowded. Burt was standing a few yards away from the enormous reflective sculpture, keeping a close eye on Ellie as she darted underneath it to stare up at her distorted reflection from below. Carole had gone off to buy a lemonade from one of the carts that was set up a little ways away. Burt was actually really glad that there wasn't much of a crowd here tonight, because it somehow gave him a tiny bit of peace of mind. His conversation with Kurt had him worried, and the last thing he needed to do was stress out about trying to keep an eye on his family in a big crowd.

Carole came back over to where Burt was standing, carrying a large yellow plastic cup of lemonade from which she offered him a sip. He shook his head, staring blankly at the reflection of the skyline in the sculpture and trying not to think.

But of course, his wife knew him all too well.

"Burt?" she asked gently. "Is everything all right?"

He couldn't lie to her. "I'm worried about Kurt and Blaine."

Before she even got a chance to ask, he quickly explained to her what Kurt had told him on the phone earlier that evening. When he was finished relating all the details of the conversation with his son, he was surprised to notice that Carole looked relatively unworried.

"I really don't think it's anything that will last much longer," she told him reassuringly. "They've both been under a lot of stress with this case and now that they've done all they can do with it, they've got a lot more room to breathe. I'm sure now that some of the stress has been lifted, they'll work it out."

She took a sip of lemonade and continued. "Besides, we know how much those two love each other. I think anyone who's spent time with them could figure it out. If there's any couple in the world that can work through this, it's Kurt and Blaine."

"Grandpa, Grandma!" Their conversation was interrupted in the form of Ellie racing over to them. "Come under the Bean and look at the reflection! It's so weird!"

As his granddaughter grabbed his hand and began leading him along, Burt shot a glance to Carole, letting her know not to mention anything about this to Ellie. She nodded and followed them underneath the huge sculpture. Burt didn't want Ellie freaking out about this, especially after what Carole had said. By the time they returned home from D.C., Burt figured, the two of them would have worked things out. Maybe they'd even be engaged by that point. Only those two could say for sure.

The three of them stepped beneath the arch and under the sculpture, which curved upwards above them. Ellie giggled and pointed up. "Look at us!"

Carole laughed as she glanced up to see the family's warped reflection in the upper part of the mirror. "Oh my goodness, look how silly we look."

"Last time I came here with Daddy and Blaine, we took a picture of ourselves from under here," Ellie told them. "We should take one, too. So I can have a silly Bean picture with my daddies, and one with my grandma and grandpa."

"Well, in that case, I'm glad I thought to bring my camera," Carole said, digging it out of her purse. She pointed it up and zoomed enough so that the strange reflection of their faces would be visible in the picture. "All right, smile!"

For the first time since getting off the phone with Kurt, Burt allowed himself to relax and smile. As Carole snapped the goofy picture, though, he couldn't help but wonder what his son and Blaine were up to now. If they'd even made an effort to smooth the situation over.

If he'd known exactly how smoothed-over the situation actually was, he would have been pleasantly surprised.

xxx

For almost the first time since they'd arrived here in Washington, Blaine finally thought it was safe to say he was completely at peace. Now that he'd argued his case and things were back to normal with Kurt, he felt like all the weight of regret had been lifted off his heart and he could breathe again. He wasn't exaggerating when he admitted to himself that those few days without Kurt had been some of the most difficult he'd ever faced. Until now, he'd grown so accustomed to Kurt's face being the first thing he saw when he opened his eyes in the morning and the last thing he saw before closing them again at night. Now, though, waking up without Kurt there to give him that glorious smile and a whispered "good morning" accompanied by a kiss made it significantly harder to get out of bed these past few days. He'd woken up in the middle of the night once or twice and sleepily attempted to snuggle against Kurt, only to have his heart sink when Kurt didn't snuggle back and it struck him that he was sleeping alone.

But there was no reason to worry about any of those things now, because he'd finally worked up the guts to apologize and Kurt's heart was safely back in his hands. The setting sun cast a peaceful orange glow over the nation's capital and they were hand-in-hand, descending the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, one of the final stops on their self-guided walking tour of Washington D.C.

Kurt stopped to admire the engraving on the landing that marked the spot where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had given his famous speech. "I have a dream," he read aloud softly, and Blaine smiled and squeezed his hand.

Upon reaching the bottom of the steps, they crossed over to walk along the edge of the reflecting pool that stretched toward the towering Washington Monument. The setting sun cast an absolutely gorgeous glow on the water – Blaine couldn't have asked for a more perfect summer night to spend with the man he loved. It was warm without being disgustingly humid and sticky, and Blaine knew it sounded cheesy but the night had an almost magical feeling about it. He wondered if this was how characters in romantic movies felt all the time, but he had to admit that it was a great feeling. He wasn't complaining.

Kurt gently pulled him to a stop and giggled as he pointed at their reflection in the water. "Look," he said. "There we are."

Blaine stared at himself and Kurt gazing back at him from the water. They were instinctively turned toward each other the slightest bit, hands intertwined. Kurt had a tiny little smile on his face, one that looked like he had a secret he couldn't wait to tell. Blaine pondered that for a second before turning away from their reflection to look at Kurt for himself. Maybe the look on Kurt's face was a mirage, a trick of the smooth-as-glass water.

But when Blaine looked at him, he still had that little smile. It was killing him not knowing what Kurt so obviously wanted to say, so he decided to coerce it out of him the only way he knew how. He stood on his tiptoes a little bit so Kurt wouldn't have to bend his neck, and kissed him softly and sweetly on the lips.

Kurt kissed him back for a few seconds, still smiling that smile even beneath Blaine's lips. When they broke away, Blaine didn't even get a chance to open his mouth before Kurt began to speak.

"Blaine," he said simply, and Blaine almost melted. He could *live* on the way his name sounded when spoken in Kurt's soft, angelic voice. In the next second, though, a glimmer of nervousness flashed quickly through Kurt's eyes. Blaine had to wonder about that, but he immediately stopped wondering the second Kurt seemed to regain his confidence and took both of Blaine's hands. That made Blaine feel better. The uncertainty that had shone in his boyfriend's eyes for just the briefest of seconds had been very un-Kurt.

"I have something I need to say," he began carefully. "And maybe you think I'm crazy for saying this now, after what's come between us these past few days, but I hope this shows you just how much I love you. I hope it shows how I'm willing to work through anything with you, *because* I love you."

Blaine swallowed, not quite sure where this was going, but he trusted Kurt. "Okay."

Kurt squeezed his hands and relaxed a little bit.

"Blaine, I don't even know where to begin," he said. "I don't think I can say enough that you *saved* me. I'm honestly not sure what would have happened to Ellie and me if we'd stayed with Dave, and I don't want to think about it, but you made me open my eyes and realize that we had to get out of there. Not only that, but you took us into your home when all we needed was a safe place to stay. Some kind of haven. And...as I grew accustomed to living with you, I slowly started to heal. You let me know that it was possible for me to love and be loved again even though that seemed impossible after what had happened to me. I'd never felt beautiful before, and you not only made me *feel* beautiful but you truly made me believe that I am. And I guess over time, as my body and heart started healing, I finally felt safe enough to admit that the feelings I'd had for you since high school were still there. They'd never left, and if I didn't admit them to you then I'd live to regret it even more than I already had."

He smiled and gave Blaine's hands a blissful squeeze. "But even though telling you how I felt was one of the hardest things I've ever done, because I'd been keeping it a secret for so long, it was the best decision I

ever made. If I hadn't taken that risk, I wouldn't have come to know you as the love of my existence. The man I want to spend the rest of my life with."

Blaine felt his heart start beating a little faster and involuntary tears sprang to his eyes at Kurt's words. He forced himself to blink them away. This conversation was probably not going where he hoped it was going. There was no way. He was going to wake up any minute now and find himself in his bed at his parents' house, seventeen years old, having dreamt everything. There was no other explanation for how his life had turned out this way, with Kurt. It all had to be some kind of beautiful dream.

"Blaine, I want to spend every single day of forever giving you all the love, tenderness, care and affection my heart can hold." The words would have sounded corny coming from anyone else, but Kurt had the uncanny ability to make them work. Blaine was practically trembling as he continued. "And I promise I will never stop loving you."

He let go of Blaine's hands and reached into his pocket. By this point Blaine had no idea how to make sense of anything that was going on, because it all seemed too perfect to be true. The opening line of Queen's Bohemian Rhapsody echoed through his brain in a split second – *Is this the real life? Is this just fantasy?* – because in all honesty, nothing that Kurt was doing seemed like it should belong in Blaine's reality.

But when Kurt pulled something small and black and square-looking out of his pocket and began sinking down to one knee, Blaine finally lost it. He let the tears he'd been trying so desperately to restrain roll down his face because *this was not real this was not happening this was a phenomenal dream oh my god Kurt was not-*

"Blaine Anderson," Kurt declared, looking up at him from down on one knee with absolute assuredness in his sublime eyes. "Will you marry me?"

Blaine was practically shaking by this point, and still crying. He had always considered himself to be an ugly crier, but apparently it wasn't ugly enough to make Kurt stand up, close the ring box and detract his proposal. Kurt was still down on his knee, looking up at Blaine with expectant hope. Blaine forced himself to look away from his face and instead at the ring Kurt was offering him. It looked like solid platinum with three diamonds set in at a diagonal. Seeing it made Blaine cry even harder, if that were possible.

"K-Kurt, I don't deserve you," he finally managed to gasp through his tears. "You are *so* good. Too good for a guy like me. Sometimes it's hard for me to even believe you're real, because you are *that* perfect. You could literally have any man on the planet that you wanted and you chose *me*, even though I know you could do so much better."

Kurt bit his lip in a nervous smile and looked away bashfully for a second. Blaine realized he didn't want to say anything else until Blaine gave him an answer, so he wasn't going to speak.

Blaine made sure Kurt's eyes were locked on his when he continued. "But I want to keep you forever, and I'm just that selfish so I'm going to say yes," he said softly. "Yes, Kurt. I'll marry you."

He knew it seemed impossible, but he had literally never seen anything as beautiful as the smile that lit up Kurt's face the second the words were out of his mouth. Kurt took the ring out of the box and slipped it slowly onto Blaine's finger. For some reason, their image in the waters of the reflecting pool beside them caught Blaine's attention out of the corner of his eye. Kurt on one knee, holding Blaine's hand, pressing a gentle kiss to his fingertips, surrounded by the orange glow of the sunset. It looked like a scene Blaine would see painted as some masterpiece and hanging in a famous art museum somewhere, not happening to him in real life.

He took both of Kurt's hands and helped him up, immediately wrapping him in a hug. It was the most intimate embrace they'd ever shared. Blaine knew perfectly well that he was holding the rest of his life in his arms, and it felt like heaven.

Blaine let him go after a little while and pulled back to look into Kurt's exquisite eyes, which were shiny with tears of his own. Looking back at him was a man that had always seemed closer to an angel rather than a mere human being, an angel who had promised his whole life to Blaine.

As for Blaine himself, he was still crying but it seemed impossible for him to stop. He knew Kurt loved him more than anything – hell, all he had to do was look at that indescribable adoration in his fiancée's eyes – but at the same time it seemed impossible to believe that someone so perfect had the ability to love Blaine.

"Sorry for crying," Blaine said weakly through the tears that were finally starting to subside, "it's just that I've been dreaming of this moment for so long...the moment where you would ask me to spend our lives together as *husbands*, and now after everything that's happened I can't believe this is *real*, and—"

Suddenly Kurt interrupted him by cupping Blaine's face in both hands and pulling him up for a sweet kiss. There was nothing he could do but melt against Kurt and kiss his fiancée back. If it weren't for Kurt's arms winding around his neck and holding him in place, he might have floated away. Kurt's lips were as gentle as ever, tender and delicious as they moved with Blaine's own. Blaine traced along the curve of Kurt's bottom lip with his tongue, marveling at how incredible it felt just to *taste*, and Kurt trembled in his arms before opening his mouth to allow Blaine access.

When they finally broke apart, Blaine leaned his forehead against Kurt's as he caught his breath and brought his left hand up between them to admire his ring.

"You like it?" Kurt asked with a shy little smile.

"I love it," Blaine told him honestly. "It's beautiful, Kurt. Like you."

He could feel the heat from the blush that had raced up to color Kurt's face. "I'm glad. It looks amazing on you," he said. "The words *All my love forever* are engraved along the inside."

Part of Blaine wanted to take the ring off so he could see, but at the same time he really just wanted to keep it on. This was his *engagement ring*, from *Kurt*, and keeping it on his finger helped him believe this was really happening.

He really wasn't sure what to say; his love for Kurt had struck him speechless. Almost instinctively, without even thinking about it, he closed the short distance between them and kissed his lips again.

"Kurt," he breathed, because in that moment it was the only word he remembered how to say.

Kurt giggled and gave Blaine his favorite smile. "Blaine."

Blaine looked into Kurt's eyes and suddenly was overwhelmed with the desire to just *be* with him – and only him. They were standing a considerable distance away from the few other tourists walking the path around the reflecting pool, and the Lincoln Memorial across the way wasn't too crowded anymore now that it was getting late, but there were still *people*. Blaine didn't want that. He wanted to be completely alone with Kurt in their own little world. He wanted to make love with him and be absolutely sure that Kurt knew just how loved he was.

"You ready to head back?" he asked softly, intertwining their fingers.

Kurt nodded. "I just want to be with you."

Blaine gave him one more soft kiss before they began walking away, letting their image in the reflecting pool disappear. He walked hand-in-hand with his fiancée through the capital city of the nation that still didn't completely acknowledge their love, back to their hotel where they would show each other just how strong their feelings were.

xxx

They ended up in the fifth-floor room where Kurt had been staying, because it was a shorter elevator trip and neither of them could stand another second that was not spent alone together. The second they were finally in the room with the door shut behind them, Kurt immediately jumped up onto Blaine, constricting his legs around his waist and his arms around his neck.

Blaine giggled. "Hi there."

Kurt responded by leaning down and giving him a deep kiss. Blaine responded to the passion immediately; he deepened the kiss even more with his tongue and moved one hand down over the small of Kurt's back to rest on the tantalizing curve of his ass. Now that all their feelings were out in the open, Blaine didn't think he should make it any secret how much he'd missed Kurt's delicious body in his bed. Tonight he was going to take full advantage of the fact that he had Kurt back and make up for the time they'd lost over the past few days.

But not now. The sun was still barely visible in the sky, almost finished setting. The night was relatively young. As much as Blaine wanted to tackle Kurt down on the bed and tear his clothes off, he forced himself to keep control as he kissed him. They had all the time in the world tonight, and he wanted to take things slow.

Blaine broke away with a smile. "We're alone, just like you wanted," he practically purred. "What would you like to do?"

Kurt jumped down off of Blaine and picked up the room service menu he'd been looking at shortly before Blaine had knocked on his door earlier. "I was actually just about to get something to eat right before you came to talk," he told Blaine. "You up for getting room service, or do you want to go out somewhere?"

"Let's stay here. Alone time, remember?" Blaine reminded him. Kurt was sitting on the edge of the bed, cradling the corded telephone receiver in the crook of his neck as he scanned the menu, so Blaine crawled up behind him and began placing kisses on the back of his neck.

"Blaine!" Kurt giggled. "I'm about to talk to someone on the *phone*, and if you keep doing that I'll end up making some very embarrassing noises that the room service people probably wouldn't care to hear."

"Oh, but those noises you make are so hot," Blaine protested. He wasn't trying to fully seduce Kurt yet – he still wanted to take it slow tonight – but it was fun seeing him get all sexually frustrated like this.

"Shush. I'm calling now, what do you want?"

Blaine shrugged and let go of Kurt. He hadn't even looked at the menu yet. "Anything."

He went over to recline on the opposite side of the bed while Kurt placed the order for a hot fudge sundae, a slice of raspberry cheesecake, a plate of chocolate covered strawberries and a bottle of champagne – he rarely ever drank alcohol, even less since the whole incident with Dave earlier this year, but he wasn't even thinking about that now. Tonight was all about him and Blaine. Nobody else mattered.

After hanging up the phone he turned around to face Blaine, who was lounging on one elbow with his distinctive eyebrows raised in shock. "Damn, Hummel. I never thought I'd live to see you consume that much dessert over the course of a *week*, let alone in one night."

Kurt stretched himself out on the bed beside Blaine, purposely making sure not to touch any part of him just yet. "I'm in the mood to indulge tonight," he drawled, knowing full well that Blaine was checking him out, watching the way his muscles moved beneath the fabric of his clothes as he lazily stretched his arms back over his head. He shot his fiancée a coquettish little glance out of the corner of his eye and responded with an equally authoritative use of Blaine's surname. "Besides, Anderson, you know as well as I do that we'll be burning off all the calories later tonight."

"Hey." Blaine immediately pounced on top of him, eliciting an eruption of giggles from Kurt. "That's *Hummel*-Anderson to you."

Kurt playfully rolled his eyes but smiled as Blaine kissed up his jawline. "I guess I have no room to talk, because that'll be me, too." He tried the names on for size. "Blaine Hummel-Anderson. Kurt Hummel-

Anderson. Mr. and Mr. Hummel-Anderson." He smiled softly up at the man who would be his husband. "Yeah, I love that."

"Mmmm, so do I," Blaine agreed. "So can we make out until they get here with our bubbly and food, or...?"

Kurt didn't need to be asked twice. He picked his head up and captured Blaine's lips in another kiss, this one slower than the kiss they'd shared upon arriving in the room but no less passionate. He closed his eyes and tried to let his lips do the talking as Blaine responded almost instantly, wrapping his arms tightly around Kurt's body and pulling them flush together so he could turn them over and shift so that Kurt was on top. Blaine wasn't sure why, but there was something about being sandwiched between Kurt and the mattress that he just *loved*. It seemed like Kurt was all around him when they were so close like this, and Blaine adored the intoxicating sensation of forgetting everything in the world except for Kurt.

Too soon, they had to break away because there was a knock at the door that told them their food had arrived. Kurt groaned and rolled off of Blaine to fix his disheveled clothing, but Blaine simply stood up from the bed – messy hair, rumpled clothes and all – to answer the door.

Kurt sat back against the headboard and busied himself by rearranging the pillows into a more comfortable position while Blaine opened the door and graciously accepted the tray of food and bucket of champagne that he was handed. Kurt had charged the food to the room when he ordered, so it would be added to the bill he was already paying and Blaine wouldn't be able to try and weasel his way into paying for it. Blaine had been kind enough to accept Kurt's offer to spend the rest of his life with him, so Kurt wanted to treat him.

Blaine expertly balanced the tray on one hand and swung the bucket containing the champagne bottle back and forth as he made his way over to Kurt. He bowed with a flourish and offered the tray to his fiancée lounging on the bed. "For you, my good sir."

Kurt had to giggle at Blaine's cheesiness. "You've always been a perfect gentleman, but I don't know what I ever did to deserve being treated like a prince." He took the tray and placed it on his lap.

"Prince? Nah, you deserve to be treated like a *king*," Blaine commented, sidling up beside Kurt and placing the silver bucket beside him. He popped the cork and took the two glasses, handing one to Kurt.

"Champagne?" he asked, raising an eyebrow and smiling.

Kurt smiled. "Yes, please."

Blaine poured them each a glass and set the bottle aside. He lifted his glass and looked Kurt straight in the eyes.

"To us," he toasted. "And the life that awaits us together."

"Cheers." Kurt grinned as they clinked their glasses together and drank to their togetherness.

The rest of the night was reminiscent of how Kurt imagined their high school dating life would have been like, if it had existed – goofy and fun. They took turns feeding each other bites of the various desserts Kurt had ordered and Blaine, who had left his guitar down in this room, took it out of the case and began making up silly little songs on the spot, which made Kurt laugh harder than he'd ever laughed before (although part of that might have just been the champagne). They giggled a lot and playfully fed each other more strawberries and bites of cheesecake and spoonfuls of sundae after Blaine's little impromptu concert until all the food was gone.

At long last, they began to settle down and the mood of the room seemed to change into something more sensual. Kurt wasn't quite sure how it happened but somehow they were intertwined in a deep kiss on the bed, the empty food tray on the floor and what remained of the champagne still in the bottle on the bedside table. He was completely lost in Blaine, just the way he liked it. They had a lot to celebrate tonight – from Blaine's amazing court argument this morning to their promise to spend the rest of their lives together just a few hours ago. And besides, Kurt had to admit...they'd only been apart for a few days, but he'd *missed* this.

He'd missed the way Blaine took his time undressing him, unveiling just a little bit of Kurt's body at a time. He'd missed the way Blaine's tongue felt against his skin – his fiancée certainly hadn't forgotten Kurt's biggest turn-on, he noticed happily. He'd missed slowly but surely undressing Blaine, taking his time just as Blaine had done with him, just marveling at every beautiful inch of tanned skin he exposed. He'd missed feeling completely vulnerable and exposed and yet so beautiful all at the same time, because Blaine *made* him feel beautiful and he *trusted* Blaine. He'd missed the warmth of Blaine's nude body pressed right up against his own as they explored each other, kissing and touching and licking and stroking in all the places they knew drove the other completely wild – they knew each other's bodies extremely well by now. He'd missed *Blaine*.

Neither of them had said a single word through it all, because dialogue was unnecessary. It was almost sweeter that way, Kurt thought. Blaine grabbed a bottle of lotion that Kurt had had sitting out on the nightstand, popped it open and squeezed it into his hands to use as lube.

Blaine carefully lubed up his fingers and began sliding them into Kurt, preparing him lovingly as always. His free hand – his left hand – rubbed slowly up and down Kurt's chest and stomach. Kurt caught Blaine's hand when he slid it up to the top of his chest and kissed his palm, his fingertips, his wrist. He kissed the ring that he had slipped onto Blaine's finger himself earlier. He kissed up Blaine's arm, trying to reach as much skin as he possibly could with his lips.

When Kurt was sufficiently prepared, Blaine extracted his fingers and slicked up his cock. They looked into each other's eyes and intertwined their hands as Blaine began to make love to him.

It was so easy, so natural for them to do this now. They fell into the familiar rhythm that they'd both missed so much, Blaine rocking gently in and out of Kurt at a relatively quick but steady pace. The only sounds that escaped either of their mouths were soft whimpers and deep moans and ragged breathing. At one point they latched their mouths together and kissed intensely, their lips and tongues mimicking the rhythm of the lower halves of their bodies.

Kurt thought that this might just be his single favorite sexual encounter he and Blaine had ever experienced. He figured that might be because now they were engaged and there was something more in the way their bodies moved together that night – something deeper and ever more loving than ever before, now that they knew for sure they would be spending their lives together. On top of all the bliss from that revelation, there was the indescribable emotion that being with Blaine in this way always brought him. It was almost like an out-of-body experience, but at the same time Kurt had never been so in tune with his own body. This was how he and Blaine went from being two separate beings to one, completing each other both physically and emotionally. There was not a single cell in his body that was unaware of Blaine.

When he was close, he moaned as his hand involuntarily moved down toward his neglected cock, only to be nudged away by Blaine's. Kurt's breath hitched as Blaine's fingers wrapped around his throbbing length; he knew it wouldn't be long now. Blaine stroked him tenderly as Kurt inched closer and closer to the edge. By this point Kurt was so sensitive that it almost hurt, but it felt so blissfully perfect at the same time.

They came at almost exactly the same time, Blaine following Kurt's release by only a split second. Both of them were gasping for air when all was said and done; Blaine collapsed against Kurt's chest and tried to work up the energy to move so he could pull out.

When he finally felt up to moving, Blaine gently kissed Kurt's lips as a distraction as he pulled out, then wrapped his fiancée in his arms and pulled the younger man as close as physically possible. Kurt snuggled against Blaine's chest and placed his hand over his heart, which was just starting to slow down to a somewhat-normal pace.

"Love," he whispered, unable to think of any other words to describe the moment, to describe Blaine. It was the first word either of them had said in a long time.

"You are so perfect," Blaine murmured. He brought his own hand up to rest on top of Kurt's over his heart; Kurt loved the way the tiny diamonds on his ring shone when they managed to catch the minimal light in the room. "I love you, Kurt Hummel-Anderson."

Kurt trembled. "I can't wait until that's my name," he whispered. "I can't wait until I'm your husband."

"Neither can I, but it's going to be so worth the wait," Blaine swore to him. "I couldn't ask for a better groom-to-be."

Kurt kissed him softly. "I love you too, Blaine Hummel-Anderson."

Eventually they managed to fall asleep, lulled by the other's heartbeat and gentle breath. They had absolutely no idea what the future was going to hold, but all they knew was that they couldn't wait to face it together.

Chapter Twenty-Six

What happened after that pivotal day on which Kurt asked Blaine to marry him was strange, and neither of them expected it. In a way, their previous situations had reversed. Blaine now had all the free time in the world now that he was done presenting his argument for the case; all he had left to do was show up at the courthouse with Kurt to hear the opinion of the court once the justices arrived at a decision. Kurt, on the other hand, was suddenly swamped.

He'd gotten a call from the main offices at Buckley Middle School, informing him that the enrollment count for the upcoming school year had been tallied and that an unprecedented number of students had taken an interest in his class. He would be teaching six full class periods this year, as opposed to just one as he had the previous year. Kurt wasn't quite sure how to feel about this. On one hand, he was thrilled that so many students – at an inner-city school, of all places – seemed interested in taking his class. But on the other hand, it seemed overwhelming. He'd never worked this many hours before, not even when he'd been teaching elementary school back in Ohio.

They were staying in D.C. indefinitely, until the Court made its decision, so suddenly he found himself staring ahead at God-only-knew-how-many-days with nothing to do. He figured he should take advantage of his newfound free time to start preparing for the upcoming year.

But one particular afternoon, about a week and a half after they'd originally presented their case, changed everything. Blaine had decided to go down to the exercise room and run a few miles on the treadmill; Kurt had opted to stay up in their room and continue trying to figure out his lesson plan. June had melted into July and it was disgustingly hot – Kurt had the air conditioner on full blast and the window open as wide as it would go, which wasn't very far, but it still didn't seem to help. He was sprawled out on the large king bed with a few various notebooks and planners scattered around him, making a valiant effort to try and figure out how in the hell he was supposed to work with six separate classes. With that many kids, he figured it would probably make more sense to arrange them based on skill level, but how would he do that? It would be hard to try and hold auditions before school started, but he couldn't think of any other way to figure out how they should be placed.

He took off the trendy black glasses with rectangular frames he'd worn today instead of his contacts and chewed absently on the arm as he thought. He was finding it near impossible to come up with some way to make this work, and the extreme heat wasn't helping much. After a few more minutes of fruitless pondering, Kurt sighed and reached for his phone on the other side of the bed. The humidity was so

unbearable and a cool swim in the hotel pool suddenly seemed very inviting; he thought he'd text Blaine and see if his husband-to-be would like to come and join him.

But before he could start typing out his message, the door opened and in stepped Blaine, dripping with sweat from his workout yet still remarkably gorgeous. *Speak of the devil...*

"I was literally just about to text you," Kurt said, tilting his head up so he could accept the quick kiss Blaine placed on his lips. "It's pretty hot, so I thought I'd see if you wanted to go swimming."

"Hold that thought," Blaine told him, perching on the edge of the bed so he could slip his tennis shoes off. "A celebratory swim might just be in store later tonight. I have good news."

Kurt sat up with a start, a hopeful smile already blooming across his face. There was only one thing this could mean. "Did they..."

"They did," Blaine told him, nodding. "I got the call while I was on the treadmill. It just went straight to voicemail; it's one of those automatic pre-recorded messages. It said we're not required to be there for the official reading of the opinion, but if we would like to come, we need to be at the Supreme Court building tomorrow at noon."

"Oh, my god." Kurt bit his lip and blinked quickly a few times as he tried to process this. "I can't believe this. The Supreme Court has a decision about a case *we* argued. This all just seems so...surreal."

Blaine pulled one hand nervously through his sweaty curls. "I know, and I just...I don't know what to think. I'm so nervous, Kurt. I've put my entire heart into fighting this for you and now..."

He trailed off, not sure if he wanted to finish that sentence.

"Hey." Kurt moved closer to Blaine and wrapped his arms around his fiancé's shoulders. "We're gonna win this, okay? Your argument was *amazing*, and besides, I think we've gotten to that point where our society is, for the most part, becoming more supportive of gay rights. I really don't think there should even be a question."

Blaine made a halfhearted attempt to pull away from Kurt's embrace. "Baby, you really don't want to be hugging me when I'm all sweaty and gross like this. But good point."

That only made Kurt clench his arms even tighter around Blaine. "First of all, you're not gross. Second, we've gone a lot further than just *hugging* when you're all sweaty. I don't mind."

"Hmm. Touché." Blaine pressed a kiss to Kurt's cheek, which instantly made the other man giggle. "Hey, but you know what this means, right?"

Kurt's face brightened. "We can finally tell them?"

"Exactly," Blaine confirmed. "Text your dad and tell him to get everyone on Skype. I'm gonna hop in the shower really quick, just to rinse off some of this sweat."

"Okay." Kurt smiled and reached for his laptop, which was resting on the pillow, as Blaine grabbed a change of clothes from his suitcase and sauntered off into the bathroom. Then he grabbed his phone and shot a quick text to his father: *Are you guys busy right now?*

Burt Hummel had always been surprisingly tech savvy. He responded within a minute. *Nope, what's up?*

Kurt bit back a smile as he responded. *Can you get everyone on Skype in a few minutes? Blaine and I have big news!*

When his father responded with *Sure*, Kurt turned his laptop on and allowed the smile he'd been trying to hold back spread across his face as the computer booted up. He and Blaine had agreed not to tell anyone about the engagement until they found out that the Court had decided their case. Both of them thought it would be more exciting if they could share both pieces of exciting news at the same time. They had decided that out of everyone they knew, Ellie probably deserved to know first, but since she was staying with Burt and Carole for the time being, they might as well just tell Kurt's parents at the same time.

He heard the shower water shut off. By the time his desktop screen appeared, Blaine had stepped out of the bathroom wearing a simple black V-neck that hugged his chest in all the right places and a pair of dark-wash jeans that both of them wore so often, Kurt couldn't remember who they'd originally belonged to. He stopped to look himself over in the full-length mirror on the back of the door.

"Do I look presentable enough?" he asked warily.

Kurt couldn't believe he even had to ask. "You look *gorgeous*. Don't even try to deny it."

"Sorry." Blaine rubbed the back of his neck nervously, still scrutinizing himself in the mirror. "It's just...we're about to tell our daughter and your parents that we're getting married and I want to look nice, y'know?"

Kurt nodded, finally able to understand. This was the side of Blaine that, no matter how renowned he became, the rest of the world would never know. Everyone else saw him as the dashing, successful attorney that had become the face of the gay rights movement. Kurt was the only person who ever got to see him vulnerable and hesitant, second-guessing himself like he was now, even when there was no reason for him to be doing so.

Kurt glanced down at his own outfit, which consisted of a gray t-shirt and black yoga pants. He'd kept it simple today, knowing full well that he'd be stuck in their hotel room slaving away at his lesson plans. He frowned, suddenly feeling underdressed. "If anything, *I'm* the one who doesn't look presentable."

He made to stand up from the bed so he could quickly change into something a little nicer, but Blaine, who had somehow managed to get across the room in a matter of seconds, put a hand on his arm to stop him. "Kurt. No. You look *amazing*. Besides, you know how much I love those pants." He grinned and licked his lips flirtatiously.

"Oh, stop." Kurt playfully swatted his hand away. "You just like them because they make my ass look good."

"It already looks good all the time," Blaine muttered, then coughed. "I mean, maybe."

Kurt sat back down on the bed and set his computer in his lap as he signed into Skype. "Besides, it's not like they're going to be looking at my ass on Skype. They're going to be looking at my face." Suddenly the idea of changing his clothes seemed silly.

"And your face looks good, too. Better than good. Have I ever mentioned how cute you look in those glasses?"

Kurt blushed as Blaine settled next to him on the bed. "Flattery will get you nowhere."

"Really?" Blaine asked, and his face had brightened into that irresistible smile that always softened Kurt up a little, no matter what. "We'll see about that."

Kurt smiled and allowed Blaine to place a sweet kiss on his lips before the unmistakeable Skype startup noise blared through the speakers and made them break apart with a jolt.

"I didn't realize how loud I had that," Kurt mumbled, quickly turning down the volume, then letting out a deep sigh. "Okay. You ready to do this?"

Blaine smiled and gave his hand a gentle squeeze. "Ready as I'll ever be."

xxx

The second the live video of Kurt and Blaine filled the computer screen, Carole immediately grabbed Burt's arm and Ellie's face brightened when she saw her daddies. Burt allowed himself to give his son and future son-in-law a small but genuine smile. He was afraid that if he expressed too much initial happiness, Carole and Ellie would know something was up, and neither of them knew what Burt knew.

"Daddy! Blaine!" Ellie exclaimed cheerfully before anyone else could even open their mouths. She waved happily at the screen; Burt could tell just from looking at Kurt's face that his heart had absolutely melted upon seeing her.

"Hi! Oh my goodness, sweetheart, how are you?" Kurt asked with a tender smile.

"I'm good. I miss you, though," Ellie said sadly.

"We miss you so much too, but I promise we're going to be home very soon," Blaine told her, smiling reassuringly.

Carole gasped excitedly. "Have they decided yet?"

Blaine and Kurt exchanged a look that suggested they were both about to burst with anticipation. "Yes, they have," Kurt announced. "Blaine just got a message on his phone about it this afternoon."

Burt shook his head in disbelief. "I'm so proud of you two. You know that no matter what they end up deciding, this is gonna be historic. And I think the odds are in your favor, anyway, so you got nothing to worry about."

"That's what Kurt seemed to think, too," Blaine said, nodding. "The opinion of the Court is set to be delivered tomorrow at noon. I'm sure there will be some sort of coverage of it on TV if you guys want to tune in."

"Oh, we wouldn't miss it." Carole seemed like she was about to cry. "This is incredible. You know, Kurt, your father was right...you guys are a part of history now."

Kurt smiled. "I don't doubt it. You guys should have seen the argument he delivered in court, it was amazing." Blaine blushed and ducked his head, smiling shyly; Kurt gave his shoulder an affectionate squeeze. "By the time Ellie gets to high school, kids will be forced to memorize his name out of a textbook."

Ellie grinned. She seemed to like the thought of one of her daddies being famous enough to have his name printed in a history book. "Cool."

"Oh, I don't know about that. Sweetie, your daddy's just giving me too much credit," Blaine said humbly.

"Don't listen to him. He's just being modest," Kurt told the three of them on the other side of the camera, rubbing one hand up and down Blaine's back. He stopped talking for a brief moment to give Blaine a knowing smile before turning back to speak to Burt, Carole and Ellie. "Besides, that's not the only reason why we wanted to talk to you guys today."

Carole blinked quickly a few times to hold back the tears Burt could see shining in her eyes. "Oh, god, I don't know how much more excitement I can take," she told them with an exhausted-looking smile.

"Oh, you'll like this, I promise," Blaine assured her. He looked to Kurt with an expectant smile. "Can I tell them?"

Kurt shrugged. "Go right ahead. Whenever you're ready?"

Even through the computer screen, Burt could see that Blaine was practically shaking with excitement. "I can't hold it in any longer. I've gotta tell them."

Blaine turned to look at his end of the webcam straight on, his right hand held lovingly in both of Kurt's own. His entire face brightened with a beaming smile as he proudly held up his left hand to show off a ring that adorned his finger.

"Kurt proposed! We're engaged!"

Burt could barely hear him over the squeal of excitement that his wife emitted before Blaine had even finished speaking. Even more precious was Ellie's reaction. Burt knew his granddaughter had been looking forward to seeing her daddies get married, and as soon as she realized what the ring on Blaine's finger meant, her face bloomed into a smile of pure bliss.

"You're finally getting married!" she exclaimed at the same time as Carole released a breathless *Oh my god!* "Are you gonna have a wedding? Can I be a flower girl?" Her eyes – Kurt's eyes, Liz's eyes – were dancing with excitement, and suddenly Burt found himself wishing more than anything that his first wife could be here, sharing this beautiful moment with all of them.

"Of course you can!" Kurt told her. He smiled at Blaine, but continued speaking to his family on the other side of the computer. "He deserves the most beautiful, amazing fairytale wedding money can buy."

Blaine blushed again. "You can't just *say* things like that," he told Kurt, smiling as he leaned in to give him a kiss. It didn't last very long, because they both knew they were on a video call with their family, but that didn't make it any less passionate. When they broke away after a second or two, Kurt bit his lip and smiled modestly as he adjusted his glasses.

"Okay, this time you *did* make me cry," Carole admitted. Burt looked at his wife; sure enough, tears were cascading down her cheeks. "I am *so* happy for you boys. We all are. You two truly are a match made in heaven."

"Aww, thank you," Blaine told her sweetly, wrapping his arms around Kurt's waist. "And don't feel bad about crying. I started *sobbing* when Kurt got down on one knee with the ring."

"You made him cry?" Burt asked his son jokingly. "Kidding. Kidding. Good for you, though. I mean it. I'm happy for the two of you."

Kurt leaned his head on Blaine's shoulder and smiled. "Thank you."

"So when'd you finally pop the question? How did you finally decide to do it?" Burt asked out of curiosity.

Carole shot him a look. "You knew?"

"I may have confided in him when we came back to see you guys in Ohio," Kurt told them. "I asked him about a week and a half ago, but we wanted to wait to tell you guys until we knew that the Court had a decision, so we could share both pieces of good news at the same time. It was really sweet how I did it, if I do say so myself..."

He trailed off for a second, so Blaine took advantage of this and jumped right in. "It was so romantic. We went for a walk around D.C. one evening at sunset, just to look at some of the monuments and whatnot, and he took me over to the reflecting pool in front of the Washington Monument and popped the question there."

Kurt smiled. "Yeah, that's basically how it happened."

"Oh, how sweet." Carole sniffed back another sob. "Blaine, let me see your ring again. I was in too much shock to really get a good look at it last time."

Blaine held up his hand again. His ring looked like it was made of silver or platinum; there were three small diamonds going across it at a diagonal.

"There's an engraving on the inside, too," Blaine told them. He hadn't stopped smiling yet – and neither had Kurt, for that matter. "It says *All my love forever*."

"So pretty," Ellie said breathlessly.

Burt nodded in approval. "Very nice. You got good taste, kid."

"In engagement rings or in men?" Kurt shot back with a teasing smile, and all five of them on both ends of the Skype call burst into laughter.

"I guess both," Burt said, shrugging as he managed to stop laughing. "You picked out a nice ring, and Blaine's an awesome guy. He's a keeper. And after all you guys have been through...nobody deserves this happiness more than you two."

Kurt gave Blaine a loving smile. "I'm definitely keeping him, that's for sure."

Burt noticed that his son wore the same indescribably overjoyed smile on his face for the remainder of their conversation. He'd seen Kurt smile like that before, but it wasn't very often. There was something about that smile that made Kurt's entire being just completely *glow* with happiness.

There had only been three people in Kurt's life who ever had the ability to make him smile like that, Burt suddenly realized. His mother, Ellie, and now Blaine. Even during those long years of nothing more than platonic friendship, Blaine had been able to make Kurt light up in a way that Dave Karofsky never could.

It didn't take Burt long at all to realize that after enduring so much pain and suffering for much of his life, his son was really, truly happy.

xxx

Kurt was still smiling even after they'd ended the call with Burt, Carole and Ellie. "That was fun," he said breathlessly. "I wanna tell more people. Who else can we tell?"

"You are adorable," Blaine said fondly. He kissed the tip of Kurt's nose, eliciting a giggle from his fiancé, then turned back to the computer to look over the list of available contacts on Skype. Not many people were on – mostly just some of his coworkers and a few random old friends he hadn't talked with in ages – but his face lit up when he noticed the little green *Online* symbol next to his brother's name.

"Kurt! Coop's online! Can we tell him?"

"I haven't talked to your brother in ages. Are you sure he'll still know who I am?" Kurt joked. Blaine had to admit, he had a point. The last time Kurt had seen Cooper had probably been at Blaine's law school graduation, which Kurt had attended (much to Karofsky's dismay, Blaine recalled). At that point, Cooper had known Kurt as his younger brother's best friend.

"Oh, I've been keeping him up to date. Trust me, he'll be glad I'm finally getting hitched to the guy I never shut up about back in high school," Blaine told him. He smiled as he reminisced on his weekly phone conversations with his older brother, during which he babbled like a giddy teenage girl about his seemingly go-nowhere crush on his best friend. Cooper had been one of the few people to whom Blaine had confessed his feelings for Kurt, and he'd been remarkably tolerant of his younger brother's crush. That was a lot more than Blaine could say for either of his parents.

Mr. and Mrs. Anderson were by no means blatantly homophobic, but Blaine always knew that they had been uncomfortable with his being gay. Over the years they'd made several subtle yet unsuccessful attempts to get him to change his ways (Blaine's particular favorite was when, a week after coming out to his parents at age 14, he'd come home to find a stack of *Playboy* magazines his father had placed on his bed. Blaine had fed them to the paper shredder and used the scraps as bedding for his guinea pig, to his father's horror). Blaine still got along well with his parents, on the rare occasions he spoke to them, and he'd discovered that it was easiest not to mention his sexuality at all whenever they were together. It had been hard, but he'd finally forced himself to accept the fact that his parents saw his sexual orientation as an inconvenience, something that did not deserve to be brought up. Despite all that he'd achieved at such a young age, he knew his parents would be a hell of a lot more proud of him if he were straight, and that bothered him more than he ever let on.

"Okay. As long as you're sure he won't be freaked out to hear that we're randomly getting married," Kurt said. "I miss Cooper. He was always fun to talk to."

Blaine grinned as he clicked on his brother's name and placed a video call to him. "Oh, he won't be freaked out at all. If anything, he'll be relieved that this is *finally* happening," he said. "Besides, I'd rather tell him before I tell anyone else in my family, so..."

Kurt nodded understandingly. "That's okay."

Blaine wanted to tell his brother before anyone else because Cooper Anderson had also fallen short of their parents' expectations. A stellar student with perfect grades and a face that was arguably even more perfect, he'd dropped out of medical school and moved to Hollywood to pursue his true lifelong dream of being an actor. Despite his handsome leading-man good looks, he'd yet to land anything bigger than a supporting role, but Blaine knew his brother was making a good living for himself, earning much more than his parents would ever dream of giving him credit for. Despite their six year age difference, the boys had always shared a strong bond, and Blaine had been the only person in the family to support Cooper when his brother had announced his decision to follow his dream. The younger Anderson had often found it oddly humorous to think that his parents had raised two sons: a brilliant almost-doctor and a successful-but-gay lawyer, and they had no idea which one to be more disappointed in.

Blaine's expression broke into a smile when Cooper answered the call and his brother greeted him with an enthusiastic, "Hey there, B! And Kurt! Did I, like, win a contest or something? It's not every day a guy gets to video chat with America's favorite gay couple."

"I think Neil Patrick Harris and David Burtka have us beat on that one," Blaine said with a laugh. He'd forgotten how much he loved talking to his brother.

"Or Ellen and Portia," Kurt chimed in. "I'm flattered, though."

"Okay, okay. *My* favorite gay couple. Even though everyone pretty much loves you guys," Cooper told them with a genuine smile. "Seriously, though, what's up? I gotta say, this is a pleasant surprise, getting to talk to you guys like this."

"Well, first of all, I don't think you guys have talked much since we got together...," he gestured to himself and Kurt, "so I kind of just wanted to properly reintroduce the two of you. Kurt, as you already know, this is my brother Cooper Anderson. Cooper, this is my..."

He hesitated, not wanting to say *fiancé* right away, but what other word could he use? *Boyfriend* was too much of an understatement, and he didn't want to come right out and announce their engagement thirty seconds into the video call.

"My Kurt," he finally finished with a proud smile, not really giving a damn about how cheesy it sounded.

Kurt looked at him and raised one eyebrow, smirking. "*Your* Kurt?"

"My Kurt," Blaine repeated, nodding, a proud smile on his face.

Kurt's face melted into a genuine smile and he pulled Blaine into a hug. "My Blaine."

"Jesus Christ, you two are so sweet I feel a cavity coming on," Cooper announced from his end of the Skype call. "I'm joking. You guys are adorable. I'm really happy for you, bro."

"Thanks, man." Blaine smiled appreciatively. "So how's life? Any big projects coming up?"

Cooper began telling them about his next movie, in which he played George Clooney's character's sister's best friend's husband or something along those lines. Surprisingly, he didn't say much about it. Blaine knew his brother well, and he could tell Cooper purposely wasn't supplying much information because he wanted to direct the conversation back toward Kurt and himself. If there was one thing Cooper was known for, Blaine thought, it was his uncontrollable curiosity.

Sure enough, the elder Anderson brother had been talking for only about a minute, even though Blaine knew there was so much more he could say, when suddenly he swerved into a non-sequitur. "But enough about me. How's life treating you two? Have you heard anything about your case yet?"

"Actually, I just got a message from them about an hour ago. They came to a decision and we find out tomorrow what the official consensus is," Blaine said. He felt a smile growing on his face and suddenly found it impossible to hold it back. "But that's not the main reason why we wanted to talk to you tonight."

"Dude, oh my god, just spit it out. I can tell you're hiding something. I know you," Cooper laughed. "What is it?"

"I swear to god, Blaine, if you don't tell him, I will," Kurt giggled, rolling his eyes.

Cooper breathed a sigh of relief. "*Thank* you, Kurt. I—"

"We're getting maaaaarried!" Kurt sang happily. He grabbed Blaine's left hand and held it up to the webcam so Cooper could see the ring. "See?"

Cooper's reaction was exactly what Blaine expected.

"*Finally!* This is awesome!" he exclaimed. "Oh my god, if I wasn't on the other side of the country from you I would seriously give you both the biggest hug, you have no idea."

"Aww, you're sweet," Kurt told him with a smile. Blaine had always loved the way these two interacted, even before he and Kurt became a couple. He watched his fiancé's expression change to one of confusion in a matter of seconds. "Wait, but what do you mean *finally*? We only just got together this year. If anything, I was expecting '*Already*?'"

Cooper smirked. "Oh, you didn't hear the way Blaine used to talk about you back when you guys were in high school. I still remember the day he called me freaking out about the '*gorgeous* boy' he met on the steps at Dalton. You were, like, there to spy on them or whatever. He never stopped talking about you after that."

Kurt smiled at Blaine. "You talked to him about me? That's adorable."

"Oh, that's not all," Cooper told him. "Sometimes I'd come home on the weekends and he'd be in his room late at night and I'd hear him—"

Blaine wasn't surprised in the least when he felt his face warming with a blush. "Thanks, Coop, I'm sure he definitely wants to marry me now that he's heard the embarrassing extent of my high school crush."

Kurt gave him a saucy little smirk. "Actually, you should be thanking him, because that's hot. If anything, I want to marry you *more*."

"You're welcome," Cooper announced as Blaine pressed a kiss to Kurt's neck, then turned back to face the screen.

Suddenly Cooper's expression changed; he looked almost concerned.

"You okay, man?" Blaine asked. "We can tone down the PDA if you want."

Cooper shook his head. "No, no, I'm totally fine with that. Whatever floats your boat," he said, then cleared his throat awkwardly. "I just was thinking about the elephant in the room. Have you...um, have you told Mom and Dad yet?"

Blaine shook his head. As far as his parents knew, Kurt was still his good friend from high school who also happened to be the big G-word. He had opted not to tell his parents when he and Kurt finally got together, because he didn't want their inevitable comments ("Oh, Blaine, when are you going to grow out of this phase?" and "You can't find *any* nice girls to go out with up there in Chicago?" sure to be among them) to ruin his happiness.

Granted, he thought, if they'd been paying any attention to the news lately, they would know that he was in Washington D.C. arguing in front of the Supreme Court. He hadn't even officially told them about *that*, because the case he was arguing dealt with gay rights and bringing it up to his parents would have caused an unnecessary surplus of drama. He figured they could figure it out for themselves when they saw the coverage of the case on the news. And if any of the news reporters had happened to mention that Kurt was not only his client, but also his boyfriend...well, then his parents would have figured that out, too. There was nothing he could do about it.

All of this flashed through his mind in a matter of seconds before he finally answered his brother. "Not yet," he said, then turned to Kurt. "I think...I think we should tell them in person. It would be a lot easier to explain face-to-face."

Kurt nodded. He was well aware of Blaine's parents' don't-ask-don't-tell-esque policy regarding their sexuality. "Good idea."

"If you want, I could fly in from LA sometime and the three of us could all go tell them together," Cooper offered. "Y'know, just for moral support. I know they already think I've thrown away my entire future, so how much more disappointed in me can they get?"

Blaine smiled appreciatively and shook his head. "Thanks but no thanks, Coop. I don't want to drag you into this. This is something Kurt and I need to tell them on our own."

"You sure?" Cooper asked. "I seriously don't have a problem with it. You might be a big hotshot lawyer, but you're still my little brother and I'm going to support you whether Mom and Dad like it or not."

Blaine marinated on this for a second. The more he thought about it, the more appealing it sounded. He would need all the familial support he could get.

"Maybe," he said after a while. "I still don't know how we should go about telling them – if Kurt and I should go to their place in Ohio, or if we should invite them to come spend a weekend in Chicago. They still haven't seen my new apartment since I've lived there. We'll talk about it and let you know. I know you're busy with shooting your movie and everything."

"I can take time off. Seriously, Blaine, I want you to know that you have at least one person in this family on your side."

"I know you are," Blaine told him. A sudden rush of passion filled his entire being and his voice swelled with emotion just the tiniest bit as he continued. "And if Mom and Dad have a problem with it...then too bad. I'm in love with Kurt, Coop. This isn't a phase, and it never has been. I love him. I've never been more sure of anything in my life. And...and I'm going to marry him."

An involuntary but sincere smile grew on his face as he finished talking. It was impossible for him to talk about marrying Kurt and *not* smile.

Kurt wrapped his arms around Blaine's waist and gave him a kiss on the cheek before snuggling up against his shoulder. "Your brother's a sweetheart, Cooper."

"You two are literally perfect together," Cooper said with a smile. "And if Mom and Dad don't want to come to your wedding, then too bad. I'll be there. Hell, I'll be the best man."

"I was actually just thinking earlier that we should have you and my brother be co best-men," Kurt told him. "You've met Finn, right? Would you be okay with that?"

"Really tall with brown hair?" Cooper asked, and Kurt nodded. "Yeah, I met him once or twice. Nice guy. I'd be cool with sharing my best man duties with him."

Kurt's face brightened into the smile that always melted Blaine's heart, no matter what. "Yay! This wedding is going to be amazing!"

Of course it is, Blaine thought fondly as his brother responded to Kurt. *I'm marrying you.*

xxx

After logging off their Skype call with Cooper, Kurt and Blaine both decided to put aside all unnerving thoughts of Blaine's parents and whether or not they would approve of this wedding (and both knew that they most likely would not) and instead celebrate the good fortune that had fallen upon them as of late. Since it was still ridiculously humid despite the fact that the evening sun was slipping lower and lower in the sky, Kurt's earlier idea of going swimming suddenly seemed remarkably appealing.

When they finally made it down to the pool, the sky was glowing a brilliant orange. The gorgeous sunset reminded Blaine of the night they'd gotten engaged, and he happily gave Kurt's hand a little squeeze. Kurt looked at Blaine out of the corner of his eye and gave him a shy little smile; that was enough to let Blaine know that Kurt was thinking of that incredible night, too.

In spite of the sticky heat, the pool was relatively empty. The only other hotel patrons there were a family of five – mother, father, and three little kids bobbing around in the shallow end. When the mother caught sight of Kurt and Blaine, who were holding hands as they made their way toward the lounge chairs so they could set their things down, she immediately turned to her husband and whispered something in his ear. The man, with barely a glance in Kurt and Blaine's direction, immediately began herding his family out of

the pool. By the time Blaine had set his towel on one of the chairs and pulled his shirt off over his head, they were gone.

Kurt frowned as he slipped off his sandals and kicked them under the chair. "You'd think we have a communicable disease or something."

Blaine perched on the edge of the long chair and made a point of checking Kurt out as he stripped out of his shirt. "Y'know, I'll admit that any other night I would probably chase them down and tell them that they're welcome to use the pool and that we won't bother them...but not tonight." He smiled up at Kurt. "Tonight's about us. If anything, I want to go thank them for letting us have the pool all to ourselves."

Kurt smiled and grabbed Blaine's hands to pull him up from the chair. "I like the way you think. Now, as you just mentioned...we have an entire pool *all to ourselves*." He turned around and made a theatrical gesture indicating the whole pool. "Would you care to join me?"

He let go of Blaine's hands and made his way down the steps in the shallow end. Blaine could only stare at him blankly for a few seconds before Kurt raised one eyebrow and pouted his lips just slightly, a wordless invitation for the other man to come join him. Blaine couldn't have resisted that look even if he'd wanted, so without wasting another second he headed for the pool and began making his way down the steps after Kurt.

It wasn't long before they both discovered that "swimming," when the two of them were involved, really meant "making out in the deep end." And that's exactly how they spent the majority of their time in the pool that evening – holding onto each other and the edge of the pool to stay afloat as they shared slow, steamy kisses. The cool water was a refreshing contrast to the sticky humidity of the summer evening, and the warmth of their shared body heat as they pressed against each other created a passionate balance between the other two sensations. It was one of those moments that each of them wanted to last forever; even thoughts of their eventual wedding were gone from their minds. This togetherness – the here and now – that was all that mattered.

When the sky grew dark, they managed to break apart long enough to climb out of the pool and head back over to the chair where they'd left their things, even though neither of them wanted to head back up to the room yet. And so it ended up that Kurt was sitting on one of the long lounge chairs with Blaine in his arms; Blaine's head was resting against Kurt's chest, listening to his heartbeat.

Blaine knew he shouldn't be freezing cold – not in this heat – but stepping out of the pool into the evening air had given him a chill. He pulled his towel closer around him and snuggled against Kurt. Kurt was nice and warm.

"Look up at all the stars," Kurt pointed out softly, and Blaine turned his head so he could see.

"It's beautiful," he agreed. "We don't get to see many stars like this in the city. The lights always drown them out."

Kurt smiled and kissed the top of Blaine's head. "If you could make a wish on a star and *know* that it was going to come true, what would you wish for?"

Blaine barely even had to think about his answer. "I wouldn't wish for anything. I already have all I need. You and Ellie are my *world*, Kurt."

"That's sweet, but what if you *had* to pick something to wish for?" Kurt asked in response.

"Damn," Blaine giggled. He lapsed back into seriousness after a second and got lost in thought for a moment before he continued.

"I guess I would wish for it to be guaranteed that we win tomorrow. I would do *anything* to make you happy, and being able to win something this monumental for you would just be amazing."

He hesitated for a moment before he continued. "Kurt?"

"Mhm?"

"What would *you* wish for, if you had to pick something?"

Kurt absentmindedly pulled his fingers through Blaine's wet curls as he thought. "I'd wish for complete tolerance and marriage equality everywhere. I want every single couple – gay, straight, whatever – to be able to experience the joy of telling their families that they're getting married, like we did earlier. Everyone deserves to feel that happiness."

It was moments like this that reminded Blaine just how in love with Kurt he was. He laid a column of kisses down the middle of Kurt's chest, all the way down to where that tantalizing little trail of hair under his belly button disappeared into the waistband of his swim trunks.

"I'm so glad I'm marrying you," he breathed against Kurt's skin.

He let his mind wander to thoughts of what the next few months would be like as he and Kurt planned their wedding together. It was still almost impossible to believe that this was happening – that he was getting *married*, and to someone as amazing as *Kurt* – but all he had to do was look at the ring on his finger and know that this was all very real and happening to him. Tomorrow he had to wake up a little bit early to pick something up for Kurt, then they were headed to the Supreme Court building to hear the opinion (which would hopefully be in their favor). The day after that, they would fly back home to Chicago and start making plans for the wedding. *Their* wedding.

Later that night, after Kurt made love to him, Blaine fell asleep curled up in his fiancé's arms as Kurt's little spoon – just the way he liked it. Somehow he'd gotten lucky enough that he would be able to fall asleep just like this every single night for the rest of his life.

xxx

Kurt had a mild panic attack when he opened his eyes in the morning to see that Blaine wasn't there, but all was well again when his gaze landed on the piece of hotel stationery that had been left on the pillow beside his head. He picked it up, squinting in the bright morning light as he read the note that was written in Blaine's quirky, flamboyant penmanship.

Good morning :) I had to run out to pick up a few things. It shouldn't take long. Go back to sleep and I'll be here when you wake up again.

I LOVE YOU! xoxo – B

PS: Happy 4th of July! Kinda awesome that SCOTUS is deciding our case today of all days.

Kurt smiled to himself as he read his fiancé's words – particularly the postscript, which only gave him more confidence that they were set to win this case today.

He thought that since he was awake for the time being, he might as well put some clothes on, so he crawled out of bed and grabbed the first thing he could reach in his suitcase – a t-shirt and a pair of boxer briefs – and slipped them on before crawling back under the covers. But then he realized that he really didn't feel like greeting Blaine with gross morning breath, so he got out of bed once again and quickly brushed his teeth. By the time he was finally back in bed, he was pretty much awake, but he decided he might as well at least *try* and sleep until Blaine returned.

He must have fallen asleep, because the next thing he knew, Blaine's voice was whispering his name.

"Kurt?" Gentle, familiar fingers began stroking his forehead, pushing the hair back. "Wake up, baby. I brought you coffee."

That did it. Kurt's eyes immediately flew open and he sat up with a huge smile on his face to see Blaine offering him a paper coffee cup.

"Have I mentioned that I have the sweetest husband-to-be on the face of the earth?" he asked, tilting his face up for a kiss, which Blaine happily gave him. "Seriously, I want to know how in the world I got to be so lucky."

"You give me way too much credit." Blaine sat down on the edge of the bed and smiled shyly as he turned to pick up something he'd set on the bedside table next to his own coffee. "I got bagels, too. The hotel breakfast food is good, but it's getting a little old."

Kurt had actually just been thinking the same thing yesterday morning when they went down to breakfast together. He peered into the box of bagels once Blaine opened it, looking over the different flavors, and finally chose one with sesame seeds.

"Mmmm, my dad was right when he said you're a keeper," Kurt said with a smile. He reached into the box and pulled out one of the little packages of cream cheese and a plastic knife. "And for the record, I do *not* give you too much credit."

"Yes, you do," Blaine argued unenthusiastically as Kurt began spreading cream cheese on one half of his bagel. "I shouldn't really be talking, though, because I *did* get you something else while I was out."

Kurt felt an involuntary, expectant smile spread across his face. "What is it?"

"Eat first," Blaine instructed him. "*Then* you get your present."

Kurt didn't listen. He began glancing around, looking for another box or bag or whatever that Blaine would have brought in with him when he came back to the room. There was nothing on the bed, and nothing on the nightstand save for their two cups of coffee and a receipt from the café where Blaine had bought the food. Whoever had been working the cash register when he made his purchase must not have known who he was, because his name was printed on the receipt as "Blane."

"I already hid it, so don't get any ideas," Blaine warned him. He bit into a blueberry bagel and gestured to the uneaten sesame seed one in Kurt's hand. "The sooner you eat that, the sooner you get it."

Kurt rolled his eyes and stuck his tongue out childishly at Blaine. "Fine."

Thankfully, the bagel was delicious, so Kurt practically inhaled the entire thing in no time at all. He even decided to take it one step further and throw back the rest of his coffee while he was at it. Once the cup was empty and the bagel long since devoured, he turned to Blaine with a smirk that he knew his fiancé would be unable to resist.

"Kurt Hummel is a man of little patience," Blaine announced to nobody in particular, laughing a little bit as he leaned over and pulled something out from under the bed.

"Really?" Kurt asked when he saw the tiny white paper shopping bag Blaine had extracted from under the bed. "Your big hiding place was two feet under me?"

"I had to think fast because I couldn't tell if you were actually asleep when I came back," Blaine admitted. Suddenly a flash of nervousness shot through his hazel eyes, and Kurt wondered why that was so. Blaine cleared his throat and pulled a tiny black box out of the bag, which he folded up and set aside before Kurt could get a good look at the name of the store on the front.

"I, um...I kind of wanted to get you something just to celebrate everything we've been through," Blaine said hesitantly. Kurt thought he still seemed nervous, and that was adorable. "I know when you proposed, you said you were willing to stick with me through everything...even stuff like that stupid argument we were in for a few days. I just thought I should get you something to symbolize the fact that I'm willing to do that, too."

He handed Kurt the box. Kurt's hands were clammy with anxious nerves as he accepted it and opened the box.

It was a ring, which Kurt probably should have expected given the size and shape of the box, but the beautiful simplicity of the tiny band made him draw back a gasp. It appeared to be made of platinum, just like Blaine's engagement ring, and there were three stones set into the metal: a diamond flanked by an emerald and amethyst – Kurt's and Blaine's birthstones, respectively.

"Oh, Blaine," he whispered, too lovestruck to say anything else.

"I don't really think I would call it an engagement ring, because we're already engaged," Blaine said, "but maybe more of like a promise ring. I promise to love you forever. That type of thing."

Kurt was still staring at the ring, blinking away the tears that were pooling up in his eyes. He didn't care what the hell Blaine called it; he just loved the fact that it was yet another tangible symbol of their love and commitment to each other, and that meant the world to him.

"I got an engraving in it, too. Look on the inside," Blaine told him softly.

With shaky fingers, Kurt slipped the ring out of its little box and held it closer to his face so he could look at the inside. There were five characters engraved there: *KH+BA*. So simple, yet so powerful.

"It's perfect," he whispered breathlessly as he made to slip the ring onto his finger, then suddenly hesitated and handed it to Blaine instead. "Wait, no, I want *you* to put it on for me."

Blaine smiled and took Kurt's left hand in both of his own. "Good practice for the wedding, right?" he asked as he slipped the ring onto Kurt's corresponding finger.

Kurt admired the ring for a second, then put his hand on the back of Blaine's neck and pulled him in for a kiss once it was in place on his finger. The thought of standing at the altar and exchanging rings with Blaine thrilled him beyond belief, but today they had a Supreme Court case to win.

xxx

Michael knew he should probably like his family's new house, but he found it extremely hard to get used to. He, his brother and his dad had finally finished getting everything moved in just two days ago and even

though it was bigger than their old place, it was strange being here. He couldn't help but wonder if it would ever start to feel like home. It didn't seem like it ever would.

Thankfully he had the place to himself for the afternoon. His father was at work and his brother was God only knows where, so he could watch the coverage from the Supreme Court in Washington D.C. without worrying about anyone catching him. He'd already told his friends he couldn't come play baseball today and now there was nothing left to do but sit on the couch and wait to find out if Mr. Hummel and Blaine won their case.

The first person to arrive was a tall, imposing-looking guy who the TV reporter identified as Justin Wheeler, the attorney who was arguing on behalf of the teachers' union and against Mr. Hummel and Blaine. Walking up the steps with him was a woman who Michael assumed to be his wife. She had brown hair that was twisted into a tight bun on the back of her head and didn't look very happy. Justin Wheeler was strutting up the steps with huge, overconfident strides; the woman looked like she was struggling to keep up.

Most of the people who had gathered on the courthouse steps were there to support Mr. Hummel and Blaine, and Michael could hear them start booing as Justin Wheeler and the woman – her name was Sarah, apparently, and she *was* his wife – began making their way up the steps. Sarah turned to give them a dirty look and tripped as one of her high heels got caught on the edge of the step. Michael could hear the crowd on the steps start to laugh as she regained her footing and scurried to catch up with her husband, who hadn't even seemed to notice she'd tripped. Something about the moment was so inexplicably funny that Michael had to laugh, too. *Stupid bitch. You're about to lose, anyway.*

When Justin and Sarah Wheeler were near the top of the large steps, the camera angle switched to show a fancy looking black car with tinted windows. Even the reporter covering the event seemed excited as she started to inform the viewers that Kurt Hummel and Blaine Anderson had arrived.

When Mr. Hummel and Blaine got out of the car and began making their way up the courthouse steps, neither of them took the lead and walked in front of the other. When Justin Wheeler had been coming up the steps just a moment earlier, it appeared that he had been doing everything possible to get away from his wife, but Blaine stayed right by Mr. Hummel's side as they walked up the steps to their fate together. Seeing that brought the tiniest smile to Michael's face. Even if they didn't win the case today and the gay rights movement was set back another decade, there was still hope that true love could triumph eventually.

He was getting so wrapped up in watching the scene unfold that he didn't hear a car pull into the driveway. A few seconds later, when his father opened the door and stepped into the house, Michael was caught completely off guard.

"I'm on my lunch break now, so I thought I'd—" He paused, taking in the sight of his son sitting on the couch and watching history be made. "What are you doing?"

Michael quickly glanced around for the remote and spotted it on the complete other side of the couch – too far away for him to quickly grab it and pretend he had been channel surfing. He decided to be as vague as possible. "Watching TV."

His father stepped closer to the television just in time to hear the news reporter talking about Mr. Hummel and Blaine as they continued making their way up the steps.

"Now, as we've mentioned earlier, Blaine Anderson is not only representing Kurt Hummel in this case, but the two are also romantically involved...and today as they prepare to enter the Supreme Court chamber to hear their decision, they are both wearing what appears to be some kind of ring on their left hands. We haven't gotten a chance to speak with either of them yet, but it appears that these rings could lead to speculation about a possible marriage or engagement, since neither of them have been spotted with a ring before. In any case, the sheer fact that they've worn these rings to the courthouse today is a poignant reminder that love conquers all."

Michael tried to remain calm as his father turned to face him with his face already red with anger. "Any reason why you're watching this shit?"

"Because I want to." Michael thought his heart was about to pulse right through his chest, but if there was anything Mr. Hummel had taught him, it was that he shouldn't be ashamed of who he was.

"There's no reason for you to watch this," his father said, grabbing for the remote and angrily flicking the television off. "You're not a fag."

"Maybe I am," Michael muttered under his breath without even thinking.

The room was suddenly filled with a pressuring silence. Michael held his breath as his father stepped toward where he was sitting on the couch, squinting at his son as if he'd never seen him before.

"What did you say?"

Michael swallowed the lump of nerves that was forming in his throat and forced himself to look his father in the eyes. "You heard me."

"I sure as hell fucking hope that I *misheard* you," his father said slowly. "Did you...did you just say you're a *fag*?"

"We prefer the term 'gay,' actually," Michael said. From the casual nonchalance of his tone, one would have thought he was commenting on the weather or suggesting that they go see a movie.

"*We*?" his father said, his face red and twisted with rage. Then, before Michael knew what was happening, he was being lifted up from the couch by the collar of his t-shirt and pulled face-to-face with his father, who continued speaking in an angry sneer.

"Listen to me, I don't know how long you've been watching that shit, but it was obviously long enough to brainwash you and make you think you're a fag. I suggest you find something else to watch or you'll be sorry."

"Watching that didn't make me gay," Michael explained as calmly as possible. "I've been this way for thirteen years, from the moment I was born."

"No." His father lowered him to the ground, but didn't let go of his collar just yet. "No, you have *not*. You *chose* to be this way and I will not *stand* for this, do you understand me?"

"I didn't choose this any more than you chose to be straight," Michael told him.

"You don't get it, do you?" his father sneered, tightening his grip on Michael's collar. "Now I'll give you two options. You can either be my son, or you can be a fag. If you decide to go with the second, you're out on your ass. I don't want a son living here under my roof if he's not a real man."

Michael didn't even have to think about it. He looked straight into his father's hateful eyes as he spoke.

"Then I guess I would rather be a *fag* than be your son." His voice was quiet but powerful and he practically spit the derogatory term back into his father's face.

His father let go of his collar and shoved him toward the door. "Get the *fuck* out of my house."

Michael lifted his chin up just the slightest bit. "You don't have to ask twice."

He kept his head held high and made a big point of slamming the door behind him on his way out.

Suddenly he was very much aware of the fact that he was standing on the front porch of the house that was no longer his. He had nowhere to go. In a matter of seconds, he'd become homeless and without a family, all because of something that he couldn't control.

He sank down and sat on the edge of the stoop. For a fleeting second he almost wanted to cry, but he forced himself to hold back the tears. It wasn't that he was afraid to cry – if there was one thing he hated, it was being shoved into the uncomfortable box that society had built that dictated what "real men" could and couldn't do. It was that he realized that there was no reason for him to cry.

No home and family at all was better than living with an intolerant homophobe who couldn't see his son's true colors through his own hatred.

He thought about the last few scenes he'd managed to catch of the Supreme Court coverage before his father had angrily turned off the television. Mr. Hummel and Blaine Anderson had been walking up the steps side-by-side, rings on their fingers. Maybe they'd gotten engaged. Michael sure hoped that was the case; they had seemed so happy and in love when Blaine had come to help them surprise Mr. Hummel. But even if that *wasn't* the case, the last few words he'd heard the TV reporter say.

Love conquers all.

Michael stood up from the porch and began walking without ever looking back at the house that had once been his home. He knew where he had to go.

xxx

The last time they had been sitting in these same chairs in front of the bench, Kurt had been unable to ignore the overwhelming tension that filled the air between him and Blaine. This time, though, all he had to do was glance down at the ring on his finger and know that even if they *did* get into an argument like that again, they would find a way to work through it, because their love was all they needed to get by. He

squeezed Blaine's hand under the table once they were seated and melted a little bit inside when his fiancé gave him the tiniest little smile in return.

Kurt was trying to stop himself from visibly shaking as the proceedings began. Part of him wanted to hold Blaine's hand under the table the entire time, but he also didn't want to seem unprofessional if he did so. But when the bailiff stepped to the podium to read aloud the opinion of the Court, he couldn't help but glance shyly at Blaine out of the corner of his eye.

His fiancé was the picture of poise, sitting up straight with a polite expression on his face as he waited for the bailiff to begin. Kurt wondered how much the anticipation was killing him inside.

The bailiff cleared his throat and began. There was no turning back now.

"The Supreme Court of the United States has come to the following unanimous opinion in the case of *Hummel v. Jeffries*."

Kurt choked on his breath a little bit. *Unanimous* opinion. All nine justices were either for him or against him.

"By a vote of nine to zero, the Court rules in favor of the petitioner, Mr. Kurt Hummel—"

And that was all Kurt needed to hear. The second his own name was spoken, an indescribable deluge of relief and happiness flooded through his entire being and immediately caused him to tune out whatever the bailiff was saying about the unconstitutionality of his exclusion from the union and things like that. He realized, too late, that a huge emotional grin had involuntarily spread across his face. This time, he didn't care about how unprofessional he may have looked. He was *happy*.

He couldn't help sneaking a glance at Blaine as the bailiff continued reading the opinion and was overwhelmed with another wave of emotion when he saw tears shining in his fiancé's eyes. This meant so much to Blaine. To both of them. To the entire gay community. Together, they were helping to write a new chapter of history.

He kept daydreaming until he was jolted out of his reverie by an abrupt silence. Court had been adjourned and they were free to leave. Trying to remain as solemn as possible, he stood up alongside Blaine and the two of them began making their way out of the chamber. Kurt was half tempted to shoot a proud little smirk at Justin Wheeler and Sean Jeffries, but he forced himself to stare straight ahead and keep walking.

When they stepped out into the bright sunshine, Kurt was surprised to see that there was still a rather large crowd gathered along the bottom of the steps. A hush fell over them as they caught sight of Kurt and Blaine exiting the building, anxious to know what the result had been.

In response to the crowd's unspoken question, Blaine took Kurt's hand and, for the first time since hearing the announcement of the decision, let himself smile as he raised their arms triumphantly over their head. The crowd exploded into enthusiastic cheers and for some reason a chill raced down Kurt's spine.

Blaine kept his hand locked with Kurt's as they began making their way down the steps towards the crowd of supporters at the bottom. Neither of them were thinking about anything traumatizing, like the idea of telling Blaine's parents about their engagement, and likewise neither of them even entertained the thought that somewhere back in Chicago, one of Kurt's students had just been kicked out of his own home for being gay.

Right now, nothing unpleasant in the world mattered. They had their victory, and they had each other.

xxx

On days when Savannah was not out taking pictures somewhere, she was working the front desk at Hummel House. Today was one of those days.

It was the most difficult job in the entire building, she thought, because she was the first person to see the fearful faces of women and children and – yes, sometimes even men – who had just made the harrowing escape from their abusive spouses or parents. But in a strange way, she liked working here because she got to hear firsthand their stories about why they were seeking refuge here, which gave her the opportunity to help them more than she could working in the cafeteria or anything like that. It wasn't always the most exciting job – there were some days when nobody came, but she didn't mind. Her girlfriend had started this incredible project all by herself; Savannah thought that the least she could do was help out in the building whenever she could.

At least today was a good day. Kurt and Blaine had won their court case and, from the sounds of it, they were engaged. She wondered how Kurt had finally decided to pop the question. No matter how he'd done it, Savannah knew he would have made it absolutely perfect and special for Blaine.

She was thinking of calling them to congratulate them when suddenly the main door opened and she immediately glanced up. The boy who stepped into the building looked relatively unscathed, which was a rare sight among new residents who came here. He was wearing a faded t-shirt and dirty jeans along with a White Sox baseball cap. He didn't seem to have any bruises or any other telltale signs of a struggle, and he'd walked into the building rather than bursting through the doors as if he were running for his life, the way most new residents did.

Still, Savannah didn't know his story. This kid could have been through hell and back for all she knew. She gave him a warm smile. "Hello, welcome to Hummel House."

"Uh, hi." The kid seemed nervous. "Um...are you the person I talk to if I want to, uh...come stay here?"

She nodded politely. "Yes, I am. Come around over here and have a seat and we'll get everything sorted out."

The boy warily stepped around the desk and took a seat in one of the chairs Savannah had on her side. She knew this was when the new residents were the most vulnerable, so she tried to seem as easygoing and gentle as possible.

"My name is Savannah," she told him with a friendly smile. "Why don't you tell me a little bit about yourself and why you're here?"

"Okay." The kid bit his lip and hesitated for a second. "Um, my name's Michael, I'll be 14 in a few months. I go to Buckley Middle School and I really like baseball."

He hesitated again; Savannah got the feeling that there was more he wanted to say. Sure enough, he continued after a brief moment. "And I'm gay."

She nodded understandingly. "The first thing we want all of our new residents here at Hummel House to know is that we are an open, accepting, and tolerant community. Nobody here is judged based on their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion...none of that. We want everyone here to feel as comfortable as possible being themselves," she explained.

Michael smiled the tiniest bit. "Sounds cool."

"It's pretty cool," she agreed with a smile. "All right, why don't you tell me about your home life? What happened that led up to your coming here?"

"My mom died when I was little," Michael explained. "It's just me and my dad and my older brother, but all he does is hang out with his friends and get high. My dad...he's never really been accepting of gay people or anything like that. I never came out to him. But...today, he came home unexpectedly and I was watching coverage of that big Supreme Court case on the news...he didn't want me watching that, and one thing led to another, and now I'm here. He pretty much kicked me out, but it wasn't very hard for him to do because I wanted to leave."

That would explain the casual, unafraid demeanor he'd had when he first came in, Savannah thought. "So there was no physical confrontation, anything like that?"

"Not really," Michael said. "Like, he picked me up by the shirt collar and kinda shoved me a little bit, but that's basically it. I'm fine."

He may have been physically fine, but Savannah knew there was no way he was emotionally all right after everything he'd been through. She knew from personal experience that trying to hide something like this from unsupportive parents was one of the most difficult things she'd ever had to do.

"Well, like I said, you don't have to worry about people like your father here," she told him with a comforting smile. "You're welcome to stay here as long as you like. We work closely with the local foster care system to help find loving, supportive families for the kids that come here alone, so when you're ready to leave, that's always an option."

"All right," Michael told her, nodding a little bit. "I'm just really glad to be out of my dad's house right now."

"That's completely understandable," Savannah told him. Suddenly she remembered one of the first things he'd told her, and she couldn't help but ask.

"Hey, you said you go to Buckley, right?"

"Yeah, I'll be in eighth grade this coming year. How come?"

Savannah smiled. "My friend teaches there."

"Oh, cool," Michael said. "Who is it?"

"Kurt Hummel? The guy this place is named for, actually." She said his name like a question to see if it rang a bell, then remembered something else he'd told her. "And he's actually the one who just took that case to the Supreme Court. I know you just mentioned that you were watching that."

"Yeah, he's my music teacher. He's awesome," Michael said with a smile. "Did they win that case, by the way? I was kind of on my way here when they were actually announcing it."

"Yes," Savannah told him. "They won. It was a unanimous decision."

Michael had the biggest smile Savannah had seen on his face thus far. "That's so great. I'm not really surprised, though. Everyone knew Mr. Hummel and Blaine were gonna win."

Savannah smiled in agreement. "I know *I* did."

They talked for a little while longer before Savannah decided to show Michael to one of the empty guest rooms where he could stay. She gave him a brief tour of the building on their way, and once he was getting situated in his room she went to the closet at the end of the hall to find some clothes for him since he'd come in empty-handed. Hummel House thrived on donations from clothing drives and the like, and the community had been extremely generous; it didn't take her long at all to find a few articles of clothing that would fit him just so he had something more to wear. Before she left, she grabbed a little bag of toiletries from the container near the door and took the whole bundle back to Michael's room.

"I got some clothes for you and there's some toothpaste and shampoo and whatnot in the bag," she explained. "I'll let you get settled in. Feel free to come see me if you have any questions or just want to talk."

"Okay," he said with an appreciative smile. "Thanks, Savannah."

She returned his smile. "No problem."

Michael began sorting through the clothes she'd brought him and Savannah turned to leave and give him some privacy. Most residents, when they first moved in, preferred to be alone at first. If they came to her to talk, she would always stop whatever she was doing and just listen.

Even after she left the room, she couldn't get her mind off of Michael. There was something special about that kid, she knew it. She just didn't quite know what it was just yet.

She had a smile on her face as she headed back to her desk. She couldn't wait to call Emily at work and tell her about everything that had happened so far today.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

The flight back home was only about an hour and a half long, but it might as well have dragged on for an entire day. By this point, Kurt was so anxious to get back home and see his parents and Ellie that it was nearly making him crazy. He breathed a sigh of relief when he noticed the shores of Lake Michigan and the familiar Chicago cityscape approaching through the window.

He glanced at Blaine, who had fallen asleep, and gently shook him awake. "Blaine, wake up. We're landing soon."

"Huh?" Blaine's eyes shot open at the sensation of being suddenly awakened, then he seemed to relax a little bit. "Oh, we're on the plane. I completely forgot where I was."

"Almost home," Kurt told him with a smile. "Though I've gotta say, I was surprised you slept the whole time."

"Yeah, and I had this really weird dream, too," Blaine said, then frowned. "It wasn't a very good one, though."

Kurt placed a caring hand on his fiancé's shoulder. "Aww, what happened?"

"Well, it started out good," Blaine explained. "You and I were getting married. It was our wedding day. It was wonderful and perfect and amazing and I got the most incredible feeling in my heart when we were pronounced husband and husband...but then we turned to head back down the aisle together after we kissed, and I noticed there were two empty seats right in the front row."

It didn't take Kurt very long at all to realize what Blaine must have been referring to.

"Your parents," he whispered.

Blaine nodded. "Yeah," he said quietly. "My mom and dad didn't show up."

It was glaringly obvious to Kurt how upset this was making his fiancé. Without thinking, he unbuckled his seatbelt – ignoring the fact that the seatbelt light was on – and lifted up the armrest in between their seats so he could hug Blaine.

"Baby, I know it's upsetting, but don't let it get you down, okay?" he said as encouragingly as possible. "We'll get Cooper to help us out, remember? He's got our backs. If he's there when we tell your parents, he can maybe convince them to come. They can't say no to *both* of their sons, can they?"

"Sir, I'm going to need you to put your seatbelt on, please. We're landing."

Kurt immediately glanced up at the sound of the sudden voice. It belonged to the flight attendant, a heavy-set African American woman who reminded him of his old friend Mercedes.

Mercedes. He hadn't spoken to her in years; they'd lost touch after college. Would it be strange to invite her and all his old New Directions friends to the wedding?

He blushed and reluctantly let go of Blaine so he could click his seatbelt back into place. "I'm sorry."

Blaine waited until she had walked away, then turned and leaned over to speak to Kurt in a low voice. "Yes, they can. They're not too proud of either of us, as far as I know. If anything, Cooper being on my side might even discourage them from coming even more."

He sighed, looking so dejected and unsure that Kurt wanted nothing more than to wrap him in another hug. "But he really wants to come and help us out, and I guess it can't hurt. Right now, I'm just going to assume they're not coming. If things don't work out with them when Coop's here, they still won't be coming, but at least I will have *tried*."

"And that's the best you can do," Kurt reassured him with a smile. "You know Cooper and I will be there to help you out, so you're not alone. And if all else fails and they still decide that they don't want to come...then it's their loss. We're going to have a *beautiful* wedding. You don't deserve anything less. I want it to be so perfect for you, Blaine...I'll never be able to forgive myself if it's anything but."

"I've said it before, and I'll say it again," Blaine swore to him quietly, "I *know* it's going to be perfect, because you'll be the one standing at the altar with me. You'll be the one saying 'I do.' I couldn't ask for more."

"I know," Kurt told him, reaching across the armrest and lacing their fingers together. "You and I will just do our best to make things work and let whatever happens...happen."

They could actually feel the plane descending now as it maneuvered toward the runway at O'Hare. Kurt glanced out the window again at the dreary clouds that filled the sky and smiled as the pilot welcomed them to Chicago.

"It's good to be home," he said softly.

xxx

Kurt was noticeably anxious once the plane finally touched down and they managed to find their luggage. Blaine had to admit, he understood perfectly. Now that they were home, they would finally get to share the utter happiness of their engagement and Supreme Court victory with three of the people they loved most – their daughter and Blaine's future in-laws. At least they had *one* set of parents supporting them.

They were waiting on the sidewalk outside the Arrivals section of the terminal, Kurt impatiently drumming his fingers on the handle of his wheelee suitcase, when Blaine spotted Burt Hummel's trusty old Ford inching its way through the crowd of cars. He tapped Kurt on the shoulder and pointed. "Look, there they are."

Kurt's face brightened and he grabbed Blaine's hand to pull him along. "Come on!"

Kurt, as usual, moved with incredible grace through the traffic, even with both hands occupied with Blaine and his suitcase. Most of the cars in the road seemed to be at a standstill (probably because they were all waiting for somebody to come out of the airport, Blaine figured), so they weren't being downright dangerous by darting through traffic, but Blaine still kept a wary eye open in case any of the cars started moving.

When they got to the car, Blaine realized that Burt had already conveniently popped the trunk for them. Kurt swung the suitcases into the hatchback with one fluid motion before pressing the door shut. They made their way toward the back door, having noticed that the passenger seat was already occupied by Carole, and had barely even gotten the door open before they were attacked by Ellie.

"Daddy! Blaine!" She had scrambled out of the car and was doing her best to wrap her tiny arms around both of them at once. Blaine bent over a little bit so he could reach her and pulled her close. This whole fatherhood thing was relatively new to him still, and he couldn't deny that it had essentially been, in the words of Shakespeare, thrust upon him. Still, he was overwhelmed with the love he felt for his little girl as

he hugged her. Kurt's presence at his side, of course, didn't hurt either. When he was with Kurt and Ellie sharing a moment like this – even in the middle of the street outside the busiest airport in the world – Blaine felt more than ever before that his life had a purpose. He loved being a lawyer and helping people out in that way, but if he had to choose between his job and his family, he would give up the former in a heartbeat.

Ellie pulled away from the hug after a while, but her face was lit up with the kind of smile that only a little girl can wear. "You're getting married!" she exclaimed, her voice teeming with innocent excitement.

"Yes we are!" Blaine held out her hand so she could see his ring; Kurt did the same to show off the ring Blaine had given him. "Daddy proposed to me when we were in Washington, and the other day I gave him a ring, too."

"They're so pretty," Ellie said with a breathless gasp. She ran her tiny finger over the trifacta of diamonds on Blaine's ring, then did the same with the three gems on Kurt's, eyes wide in wonderment. "When are you gonna have the wedding?"

Blaine shot Kurt a smile. They'd only started discussing the most general of details, but his heart was already overflowing with excitement. Still, he figured that they probably shouldn't be discussing this while kneeling in the middle of the road, so he made to stand up.

Kurt seemed to have the same idea. "Sweetie, let's get in the car and we'll tell you all about what we know so far. It's dangerous to be in the street like this, even if the cars aren't moving."

Their little group piled into the backseat of the car, with Ellie opting to squish herself in the middle seat in between Kurt and Blaine. Burt and Carole both turned around to greet them and give them enthusiastic but awkward hugs over the backs of the front seats, and Kurt and Blaine both showed off their rings again. Before long, traffic started moving slowly but surely and they were on their way.

Blaine smiled as he remembered what his daughter had asked them right before they got in the car. "Ellie just asked us when we were planning on having the wedding, so I figured we might as well tell everyone now that we're all together," he explained to Burt and Carole, then looked at Kurt.

His fiancé picked up right where Blaine had left off. "We don't have a date yet, but we were thinking about getting married this coming spring," Kurt said happily. "We would take our honeymoon when Buckley is

on spring break, so I wouldn't have to miss many days of teaching, and that gives Blaine enough time to plan ahead with whatever he might have coming up."

"Plus, the weather will hopefully be nice enough for us to have the wedding outside," Blaine added. "Kurt and I were talking about it, and we both would love to have an outdoor wedding if possible."

"I can see it now. A gorgeous spring day with a clear blue sky, surrounded by all our family and friends, marrying the most incredible man on the face of the earth," Kurt mused dreamily. "I couldn't think of anything better."

"It sounds perfect," Carole agreed. "Blaine, have you told your family yet?"

It was the question Blaine had been dreading, but in a strange way, he was glad she'd asked it. Maybe this would give them another perspective on how to handle the situation.

"Uh, we told my brother," he said. "We Skyped him after we ended the call with you guys the other day. But, um, my parents...I don't know if Kurt's ever told you this, but they're not the most tolerant of...this kinda stuff."

He bit his lip and glanced warily at Ellie, who had never met her brand-new set of grandparents, wondering what she must have been thinking. He couldn't help but feel awful all of a sudden. This little girl had been raised by two fathers her entire life, and here Blaine was essentially telling her that the people she would come to know as Grandma and Grandpa Anderson disapproved of the only family structure she knew.

Kurt, as usual, was completely attuned to how he was feeling. He shot Blaine an apologetic look and spoke in a broken whisper. "Blaine, I'm so sorry, we should have planned this better..."

"We'll figure something out," Blaine told him, then raised his voice to acknowledge Burt and Carole again. "Knowing my parents, I think this type of thing would be the easiest to tell them in person. I want to invite them out to Chicago to maybe spend a weekend here, see our apartment and whatnot, and break the news to them that way. Coop offered to fly in from LA to help us out, so hopefully having him on our side will help us out."

"I'm really sorry to hear that, Blaine," Burt said, sounding genuinely disappointed. "If there's anything Carole and I can do..."

"We'll definitely let you know," Blaine said appreciatively. "Thank you so much."

Kurt, sensing that talking about his parents was making Blaine upset, successfully managed to shift the direction of the conversation toward happier topics for the rest of the drive home. The more they talked about the wedding, the more excited Blaine got – and he was already pretty excited to begin with. As much as he wanted to marry Kurt right away, he was really looking forward to the next few months of planning and preparation. Planning and preparing *their wedding*. His wedding to Kurt. It still seemed surreal to think about. Any minute now, he figured, he would wake up and realize that everything had just been a wonderful dream.

But then he looked down at the ring on his finger and smiled. If this was a dream, he never wanted to wake up.

xxx

Out of habit, Kurt checked the answering machine first thing as he walked in the door to their apartment. There was one new message.

"Your friend Savannah called the other day when we were out," Burt explained to him. "From what it sounded like, she wanted you to call her when you got back."

Kurt shrugged and pressed the button. Sure enough, Savannah's prerecorded voice spoke from within the machine.

"Hey, Kurt, it's Savannah," she said. "Listen, I know you and Blaine aren't home, but something happened and I thought I should let you know. One of your students, a kid named Michael, showed up here at Hummel House earlier today...he basically got kicked out of his house after he came out to his dad. He's doing well, but I just thought you should know...I asked him if I should call your cell phone and let you know right away, but he said not to bother you while you and Blaine are in DC. Anyway, I just thought I'd let you know that he's here, and that he's doing okay. Congratulations on winning the case, by the way. Em and I need to meet up with you and Blaine so we can hear all about it, okay? Call me back when you get this. Bye."

"Oh, no," Kurt said quietly as the message ended. "I had a feeling it would come to this eventually..."

Burt, Carole and Ellie had left the room, so Blaine took advantage of their newfound privacy to wrap Kurt into a hug. "Michael's the kid who kinda helped put together that surprise song for you at the end of the school year, right?"

"Yeah, that was him," Kurt said. "I knew he'd said that his father was homophobic, but as far as I knew, he hadn't been planning on coming out to his dad. I feel like I should have done something more to help him get out of there sooner..."

"Hey," Blaine said gently, rubbing Kurt's back to calm him down. "Savannah said he's okay. She wouldn't lie about something like that. If there was a problem, she'd tell you. Just call her back and try to figure out what's going on, okay?"

Kurt nodded. "I will," he said. "It's just...I don't know. Maybe this sounds extremely weird, who knows...but the more I got to know Michael this year, the more I started to feel like he was my own son. I know exactly what he's going through so I can empathize with the situation and it just makes me so mad that his real dad can't see what an awesome kid he is, y'know?"

"I know," Blaine said understandingly. He kissed Kurt's cheek and handed him the phone receiver. "I'm gonna go start unpacking. Let me know what she says."

He left, giving Kurt some privacy, and headed back into the master bedroom where Carole already had one of the suitcases open on the bed and was starting to put things away.

She looked embarrassed when Blaine came in. "Oh, I'm sorry. I just thought I'd help..."

Blaine shook his head and smiled. "No, you're fine. Don't feel obligated, though."

"I don't mind," she told him. "It's the mom in me, I guess."

Blaine took a stack of folded clothes out of the suitcase and began putting each item in its respective place. It was quiet for a few seconds before he spoke.

"Carole?" he asked warily.

"Yes?"

"Do you...," he trailed off, rephrasing the question and starting again. "What do you think Kurt and I should do if my parents end up disapproving of this whole getting-married thing?"

Her tone was simple and casual as she responded. "Well, you should get married, of course," she said matter-of-factly. "I get that it would be nice to have your parents' approval, but you're an adult, Blaine. And you and Kurt are in love with each other and you're obviously ready to take this step together. There's nothing stopping you."

Blaine considered this. "I know, but I can't help wondering what they'll do if I marry him without their approval. They try to keep their prejudice hidden, but I wouldn't put it past them to disown me completely if I do something this drastic."

"Let me ask you something," Carole said, shutting the empty suitcase and turning to face Blaine. Her tone was gentle but serious. "Do you want to marry Kurt, Blaine?"

Blaine nodded. When he spoke, his voice was weak with emotion. "More than anything in the world."

"Then follow your heart," Carole told him with a sweet smile. "If you think it feels right, then do it."

Blaine wandered over to sit on the edge of the bed, thinking deeply. Marrying Kurt might mean giving up the people who had raised him – not that his parents had been there for him much ever since he came out. But still, they were his *parents*, and he had a strange affection toward them.

The more he thought about it, though, the more obvious his decision became. If they couldn't support and respect the fact that he'd found the love of his life, then why should their opinion matter?

"My heart already belongs to him," he told Carole with a small smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. "Might as well make it official."

Just then, Kurt sauntered into the room. He looked noticeably less stressed than when Blaine had left him alone a few minutes earlier.

"Michael's okay. I'm going down to Hummel House tomorrow to check up on him and see how he's doing," he said, then froze when he realized that Carole and Blaine had obviously just put a deep conversation on hold. "Wait, what am I missing in here?"

Carole just smiled and headed for the door. "I'll let you two be."

She shut the door behind her, and once they were completely alone, Kurt turned to Blaine. "Everything okay?"

Blaine didn't say a word. He simply stood up from the bed and walked over to Kurt to wrap him in a hug, never wanting to let go.

xxx

It was one of those dreams that was so realistic, everything seemed tangible to the five senses. Kurt could smell the sweet aroma of the floral arrangements drifting on the spring air and feel the smooth, circular platinum band being slid onto his finger as if it were actually happening.

Later, he would wake up and think to himself how ironic it was that he had dreamt about their wedding, considering that Blaine had just had a dream about this exact same momentous occasion on the plane. But not now. To Kurt, this was very much real and happening.

He heard his own shaky voice say the magic words as the minister asked him if he took Blaine to be his lawful wedded husband. The same question was then repeated to Blaine, who looked so hopelessly in love as he said "I do," that it made Kurt weak in the knees.

His heart overflowed with unimaginable joy as they were pronounced husband and husband and told to kiss. Never before had Blaine's lips felt more like home.

They broke away and turned toward the applauding congregation, ready to make their way back down the center aisle. But before they could get too far, someone sitting on the edge of the aisle in the front row gently tugged on Kurt's arm to pull him to a stop. He turned and completely lost his breath.

She had chestnut hair and distinctive, magical eyes that matched the color of Kurt's own perfectly. She smiled that smile he remembered so well and pulled him into an emotional hug. Without even thinking about it, Kurt hugged her back, breathing in the flowery scent of her perfume. He somehow managed to forget the fact that he was married now and that his husband was waiting for him so they could finish their trek back down the aisle arm-in-arm. Right now, all he cared about was this embrace. He wanted to stay in her arms forever.

She pulled back just the slightest bit and looked straight into Kurt's eyes with nothing but pure love and warmth reflected in her own gaze.

"Oh, Kurt," she whispered, and Kurt trembled upon hearing her voice, "I'm so proud of you."

It was still dark when Kurt woke up in tears – not just in tears, but borderline bawling his eyes out. Blaine's first instinct, of course, was to wrap him up in his arms and pull him close, doing everything in his power to provide as much initial comfort as possible.

"Kurt, love, what's wrong?" he whispered, brushing a few strands of bangs back from Kurt's sweaty forehead. He kissed the side of his face, letting his lips linger there for a long time.

"I...I had a dream..." Kurt choked through his tears.

Fearing the worst, Blaine immediately tightened his arms around his fiancé. "Do you want to talk about it, or is it too upsetting?"

Kurt shook his head and, to Blaine's pleasant surprise, smiled. "It's not upsetting at all. It was a very good dream," he reassured him. "These are happy tears."

He craned his neck to look at the glowing numbers on the clock next to their bed. "Oh, god. 3:43 a.m., I'm so sorry for waking you up..."

"Don't worry about it," Blaine told him. "Can I hear about this happy-tear-inducing dream?"

Kurt nodded and blinked to stop himself from crying. "Well, like your dream, it was our wedding day."

"That sounds pretty happy to me so far," Blaine agreed.

The best part was yet to come, however. "My mom was there," Kurt whispered. "She told me how proud she was of me."

He had the biggest smile on his face despite his tears. Kurt was beyond happy, that much was clear to Blaine, and it made *him* happy as well.

"And now I'm just thinking about what you said to her when we visited her grave a few months ago," Kurt continued, his voice shaky with tears but brimming with joy. "About how she would be so proud of me...and now I'm realizing that you were right. She *is* proud, and she wants me to marry you. I think this is her way of saying she approves."

"Kurt," Blaine whispered, because after hearing his fiancé's emotional description of his dream, it was the only word he remembered how to say. He tightened his arms around Kurt, holding him as close as physically possible without one of them actually being inside the other. He started placing little kisses on every part of Kurt he could reach – the top of his head, his forehead, the sides of his face.

Kurt inhaled deeply, his entire body shaking through his sobs. His tears were so intense that if Blaine didn't know better, he would have thought he was legitimately upset.

"Maybe this is stupid, but it's a sign," Kurt said in the softest of whispers. "That everything is going to be okay."

"It's not stupid," Blaine said with trembling emotion in his voice. "I've always known she's watching over you. This just proves it."

Kurt nodded against Blaine's chest. He wasn't crying so intensely anymore, but there were still tears shining in his eyes and on his face.

"She put you here," he murmured. "My mom put you in my life because she's watching over me and she wants me to be happy. I fully believe that."

Blaine wasn't quite sure what to say to such an amazing revelation. He lay back down, keeping Kurt in his arms, cradling him against his chest and close to his heart.

"In that case, I don't want to let her down," he finally whispered with a smile. "I want you to never feel anything less than completely loved, Kurt."

"I never do," Kurt assured him. His eyes shone with brilliant love even in the darkness of the room. He paused for a fleeting second; his voice was somewhat hesitant when he continued. "I-I'm sorry if I'm going out on a limb here, but I've always felt so loved whenever I was with you. Even before we were...together."

"That's because I've always loved you," Blaine said simply. "I just had to hide it for a long time out of respect for you and your...other relationship."

Once he'd started talking, he couldn't stop, but as soon as the words were out of his mouth he felt awful. He always hated bringing up the subject of Kurt's past relationship, but he'd put his foot in his mouth and there was no way to take it back.

Kurt didn't say anything for a long time. The longer the silence, the more awful Blaine felt.

"I'm sorry," he whispered after a long time.

Kurt shook his head. It was the first response Blaine had gotten out of him for at least a few minutes by this point. A few more silent seconds passed, then he spoke.

"Don't be," he said. "I...this seems crazy, I know, and I would never admit it to anyone else, but if I had to put myself through all that hurt and pain again, if it meant I would end up with you...I'd do it in a heartbeat."

"Oh, Kurt, no." Blaine couldn't really even think of a way to describe the feeling that came to his heart upon hearing his fiancé's words. "That is literally the most selfish thing I could ever ask you to do. I wouldn't ask you to put yourself through all that again just so *I* could be happy."

"But I'm happy now, too," Kurt protested. "And think about it. Neither one of us would have confessed our feelings when we were in high school. Both of us were too scared. It took...*that*...to finally bring us together. I'd do it all again for you."

Blaine inhaled and let it out slowly. "Kurt."

"Yes?"

"You know I love you."

"Of course I know that. I love you too."

"I mean that, Kurt. I love you more than I've ever loved anyone or anything," Blaine said slowly. "This...what we have between us is real, true love. I'm the only one for you and you're the only one for me."

He paused for a second or two, giving Kurt a moment to take this in. "And even if...even if Dave never...did what he did, we would have found a way to be together somehow. It's meant to be. I don't know how, but it would have happened somehow. There's absolutely no doubt in my mind about that."

Kurt's face melted into the sweetest smile. When he spoke, his voice cracked with new tears. "Oh, Blaine..."

"I love you, Kurt," Blaine said with solemn confidence in his voice. "And I can't *wait* to marry you."

Kurt loosened himself from Blaine's arms just enough so he could pick his head up and give his fiancé a kiss. Then another. And another. Before long, their lips had been fused together into one deep, sweet kiss.

"I can't wait, either," Kurt whispered breathlessly when they finally forced themselves to break away. "You're actually going to be my *husband*. This is unbelievable."

Blaine smiled and closed his eyes, relishing the moment, bringing Kurt even closer to him in his arms. He would never believe how he got to be so lucky.

"I know it is," he admitted, "but I wouldn't have it any other way."

xxx

The next morning, Burt and Carole left for home. Kurt had thought about telling them about his dream, but he decided to keep it between him and Blaine. So, after they ate breakfast that morning, Burt and Carole headed off for Ohio without knowing anything about Kurt's incredible dream.

Once they were gone and Ellie was safely at the apartment down the hall where one of her little friends lived (Kurt had already called and asked the girl's mother if she minded babysitting for a few hours; she did not), Kurt and Blaine were finally able to do what they especially needed to do today – go to Hummel House and visit Michael.

Neither Kurt nor Blaine had been in the building since it opened, and so much had changed. There were quite a few people living here now; Kurt couldn't decide if this was a good thing or a bad thing. Part of him

was happy to see that all the work Emily had put into this project was paying off – and besides, he thought, if people were living here, they had obviously gotten out of a bad situation instead of opting to stay in their potentially dangerous homes, and that was good. But at the same time...there were a *lot* of residents living there. He never would have imagined that so many people in the area had been hurt that badly, but at the same time, he *could* believe it. When all that abuse had happened to him, he'd lived in Ohio, but Chicago was a much bigger city than the place he'd come from. More people meant that there was a greater chance of some of them being in abusive relationships.

Their visit was harder than he was expecting it to be. Kurt had thought he was strong enough, but as soon as he entered the building, the significance of the moment struck him like lightning. He could relate to every single person that lived here on one level or another. He knew all too well how it felt to be rejected, hurt, abused. Seeing that so many people had had the same horrible experiences as him broke his heart. He wouldn't have wished that on anyone.

When they arrived, Savannah was working at the front desk. She greeted them both with enthusiastic hugs and squealed with excitement when they showed her their rings and told her about the engagement. After talking for a few minutes and making plans to meet up with her and Emily for coffee later that morning, she led them back down a long hallway that was reminiscent of a hotel.

"We want them to feel as comfortable here as possible," she explained to them as they walked. "This is their home for the time being. The last thing we want is for any of them to feel like they're at a shelter, even though that's essentially what this is."

They paused outside a door with a thin vertical window. Savannah pulled the knob down but kept talking instead of showing them inside. "This is one of our entertainment rooms. A lot of the kids like to spend time here and hang out. A few local electronics stores were nice enough to donate televisions, stereos, game systems...stuff like that, so that the residents have some fun, entertainment-based things to do." She peered through the window and nodded. "Looks like Michael's in there. He's been hanging out in this room a lot ever since he got here."

She pulled the door open and stepped inside, motioning for Kurt and Blaine to follow her. Kurt spotted Michael sitting on a couch on the other side of the room, playing some racing video game with another boy.

"Michael?" Savannah said to get his attention, and he immediately paused the game and turned around. He smiled a little bit when he saw Kurt and Blaine standing beside her.

"You have some visitors," Savannah told him with a smile of her own.

Michael hopped off the couch and headed over to where they were standing. Kurt couldn't help noticing that another kid immediately moved over to pick up his controller and finish the video game. They were as comfortable here as they would be in their own home, but he knew that was because they *were* at home here now.

Kurt was about to open his mouth to greet him, but stopped himself when he saw the wary, unemotional way Michael smiled and shrugged a little bit, as if to say *Here I am, this is my life now*. Without even thinking, Kurt stepped forward and gave him a hug.

It was suddenly clear to him how much this had affected Michael, because without hesitating he immediately hugged Kurt back. He'd been through so much in the past few days and even though he'd found a safe place to go, there was no way he'd get over this easily.

"Sorry about everything that happened," Kurt mumbled apologetically, suddenly unsure of what to say.

"S okay," Michael told him. "I feel better already. I like it here. Everyone's really cool and I can be myself without having to worry about what anyone thinks."

"I know it's hard, but you did the right thing," Blaine told him. "I don't even want to think about what could have happened if you'd stuck around any longer."

"Yeah, you're right...it could have ended up being a lot worse," Michael agreed. "Hey, you guys want to walk around a little bit and I can show you the place?"

Kurt gave him a polite smile. "Sure, we'd love to."

Michael led them through the halls of the building, occasionally stopping to describe the function of a certain room or area, but for the most part the three of them just wandered and talked. Michael explained his situation a little better and Kurt and Blaine responded with shock and understanding when appropriate, but soon enough he began asking Kurt and Blaine questions about their trip and subsequent Supreme Court victory. Kurt could tell he didn't really want to talk about his own situation anymore, and

that was okay. He knew that rehashing the same story over and over could get tiring after some time, especially when it dealt with such an emotionally draining experience like this.

So they told him all about the past few weeks in Washington D.C., leaving out the part about the fight they'd gotten into. Michael already had a lot on his mind; neither of them wanted him to hear bad news even if it had already been resolved. They were more than happy to break the news of their engagement to them when he asked – apparently, on the day they got the results of their court case, a TV news reporter had pointed out the fact that both of them were wearing rings. He seemed genuinely happy for them, which made Kurt happy as well. The kid needed some joy and good news in his life, now that his life had been turned completely upside down in the past few days.

After a while, Kurt and Blaine decided they should get going. They had to meet up with Emily and Savannah – plus, Michael was a thirteen-year-old-kid and they both knew he'd rather be with his friends than walking around with his teacher and the fiancé of said teacher.

They wound up back outside the same door they'd started. Kurt gave Michael an apologetic smile before he headed back inside to find his friends. "Michael, I am *so* sorry this happened to you. We both are. If there's anything at all we can do, please let us know."

He nodded. "Thanks," he told them. "It means a lot. It's...kinda rough, but I really like it here and I'll get through it."

He paused, looked at the ground for a second, then made himself look back up, straight at Kurt. "Y'know, Mr. Hummel...I know this might sound kinda weird or whatever, but you've been more of a dad to me than my real father has. Thanks."

"Maybe I'm just biased because I *am* gay," Kurt said, "but I don't see any reason not to treat everyone equally. It doesn't matter who you're attracted to, who you love...we're all human. I wish everyone could see that and respect that."

"Me too," Michael agreed. "Thanks so much for coming today. And congratulations again on getting engaged, that's really cool. I'm happy for you guys."

"You're so welcome. And thank *you*," Blaine told him with an appreciative smile. "Take it easy, Michael."

Michael opened the door to the entertainment room and stepped back inside, so Kurt turned and headed back down the hallway. He didn't get very far, though, before Blaine suddenly tugged on his hand and pulled him to a stop.

"What are yo—*mmm*." He was pleasantly surprised when Blaine pulled him into a spur-of-the-moment kiss right in the middle of the empty hallway. It was unexpected and made his head spin, and when they broke away after a few seconds he was deliriously dizzy with love.

"Wow," was Kurt's dumbfounded response once his lips were free. He giggled, feeling completely flustered, and felt blood rushing to color his face with a blush. Only Blaine could do this to him. "Not that I'm complaining, but what did I do?"

"You're amazing, Kurt," Blaine said breathlessly. "Everything you said to him just now...that just reminded me of why I love you so much."

"I love *you* so much, too," Kurt giggled. Then, because their previous kiss had left him thirsting for more, he put one hand on the back of Blaine's neck and pulled him into another.

But this kiss didn't last very long before they were interrupted by the sound of somebody awkwardly clearing her throat. Both of them abruptly broke the kiss and blushed as they turned to see who had caught them.

"Sorry to interrupt," Emily said hastily, looking just as embarrassed as they were as she wheeled herself further down the hall toward them.

Kurt quickly managed to recover from his embarrassment and let his face brighten into a smile as he stepped forward to greet her. "Oh my god, hi! I feel like I haven't seen you in forever!"

"I know, and now I feel kinda bad that I interrupted your guys' little rendezvous back here," she laughed as Kurt leaned down to give her a hug and a kiss on the cheek.

Blaine smirked as Kurt stepped aside so he could give her a hug, too. "Oh, don't worry about that. It's nothing we can't make up later." He turned and shot a wink to Kurt over his shoulder. Kurt forgot how to breathe for a second.

"I'm sure you will," Emily giggled. "Come on, you guys have got to tell us *everything* about your trip."

xxx

They were seated at a small table in the little café at Hummel House, each nursing a cup of coffee just the way they liked it – two creams and two sugars for Kurt, decaf with one cream for Blaine, laden with both creams *and* sugars for Emily, and completely black for Savannah. None of them were really drinking, because Kurt and Blaine were talking a mile a minute about their experience in Washington D.C. and Savannah and Emily were hanging on every single syllable they said. Emily practically swooned when they broke the news of their engagement to her; Savannah took her hand and held it delicately in both of her own while they listened to Blaine explain, in great detail, how Kurt had proposed to him.

"Aww, how sweet," Emily told them both, smiling so they could tell how genuinely happy she was for the two of them. "That's so romantic, Kurt."

"It was," Blaine said, smiling as he admired his ring for a second. "He made it perfect."

"Not surprising, coming from Mr. Perfectionist here," Emily joked, and Kurt had to crack a smile because it was true. "Seriously, though. That's exactly how I would want to be proposed to. It's simple, but so special and significant at the same time. I'm almost jealous of Blaine." She laughed.

"Hmmm, is that a hint?" Savannah teased. Kurt bit his lip to hold back a giggle.

"It is if you want it to be," Emily said flirtatiously. She leaned over and gave her girlfriend a quick but sweet kiss; both of them were still smiling as their lips met. Kurt thought they were positively adorable.

"Well, we won't be having a bouquet toss at our wedding for obvious reasons, so let's just say you catch the nonexistent bouquet by default," Kurt joked.

"Sounds good to me," Savannah said happily. "But it's your guys' turn now. I'm so excited to see you two get married, you have no idea."

"I'm excited for us two to get married, too," Blaine said with the laugh that always warmed Kurt's heart. He smiled and looked straight at Kurt as he continued, even though he was still responding to what Savannah had said. "This wedding is going to be a dream come true."

Kurt thought back to the dream he'd had the previous night and returned Blaine's smile. In that moment, he knew that whatever drama leading up to the wedding (including whatever happened with Blaine's

parents) wouldn't matter in the long run. After all was said and done, Blaine was going to be his husband. That was what was important.

xxx

When they got home a little later that morning, they stopped across the hall to pick up Ellie only to find that she wanted to stay and keep playing with her friend. The other little girl's mom didn't mind, so Kurt decided she could stay for another hour or so. Plus, that gave him and Blaine enough time to make a few very important phone calls that they wouldn't have wanted their daughter to overhear. They would explain the whole situation with Blaine's parents some other time for sure, but for now she was too blissfully happy about the fact that her daddies were getting married. Neither of them wanted to crush her spirits just yet with the harsh reality that not everyone approved of said marriage. They decided that once they figured out exactly how they were going to go about breaking the news to Blaine's parents, they would sit down with Ellie and explain the situation to her.

The first person they called was Cooper. Blaine figured they should let him know what was going on – plus, Cooper was always easy to talk to, so calling him first would put the two of them at ease. They sat close together on the couch with the phone on speaker so both of them could talk and hear.

Cooper answered on the third ring. "Sup, B?"

"Hey, Coop, I hope I'm not interrupting anything," Blaine replied. "I'm just kinda hanging out with my fiancé. What about you?"

Kurt couldn't help it. He let a huge smile spread across his lips when Blaine said *fiancé*.

"Oh, hey Kurt!" Cooper called through the phone.

"Hi, Cooper," Kurt greeted him.

"Anyway, no, you're not interrupting anything," Blaine told his brother. "Kurt and I were just calling because we thought we should let you know that we're about to call Mom and Dad."

"Ah. Married Couple Syndrome already, I see," Cooper joked.

"Married Couple Syndrome?" Kurt asked, legitimately confused, although he liked the idea of himself and Blaine as a married couple.

"Yup. Good old MCS, as I like to call it. Everything becomes 'us' and 'we' instead of 'I' and 'me.' Like that Michael Jackson song about the rat."

Blaine frowned. "What a lovely comparison, Cooper."

"No, I'm serious, you don't even realize you're doing it. Happened to me, too. Literally for about the first year after Court and I got married, everything was 'Courtney and I...'. It's part of that whole puppy-love thing, I guess," Cooper, who had been married to his wife for three years now, told them. "Old habits die hard, my friend."

He laughed, then his tone suddenly shifted to one with more focus as he continued. "Wow. Okay. Tangent much? So you guys are about to call Mom and Dad."

"Yeah. We just thought we'd try and get them to come out here sometime so we can tell them about the wedding in person," Kurt said.

"'Try' being the operative word here," Blaine said flatly. "Anyway, would you be interested in coming out here at the same time they do, just to help us out?"

"Not at all," Cooper said. "I can be out there anytime. Let them decide when they want to come, it'll push us closer to being on their good side as opposed to us telling them a specific day."

"Good idea," Kurt said, nodding. "Also, I think Blaine should be the only one that talks to them when we call them here in a little bit. I don't want them to hear me at all, and my voice is kind of...distinctive. I don't want to do anything that might make them decide not to come."

"That's probably not a bad idea," Cooper agreed. "Just call me back as soon as you get off the phone with them, okay?"

"All right, will do," Blaine told him. "Talk to you in a little bit."

They said goodbye and hung up. Blaine turned off the speakerphone and closed his eyes for a second."

"You okay?" Kurt asked, rubbing his shoulder affectionately.

Blaine nodded. "I'll be fine. I just really hope they decide to come. And I hope they can open their hearts and minds to the fact that I've found the love of my life."

"We'll make it happen," Kurt assured him. "I'm not quite sure how yet, but somehow...somehow...your mom and dad are going to be at our wedding, and they're going to *want* to be there."

He leaned in closer and gave Blaine a sweet, reassuring kiss on the lips. When they broke apart after a few seconds, he let his gaze linger lovingly on Blaine's for a moment longer before he nodded at the phone.

Blaine took a deep breath and started dialing. He pressed the phone to his ear, a nervous expression clouded his features as he listened to it ring. He ran one hand through his hair, as he often did when he was nervous, so Kurt took that hand and held it gently in both of his own. Blaine seemed to relax a little bit, but he was still chewing his bottom lip. Kurt was tempted to give him one more kiss, but decided against it given the circumstances. Any minute now, one of Blaine's disapproving parents would answer the phone, and he didn't want his fiancé to be distracted.

Kurt could hear someone starting to speak on the other end of the line, but was unable to make out exactly what they were saying. After a few seconds, Blaine spoke. "Hey, Mom."

Part of Kurt wanted to ask Blaine to turn up the volume on the receiver so he could hear Mrs. Anderson's end a little better, but that would run the risk of her overhearing them. He settled for listening to only Blaine's end.

"I'm doing very well, thank you. How are you?" Blaine said after a long time.

Another long pause. When Blaine spoke again, he seemed to be choosing his words very carefully.

"Yes, I did, actually." Blaine's mom talked for a long time before Blaine finally got to speak again. "Well, I didn't want to tell you two because it *was* a gay rights case, after all, and I know you and Dad aren't exactly the biggest supporters of that kind of thing."

She said something else, and Blaine took a deep breath before he responded. "Yes, Kurt was there, too. I was arguing the case for him, actually. He lives out here now."

Kurt figured she must have seen something about their case on the news and was asking him about it. Still, he found himself holding his breath. The conversation didn't seem to be going in a very good direction. If she found out that Kurt and Blaine were romantically involved before they got a chance to invite her and Blaine's father out to Chicago, there was a chance that they might not even come.

"I don't know anything about what they said about us on the news," Blaine said. "All I know is that we were there, and we won the case."

She must have asked Blaine if there was something going on between the two of them. Kurt wouldn't have been surprised if they'd mentioned on the news that he and Blaine were together.

"Okay, that's not the reason why I'm calling," Blaine said, trying his hardest not to sound annoyed. "I...um, I was just thinking that you and Dad haven't been up here to see my new place yet since I moved to Chicago, and I was thinking that we should probably change that." He smiled. "So this is me cordially inviting the two of you to come spend a weekend with me at my humble abode."

He was no longer speaking in "we" terms, referring to himself along with Kurt, but Kurt didn't mind that at all. He knew Blaine had to make it seem like he was living on his own so that his parents would give the visit a chance and weren't deterred from making the trip. Maybe it wasn't the most honest way of going about this, but at least it would probably be the most effective. Only time will tell.

"And actually, I just talked to Cooper, and he mentioned that he wanted to come out here and visit me, too," Blaine continued. "If you want, we can try and get you and Dad out here the same weekend he comes. He said he's pretty flexible with his shooting schedule, so it's up to you. Whenever you want."

For a few minutes, Blaine's end of the conversation consisted mostly of "Yeah"s and "Mhm"s, so Kurt couldn't really tell what was going on. After a while, though, Blaine actually spoke again.

"All right, sounds good." He was smiling. "Yeah, great. See you guys then, I'll let Coop know." There was one last short pause, then he said goodbye and hung up.

Kurt gave him an expectant smile. "Well?"

"They're coming in two weeks," Blaine told him, letting out a deep breath that he could have been holding for the entire duration of the call. "We have a *lot* of explaining to do."

Chapter Twenty-Eight

"I really don't want to tell her."

"Neither of us do, Blaine. But we have to. She deserves to know what the hell is going on."

"I know. Look at her, though. She's so happy and excited to go to camp, and now we have to dump this on her. I hate to crush her spirits, y'know?"

Kurt peered in through their daughter's half-open bedroom door. Ellie was kneeling in front of her bed, carefully laying out every item that she was going to pack into her pink drawstring backpack to take to day camp with her. Kurt and Blaine had decided that this camp would be a good opportunity for her to get out and spend time with kids her own age this summer – something that wasn't always easy to do in the middle of the bustling city.

He sighed and turned to Blaine. "As tough as it sounds, we gotta tell her. If you don't, I will."

"I *will* tell her, I just—"

"Daddy? Blaine?"

Ellie's innocent voice had interrupted their conversation. They both paused abruptly and turned to peek into her room. She was looking at them with wide eyes, obviously wondering what it was that neither of them wanted to tell her.

"Sweetie...there's something we need to tell you," Kurt said reluctantly.

He pushed the door the rest of the way open and stepped into the room, motioning for Blaine to follow. He took a seat at the foot of her bed and Blaine stood behind him, a reassuring hand on Kurt's shoulder. Kurt closed his eyes and relaxed under Blaine's touch, but he was still far from completely calm. Explaining other people's intolerance to his daughter was never something he enjoyed doing, but it was something that unfortunately had to be done all too often.

Ellie looked worried all of a sudden. "Is everything okay? Is Uncle Cooper still coming?"

Kurt and Blaine both had to let themselves laugh at that. Their daughter had been especially excited to meet Blaine's brother in person, especially after a few long-distance Skype sessions that the three of them had had with Cooper in order to get her acquainted with her new uncle (Kurt would never cease to be amazed by the capabilities of modern technology). He already had the feeling that the two of them were going to get along just fine.

"No, Coop actually just texted me a few minutes ago. His plane just landed, so he's gotta get his luggage and then he's gonna catch a cab to get over here. You'll get to see him when you get back from camp," Blaine assured her. "It's just...there's kind of another reason why he's coming, other than just to visit with us."

Ellie looked like she was waiting to hear more, so Blaine hesitantly continued. "My mom and dad are coming into town later today, too. Daddy and I need to talk to them in person and tell them that we're getting married. They...they..."

Kurt could tell how painful it was for Blaine to explain this to their daughter. When his fiancé trailed off, he wrapped one arm comfortingly around his waist before doing his best to pick up where Blaine had left off.

"Blaine's parents don't support gay marriage. Or gay...anything," he said warily. "They're not happy that Blaine is the way he is, and he and I both know that they won't be very happy when they find out we're getting married."

"But why wouldn't they be happy?" Ellie asked in response. The look of pure confusion on her face broke Kurt's heart. "They're his mommy and daddy and he loves you. Why would it make them sad that you're getting married?"

"Honey, you're not even seven years old yet and you already understand so much more about the world than they do," Blaine told her with a sad smile.

"Neither of us can understand why they're like that. Trust me," Kurt continued. "We both thought it would be easier to tell them in person, so that's why we invited them over. Cooper is flying in from California to help us out because...well, because Blaine and I are going to need all the help we can get." He chuckled emotionlessly.

Ellie frowned. "But why don't they see that Blaine isn't gonna change? He likes boys and he's always liked boys, right?" She looked up at Blaine with confusion still written into her features.

"Oh, yeah. Always have, always will," Blaine said, laughing. "Couldn't change that if I tried."

"Then aren't they used to it by now?" Ellie asked. "They know he's not gonna change, so why don't they just be happy for him?"

Blaine had been Kurt's best friend since before Ellie was even born. He'd been there for every single major event in her life even before he became her legal father. He knew that Kurt had never been anything less than the quintessential loving, adoring father throughout her entire life – even when they'd been living through that domestic hell earlier in the year. Blaine thought it was absolutely wonderful that Ellie had always known such love from at least one parental figure in her life, but at the same time, it left her unable to understand why other people weren't always loved and accepted by their mommies and daddies as well. It made no sense to her why Blaine's parents weren't tolerant of him – but in the same way, it really made no sense to Blaine, either. They were his *parents*. Unconditional love shouldn't have been as difficult to give as they were making it out to be.

"Hopefully we're going to find that out when they get here," Kurt explained. "We know they're not going to be thrilled when they first hear about the wedding, but hopefully Blaine and I will be able to talk some sense into them and get them to open their hearts to us."

Blaine nodded in agreement. "I was never in a relationship with another guy when I was living at home with them. They can say they don't like the fact that I'm gay, but they've never seen me with a boyfriend. I'm hoping that once they see the love that your dad and I share, they'll realize just how special this is."

"I think they will," Ellie said confidently. "I can see how much you guys love each other, and I'm not even in first grade yet."

Kurt's heart was sufficiently touched, so he leaned over and gave her a hug. "You are wise beyond your years," he told her with a sweet smile. "How are you feeling about this?"

"I think it's good that you guys are getting married," she said, and Kurt had to smile at her innocent honesty. "And it's really sad that Blaine's mommy and daddy don't like when two boys are in love, but when they see you they're gonna see how happy he makes you."

"I hope so," Blaine admitted. "Honestly, though, I don't get how anyone *wouldn't* understand our love when they see that smile of his." He squeezed Kurt's hand, earning the same smile he'd just been talking about.

"It's not too hard to smile when I'm around you. Both of you," Kurt told them both, then glanced at the clock on the wall. "Oh, shoot. Ellie, you've gotta get to camp. Blaine, do you want to stay here and wait for Cooper while I take her?"

"Yeah, I'll do that," Blaine agreed. He stood up and gave Ellie a kiss on the top of her head. "Have a fun time, sweetie."

Kurt was about to turn away and head out the door, but Blaine surprised him with a quick but reassuring kiss on the lips before he could get too far. "I'll see you in a little bit. We're gonna get through this, okay?"

Kurt nodded breathlessly. Even though he'd kissed Blaine hundreds of times by now, the simplest of kisses like this still took his breath away. "Okay."

If Blaine could believe it, he thought, then there was no reason why he couldn't, too.

xxx

Cooper announced his presence the same way he had even when the Anderson brothers had been living at home together and he wanted to get into Blaine's room – with three sharp knocks on the door, right in a row. Blaine smiled to himself as he set aside the issue of *American Lawyer* he'd been browsing through and stood up from the couch to answer the door and greet his brother.

He'd barely gotten the door open when he was suddenly being wrapped in a gigantic hug. It was a little hard to breathe when Cooper was kind of crushing him like this, but Blaine had to laugh even as Cooper greeted him with an enthusiastic, "Blaine! Dude, how long has it *been?*"

Blaine laughed again when Cooper finally released him. "Oh, god, I don't know...couple years since I've seen you in person, definitely," he said, stepping aside so his brother could get through the door. "Come on in...don't you have any suitcases or luggage with you?"

"In the car," Cooper told him. "I got a hotel downtown." Blaine opened his mouth to respond, but Cooper immediately cut him off. "I know you guys offered to let me stay here, and I really appreciate that, but you

live in an *apartment*, Blaine. As nice as this place is...," he looked around at the front entryway and living room, nodding in approval, "I would just feel like I was getting in the way of you and Kurt and Ellie."

He frowned when he noticed the two absences. "Hey, where *are* your better half and my favorite niece, anyway?"

"We signed her up for a day camp down at the community center. Kurt's dropping her off there, he should be home any minute," Blaine explained. "Have a seat...can I get you anything to eat or drink? That had to have been one hell of a flight."

"Almost four hours," Cooper said, sinking down onto the couch. "Can I just get a glass of water or something, please?"

"You got it." Blaine turned and was about to head out to the kitchen, when suddenly the door to their apartment opened and the love of his life stepped in.

"Hey, Cooper!" Kurt exclaimed cheerfully. Blaine was about to crack a joke about how Kurt had greeted his future brother-in-law first rather than his fiancé, but all was forgotten when Kurt intercepted him with a "Hi, baby," and a kiss.

"Oh my god, you guys are one of *those* couples," Cooper said, laughing. "All sweet and domestic and loving. That means when Mom and Dad get here, convincing them that you two should get married is going to be *easy*."

"Oh, we're getting married whether they like it or not," Blaine assured his brother. He still had a hand on the small of Kurt's back; it was completely natural for them to be touching in some way pretty much all the time. "Since I'm heading out to the kitchen, do you want anything to drink?"

"Some more coffee would be great. Something tells me I need all the caffeine I can get today," Kurt replied. Blaine slipped away from him to continue out to the kitchen, so Kurt took advantage of the fact that he was now turned around to giggle and slap his ass playfully. "Thanks, hot stuff."

"Okay, never mind. You guys are horny teenagers," Cooper joked. "In which case, it might be a *little* more difficult to get on our mom and dad's good side."

"We'll be good boys," Kurt promised, fluttering his eyelashes innocently, then dissolved into laughter as he took a seat beside Blaine's brother on the couch. "How's life been treating you, Cooper?"

"It's been pretty hectic lately, but I can't complain," Cooper responded with a shrug. "What about you guys, though? I'm really excited to hear about this wedding you're planning."

Kurt was excited, too. He and Blaine had already decided that they were going to sit down together sometime this week and work out all the details of the wedding – the date, the location, the catering, the flower arrangements, the honeymoon. He couldn't wait to really start pulling things together for the ceremony in which he would marry the love of his life – everything just seemed so much more real now.

He smiled. "We don't have any specific details *yet*, because we're gonna iron all that out sometime later this week, but we've already decided that we're going to have an outdoor ceremony next spring. Sometime probably at the end of March or beginning of April. That's basically all we've decided so far, but I'm so excited."

Cooper glanced up at Blaine, who was just returning with their drinks. "You done good, bro. He's *adorable*."

Blaine frowned as he handed Kurt his coffee and Cooper his glass of water. "You're straight. I thought I wouldn't have to worry about you stealing my man." He punched his brother jokingly on the arm as he sat between them on the sofa, close enough to Kurt that their arms were touching.

"I am," Cooper said nonchalantly. "It's just hard not to like this guy."

"All I really care about is if your parents like me or not," Kurt said, sipping his coffee. "I mean, obviously there are certain things about me that they inherently won't like...my sexuality being one of them. I just hope I can win them over somehow."

Blaine rubbed Kurt's arm reassuringly. He hated seeing the man he loved so unsure of himself – and the fact that Kurt was feeling this way because he was so desperate for Blaine's parents' approval made Blaine even more upset at his mother and father.

"We'll get through to them," he promised Kurt. "It might take some time, but we'll make it happen."

And because he was Blaine and his eyes were filled with nothing but the purest love, Kurt believed him.

xxx

Kurt hadn't had enough time to prepare himself for the knock that eventually came to the door, but then again, he didn't think he would *ever* be ready for what he knew was about to happen. He tried to ignore the feeling of dread in his stomach and instead curled an arm around Blaine's waist, bringing him closer for a second before his fiancé stood up from the couch and went to answer the door. It was a small but monumental gesture – he knew Blaine had been less than excited about doing this, and he figured the least he could do was let him know that he was loved.

He watched Blaine pull the door open and position himself in such a way that his parents wouldn't be able to see inside the apartment just yet. Kurt stopped breathing for a second. His heart was pounding in his ears. This was it – he and his fiancé were about to break the joyful news of their engagement to two people who didn't want to hear it. Lisa and Bill Anderson hadn't even set foot in the apartment yet, and Kurt already knew that this was going to be one of the most difficult things he'd ever done.

Kurt hung back when Bill and Lisa finally made it through the doorway and went to greet their eldest son. They seemed to be so distracted by the greetings Blaine and Cooper were throwing their way that they hadn't even really noticed Kurt standing there yet, which he didn't mind at all. It gave him a few more seconds of mental preparation that he knew would do no good because there was absolutely no easy way to do what he and Blaine were about to do.

Blaine's mother was the first person to notice him. When she did, she seemed more surprised than anything. That was good, Kurt thought. As long as her disapproval didn't seep through right away, maybe she and her husband would stick around long enough to hear what Kurt and Blaine had to say.

"Kurt Hummel?" There was immediate recognition in disbelief in her tone. "Oh my goodness, I haven't seen you in years. How have you been?"

"I've had my ups and downs," Kurt admitted as she gave him a hug that was admittedly awkward. "Lots of ups lately, though." He grinned, resisting the urge to wink at Blaine.

"It's good to see you," Bill Anderson chimed in, shaking Kurt's hand once his wife was finished hugging him. "Even if it is a little unexpected that you're here...we just thought we were coming to see Blaine and Cooper." He laughed. Kurt shot a glance toward Blaine, whose eyes were dark with anger. He knew how

good his parents were at hiding their blatant homophobia, and their attempts to cover it up almost made it worse.

"Why don't we all have a seat?" Kurt suggested in an attempt to ease the tension. "Bill, Lisa, can I get you anything to drink?"

"He's just as comfortable here as he would be in his own home," Lisa commented to her husband as if Kurt weren't even there. She smiled at Kurt and he could almost read the false sincerity in her eyes. "No, thank you."

Kurt glanced at Bill to see if he wanted anything. When Blaine's father shook his head, Kurt returned to his seat on the couch and tried his hardest to remain calm.

Blaine turned toward the loveseat on the adjacent wall where his parents had chosen to sit and Kurt immediately realized that he was doing this right here, right now.

"Mom, Dad...," he began hesitantly, "I know you probably just want to relax and make small talk, but I'm just going to cut right to the chase and tell you why we invited you two here today."

He took Kurt's hand and held it right in between the two of them, positioning their interlocked hands so that their rings were front and center. Kurt couldn't bring himself to look at how Bill and Lisa were responding to this, so he kept his eyes on Blaine.

"Kurt and I are engaged," he said simply. "We're getting married this coming spring. To make a long story short...earlier this year we came to realize that we've loved each other for a very long time...and now we want to spend our lives together."

Kurt didn't look away from Blaine even as uncomfortable silence filled the room. Blaine was still looking at his parents, speaking directly to them as he continued to fill the stark quiet.

"I love him," Blaine said with fond affection in his voice, "and he loves me. By some amazing miracle, he loves me back. I consider myself the luckiest man in the world to have him in my life."

By the time he was finished speaking, Blaine was looking at Kurt while still addressing his parents. He'd moved his other hand up to cover Kurt's, so he was holding Kurt's hand lovingly in between both of his

own. Kurt was well aware that Blaine wasn't just doing this to show off to his parents – he was making these small, simple gestures because he really, truly loved Kurt.

"Anyway," Blaine sighed after a few seconds of lovingly holding Kurt's gaze, "we just wanted to tell you this in person. I know that neither of you have been very accepting of my sexual orientation in the past, but *please*, Mom and Dad. It would mean the world to me – to both of us – if you would acknowledge, accept and respect our love."

Lisa and Bill just stared at them for a while and Kurt felt his palms getting clammy. He wanted to pull his hand away, because it would be gross to make Blaine keep holding his hand when it was all sweaty, but at the same time he felt it was important for the two of them to have some kind of physical connection while they waited for Blaine's parents to respond. He kept his hand where it was.

"Blaine, I honestly can't believe you're telling us this," Lisa said softly after a long silence. "Your father and I were hoping that you would have gotten help for this illness by now."

And that was when Blaine got mad. Kurt had never seen such anger in his normally loving hazel eyes before, and the sight both thrilled and terrified him at the same time. He watched in breathless anticipation to see just what his fiancé had to say to the people who were supposed to love and accept him.

"I know you've never liked the way I am," he said in a low voice, "but this...*this* is a new low for you, Mom. You've never gone so far as to use that word before. And now here I am, telling you that I'm planning on getting married to the love of my life...and you think I have some sort of *illness*?"

There were tears in his eyes and in his voice, which broke Kurt's heart beyond belief. Without even pausing to consider what Bill and Lisa must have been thinking, he scooted in closer to Blaine on the couch and rubbed his back comfortingly to reassure him that he was still here.

Cooper noticed the small display of affection that Kurt was showing Blaine and didn't hesitate to acknowledge it. "This sure doesn't look like either of them are 'ill.' They love each other."

Bill Anderson shook his head. "I've put up with this for far too long," he declared. "You're not getting married, Blaine. Actually, I take that back. You're not getting married to another *man*."

"I'm twenty-seven years old, Dad," Blaine snapped, sounding legitimately angry for the first time. "I'm an adult. I'm partner at one of the most powerful law firms in the state and I just argued *and* won a case in front of the Supreme Court of the United States. I think I'm perfectly capable of deciding for myself if I want to get married. And I *do*."

Any other time, Kurt would have giggled at Blaine's possibly intentional use of the traditional marital words, but it was time to be serious. He stayed right where he was, still gently rubbing up and down Blaine's back as they waited for his parents' response.

"Fine, then," Bill said after a while. "But we won't be there to watch it happen."

These were exactly the words Blaine had been dreading, and Kurt knew it. He pulled his fiancé just the tiniest bit closer.

"And I'm disappointed in you, too, Cooper," Blaine's father continued. "Your mother and I haven't been very happy with some of the choices you've made, sure, but we thought you at least had enough common sense to know that what your brother is doing is not right. You shouldn't be supporting him."

"He's my brother," Cooper shot back. "Why *wouldn't* I support him?"

"We're not having this discussion anymore," Lisa Anderson snapped. "Is there anything *else* you would like to tell us, Blaine?"

"Yes, there is," Blaine said calmly. "You have a granddaughter. Her name is Elizabeth Anne Hummel-Anderson, or Ellie for short. She's biologically Kurt's and she'll be seven in August."

Bill and Lisa could only stare in complete and utter disbelief, so Blaine continued nonchalantly. "Luckily, she's at day camp right now. The last thing I would want is for her to be witness to such ignorant hatred from the people she's supposed to consider grandparents."

"But what...why didn't...?" Blaine's mother was practically incoherent with disbelief by this point.

"Let me make a long story short," Blaine said, showing little patience in his voice, "Kurt had her from a previous relationship. When he left his partner and moved here to Chicago with his daughter at the beginning of this year, I offered to let the two of them stay here with me. Kurt and I both had feelings for each other, but we didn't know it until one night when we started talking and both of us confessed that

we've been in love with the other since high school. We decided that we wanted to be together. A few months later, I adopted Ellie. Kurt proposed to me a few weeks ago, while we were in Washington D.C. Like it or not, we're a family. And by this time next year, Kurt's going to be my husband."

The room was silent for a long time. Kurt stared at Blaine in quiet awe for a moment, amazed at the passion that had filled his voice even while simply retelling the story of how they'd gotten together.

Lisa was the first one to speak. When she did, her voice was quiet.

"But why didn't you tell us about any of this when it was going on? We didn't know anything about your life for *months*, Blaine."

"Because I was finally *happy*," Blaine said softly but firmly. "For so long I'd been feeling like there was something missing in my life. Then Kurt and Ellie came along and that space in my heart was filled. And Kurt was happy, too. His situation prior to coming here was pretty horrible. He'd been through a lot. And when we fell in love, that's when we both found what we'd been looking for. I didn't tell you because I *knew* you'd react like this and I didn't want you to ruin our happiness when we'd only just found it."

"We're only trying to help you out, son," Bill said, seeming pretty sure of himself. "We don't think this choice of lifestyle is very good, that's all. Your mother and I were hoping that you'd grown out of this phase."

And that was where Kurt finally decided he couldn't hold his tongue any longer. He spoke up the second Blaine's father had finished talking.

"With all due respect, Mr. Anderson, Blaine and I didn't 'choose' this for ourselves," he said, trying to keep his tone calm and even. "Do *you* remember a specific moment in your life when you 'chose' to be attracted to women? Can you pinpoint that?"

Bill was stunned silent, so Kurt continued after a few seconds. "You can't, can you? And I can't either. There's not one moment in my life where I can look back and say, 'Oh yeah, that's when I decided to be gay.' Neither can Blaine. This is the way we are, and this is how we always will be. It's not a phase and we're not going to grow out of it. What we share is real, true love and I know him so well that just by looking at his face right now, I can tell just how hurt he is that you won't accept us. I just don't understand how you can hurt your own son like this."

"We've given him chance after chance to change the way he is," Lisa said firmly. "Blaine has decided that he's going to stay exactly as he is. I'm sorry, Kurt, but my husband and I just cannot accept this kind of lifestyle. Congratulations to you both, but we won't be at the wedding."

Kurt knew there was no sincerity whatsoever in her voice when she congratulated them, but he didn't expect anything different. Nor did he expect them to stay much longer, which is why he wasn't surprised when Bill and Lisa stood up from the couch and started making their way toward the door.

"Wait," Blaine called after them, sounding frantically distraught. "You're leaving already? You just drove nine hours to get here."

"We have hotel reservations. We'll stay for the weekend, do some sightseeing, just like we originally planned," Bill explained. "It's too bad we won't be able to spend more time with you, but I don't know if that's a good idea after everything that's gone down here today. I hope you understand."

"No," Blaine protested. He stood up from the couch and started after his parents; his voice was breaking as he spoke. "*I don't* understand. I want *you* to understand. I—"

But that was all Bill and Lisa would have heard, because before Kurt knew it they were out the door. The slam echoed in Kurt's head like an explosion.

Blaine warily stepped back over toward the couch where Cooper and Kurt were sitting and sunk down dejectedly next to his fiancé. Kurt instinctively sidled up beside Blaine and wrapped him in his arms; Blaine was already shaking with suppressed sobs.

Cooper noticed this as well. "Go ahead and cry if you need to," he said gently. "It's just me and Kurt, and we love you. Let it out."

Blaine had already started doing so. "What fucking era do they think we live in?" he asked through his tears. "People are finally starting to become accepting of the way we are, and the two people that can't fucking open their minds are my own *parents*. What does that say about me?"

He turned to Kurt with such a forlorn expression on his face and tears shining in his eyes and on his cheeks that Kurt actually wanted to run after Blaine's parents and bring them back to the apartment to show them just what they'd done to their son. How broken he was because of their lack of acceptance. But as tempting as that idea was, he needed to stay here with Blaine.

"First of all, *you* are a major part of the reason why our society is slowly getting to be more accepting," Kurt said, calmly stroking his fingers through Blaine's hair. "People saw what you did with Emily's case earlier this year, and with Prop 21...we wouldn't even be legally *able* to get married if it weren't for the effort you put into getting that passed. The Supreme Court case you won for me is still fairly recent but there's no doubt in my mind that people are really going to take something away from that, too. You're *amazing*, Blaine. What you've done with your life and your career is incredible. I never want you to forget that."

"He's right, B," Cooper chimed in. "You've done more than most people can even *dream* of doing in their lives, and you're not even thirty yet." He laughed. "And you're making the country a more accepting place for millions of people. That doesn't hurt."

"I got through to the voters of Illinois. I got through to the nine justices on the Supreme Court. I can't get through to my own parents," Blaine murmured absently. "The two people who are supposed to love me exactly as I am refuse to accept me."

"We'll keep working on them," Kurt promised. "You've taught me so much, Blaine, but one of the most valuable lessons I've learned from you is not to give up hope, ever. Somehow, someday, we'll get them to see just how special our love is and how ridiculous they've been for not realizing it sooner."

He gently lifted Blaine's head up, wiping away tears with his thumb. "I hate seeing you so broken like this," he whispered. "I'm going to do everything I can to make it go away."

Cooper opened his mouth to say something, but immediately snapped it shut again when he saw the way his brother was looking at Kurt. Both of them seemed to have forgotten that Cooper was there. Blaine was whispering to Kurt that he loved him and then they were kissing and Cooper had never felt more like an awkward third wheel in his thirty-three years.

He stood up from the couch and grabbed the now-empty glass Blaine had brought him, then headed out to the kitchen to pour himself some more water. If anyone could figure this out, he thought, it was Blaine and Kurt. He'd only been around them as a couple for less than an hour, and he could already tell that their love was strong enough to endure anything.

xxx

Kurt thought that going out that night would be a wonderful way to get Blaine's mind off of the drama that had ensued that afternoon. But due to the fact that they were accompanied by a six-year-old girl and Cooper, who at heart was the biggest kid Kurt had ever met, what he hoped would be a nice sit-down dinner at a family restaurant turned into a rollicking adventure at a pizza joint that had its own game room.

"My head hurts," Blaine said with a frown, rubbing his temples after Cooper and Ellie had abandoned the table in favor of the arcade. "I'm not sure why. I thought I was feeling a little bit better after this afternoon."

"Well, all this noise can't be very helpful with that," Kurt pointed out. He had to lean in closer so that Blaine could hear him over said noise – the shoots and blasts coming from the video game arcade. He picked up a slice of pepperoni pizza from the almost-empty dish in the middle of the table and held it in front of Blaine. "Eat. Food helps."

Blaine opened his mouth and chomped off a bite of the slice that Kurt was holding right in front of his face. Kurt burst into laughter and set the slice down on Blaine's plate next to the discarded crust of the piece he'd already eaten. "Blaine Anderson, you are not five. I'm not going to sit here and feed this to you."

"I'm not very hungry," Blaine admitted. He picked a small piece of pepperoni off of the slice of pizza and popped it into his mouth to appease his fiancé.

"I know you probably don't have much of an appetite, but you need to eat, Blaine. You haven't had anything all day except for that one tiny slice of pizza and that piece of pepperoni you just ate."

"That was just to make you happy, and to keep Ellie from asking why I wasn't eating anything. You know she would have noticed." Kurt had to admit, he was right. Their daughter, in spite of her young age, noticed *everything*. "Kurt, I really don't think I can eat much more. I feel sick to my stomach after what happened earlier this afternoon with my mom and dad. I'm surprised I haven't barfed that one piece of pizza back up yet, honestly."

Kurt made a face. "Ew." He picked up the slice of pizza that was on Blaine's plate and took a bite. "Shouldn't let this piece go to waste."

He chewed quickly and swallowed, then turned to Blaine. "Can I just ask you one thing?" he asked gently, and Blaine nodded. "You seemed pretty okay up until now. I mean, I know you were obviously upset, but it seemed like you had yourself together."

"I had to put on a brave face," Blaine said quietly. "For Ellie. And Cooper. And you. I love you three so much...in different ways, but still. *So* much. I didn't want any of you to have to worry about me."

"You're the love of my life, Blaine. If I have the slightest feeling that something is wrong, I'm going to worry about you." Kurt laughed emotionlessly. "I can't help it."

"You said yourself that we're going to figure this out. If you really want to make me feel better, you'll focus on that and stop worrying about me." Blaine placed his hand over Kurt's and looked lovingly into his eyes, pleading with him. "Please do that for me?"

Kurt had to smile. "Okay," he said. "And I'm sorry."

"For what?" Blaine asked with a smile of his own. "You didn't do anything."

"I know *I* didn't," Kurt said, "but I feel bad that your parents are doing this to you. I'm sorry we have to go through this."

He broke eye contact and looked at the floor, and Blaine knew exactly what he was thinking. Kurt felt bad about the fact that Blaine had fallen for *him* and he thought that in a way, he was a cause of Blaine's parents' intolerance. Blaine didn't want him to feel that way. He hated seeing Kurt so doubtful of himself.

"This is taking a huge toll on both of us," Blaine said quietly after a while. "We both just need to stop blaming ourselves and forget about it for a little while. We'll think of some way to get through to them, I *know* we will. For now, I just think we need to take our minds off of it and go have some fun."

He pushed his chair back to stand up, then offered a hand to Kurt. "That kid-infested arcade is calling our name. What do you say?"

Kurt had to smile and take Blaine's hand so he could stand up. "You're forgetting your thirty-three year old brother is over there, too."

"Exactly," Blaine said as they made their way through the restaurant to the game arcade at the back. "Coop's just an overgrown kid."

It didn't take them very long at all to find Cooper and Ellie. They were seated side-by-side in two large plastic seats, playing some kind of car racing game. From the looks of it, Ellie was winning (that, or Cooper was letting her win, which Kurt thought seemed more likely).

"Aw, man, look at you go!" Cooper shouted over the noise, glancing at Ellie's car zooming down the road on the split game screen. "I'm not getting *anywhere*."

Ellie giggled as she tilted the fake steering wheel to swerve around a turn. "You don't have your foot on the pedal, silly!"

"Oh! Is that what those are for?" Cooper glanced down at the two pedals underneath his own steering wheel, and Blaine had to stifle a laugh because his brother was quite obviously letting Ellie win. He stepped on the gas pedal and his onscreen car, which had been awkwardly stalling near the starting line, immediately sprung into motion. "Well, what do you know?"

"Y'know, Coop, for an actor, you're not very convincing right now," Blaine said, speaking up for the first time.

Cooper turned around to see who had spoken. Onscreen, his car was ramming itself back and forth into a wall. "Oh, hey guys! Your daughter is *slaying* me in this race."

"Sure she is," Kurt joked, just loudly enough for Cooper and Blaine to hear. On the other side of Blaine's brother, Ellie let go of the steering wheel and raised her arms triumphantly in the air as her car coasted across the finish line and colorful words flashing across the screen declared her the winner.

"Yay, Ellie! You won!" he said a little bit louder.

"Uncle Cooper didn't know you were supposed to press the pedals to make the car go," she informed him proudly.

"Yeah, yeah. Good game, young lady," Cooper said with joking seriousness, turning to Ellie and shaking her small hand. He glanced up at Kurt and Blaine. "You guys wanna give it a go?"

Kurt raised one eyebrow and glanced at Blaine, who shrugged. Before either of them could say a word, Ellie spoke up. "Yeah! You guys should race!"

"What the heck," Blaine said, sliding into the seat that Cooper had just vacated. "You game, Hummel?"

Kurt laughed and walked around to take the other seat. "That's Hummel-*Anderson* to you," he declared, echoing Blaine's teasing remark from the night they'd gotten engaged. "And I am *so* game."

"This is gonna be good," Cooper commented to Ellie from where the two of them stood behind where Kurt and Blaine were sitting. Kurt smiled to himself and turned the wheel to look through the selection of cars, finally choosing a sleek red one that boasted speed and easy maneuverability.

Blaine finished choosing a car for himself, then turned to Kurt. "You ready?"

"Bring it," was all Kurt said as a three-second countdown flashed across the screen. When a prerecorded announcer's voice told them to "*Go!*" he immediately floored the gas and jumped out ahead of Blaine to start the race.

"Hey, not fair!" Blaine shouted, but he was smiling as he maneuvered his car to try and catch up with Kurt's.

"What about it isn't fair?" Kurt giggled, smirking to himself as he managed to pick up some speed and get further away from Blaine. This had ended up being the perfect distraction – the dilemma with Blaine's parents was the furthest thing from his mind. Plus, it had been far too long since he'd let himself relax and be a kid again.

"You're taller than me. You have longer legs," Blaine complained. "You can reach the pedals easier."

"It's not my fault you're a hobbit," Kurt joked. "Aww, yeah! Look at the *speed* on this baby!"

Kurt's last comment seemed to really get Blaine in the competitive spirit. He lifted up his free leg that he wasn't using to press the gas pedal and kicked Kurt's half of the screen so that he couldn't see where he was going.

"What are you doing? Stop that! Put your foot down!" Kurt was squealing with laughter by this point, and the sound warmed Blaine's heart. It had been a while since he'd seen Kurt this carefree. "Blaine!"

Cooper and Ellie were cracking up from where they stood. Kurt had to admit, it was probably pretty funny to watch. He squinted at the screen and tried to see around his fiancé's foot, which was still blocking his view. "Blaine, I'm literally going backwards. I can't see *anything*."

"You can obviously see that you're going backwards," Blaine teased, then put his foot down. "All right, I guess I'll let you see now. Since I'm almost to the *finish line*." He stuck out his tongue and grinned and managed to look so hot that Kurt remained distracted for a second before he finally got his head back in the game and turned his car around.

"Well, it's too late for that," Kurt said flatly as he saw Blaine driving victoriously across the finish line. He glared with mock seriousness at the word *Winner!* being flashed across Blaine's half of the screen. "He cheated, y'know that?" he said to the game.

"You *did* have an unfair advantage to start off," Cooper acknowledged.

"I'm only two inches taller than him!" Kurt exclaimed, rolling his eyes. "That's hardly an advantage, nor is it unfair."

"Either way, I won," Blaine declared proudly. "I want a prize. And you have to give it to me."

"Oh, fine." Kurt sighed, pretending to sound exasperated. "If it's one of those giant stuffed animals out of the claw machine, I'm sorry in advance if it doesn't work. I've always been awful at those things and—"

"Kurt," Blaine said abruptly, cutting off his rambling. "Just kiss me."

Kurt smiled. "That is so much easier to do, and I like it more, so it's win-win."

He leaned over and gave his fiancé a quick but sweet congratulatory kiss on the lips. Blaine may have unfairly beaten him in the insignificant racing game, but Kurt knew that he was the real winner to have ended up with such an incredible man.

xxx

It was a sticky, humid summer night, so both Kurt and Blaine had decided to forgo the majority of their clothing before crawling into bed together. Both of them were down to nothing but boxer briefs, and Kurt knew that considering how fantastic their sex life had been, those would probably be gone before long as

well. But as appealing as that sounded, he was perfectly content for now to snuggle up peacefully in his absolute favorite place in the world – Blaine's arms.

"Tonight was fun," he hummed with a content smile after a long but comfortable silence. He shifted his head on Blaine's chest so that his ear was pressed right up above his fiancé's beating heart.

"I agree. I think we should keep finding more fun things to distract ourselves until we think of some way to work on my mom and dad," Blaine said. "Our firm's having a company outing to the White Sox game later this week. I can try to get us tickets to that."

"Mmmm, that would be fun," Kurt agreed. Surprisingly enough, he'd always been a little bit of a baseball fan. "I think Ellie would like that, too. Even if she doesn't really pay attention to the game, these ballparks always have fun stuff going on for kids."

"Awesome. I'll put in our name for some tickets tomorrow at work," Blaine told him. "I don't know what to do for the next few days, though. My parents are still in town...when I talked to them last night, before they came, I was telling them all about how I was going to take them sightseeing around the city and all this other dumb stuff. I guess those plans are ruined now."

"We'll think of something else. Cooper's still here, too," Kurt reminded him. "We can still take *him* sightseeing."

"Yeah, but Coop's *been* here before. He shot a movie on location downtown about a year before I moved here," Blaine said dejectedly. "I mean, I guess we can still show him around, but it won't really be new to him."

"Hey." Kurt picked his head up off of Blaine's chest so he could look into his eyes. He'd sensed that Blaine had gotten upset again when the subject of his parents was brought up, so Kurt wanted to do anything he could to reassure him. "We'll think of something to do that will get us through these next few days, okay? I'm not just going to let you sit around feeling sorry for yourself."

Blaine smiled wryly up at him. "You take such good care of me, y'know that? You are way too good to me." He reached up to caress Kurt's cheek; Kurt smiled beautifully and leaned his face into Blaine's touch.

"It's because I *love* you." Kurt leaned down and kissed Blaine's forehead lovingly, with so much tenderness and affection that Blaine couldn't have spoken even if he'd tried. After letting his lips linger for a few

seconds, Kurt pulled back and looked into Blaine's eyes as he stroked the side of his face. "You silly boy. When are you going to realize that?"

Blaine smiled softly and looked up at Kurt through his long, dark eyelashes. "I know you do. It's still just a little unbelievable at times, is all."

Kurt shifted a little bit, letting his own bare legs tangle up with Blaine's under the covers. "I'll never let you forget it," he said softly. "Especially not now when we both need each other more than ever."

He placed his head over Blaine's heart again and gently curled his fingers through the soft dusting of chest hair. After a few seconds he turned his head to the side just slightly and pressed his lips gently against Blaine's chest, then spoke without moving his mouth off of his fiancé's gorgeously tanned skin.

"You're so perfect," he whispered, knowing full well that earlier that day Blaine had felt anything but.

Blaine's arms wound around Kurt's back, pulling him closer.

"I just need you right here, like this," he murmured. "I need to feel you in my arms just so I know that *something* is right in my world."

"I think there's a lot that's right in our world," Kurt mused. "We just need to stop dwelling on what close-minded people like your parents think. We need to forget about their intolerance and focus on our love."

He placed more kisses on Blaine's chest, covering every inch of skin he could reach, still managing to speak. "Because I love you more than life, Blaine."

The sensation of Blaine's entire body trembling beneath him as he spoke those simple but powerful words was almost too overwhelming for Kurt. Suddenly there was a strong but gentle hand on the side of his cheek guiding his face up to look into those warm twin pools of golden hazel.

"Kurt." His voice was broken with desperation. "Make me forget."

It didn't take Kurt very long at all to catch on. From that point forward, for the rest of the night until they fell asleep, Blaine managed to forget about all his troubles and everything else in the world, other than Kurt and his love.

xxx

Blaine got home from work relatively early the next afternoon. Ellie was at her camp and Cooper was off doing his own thing downtown; the four of them were going to meet up and have dinner out later that evening. Kurt had had the apartment all to himself, which was strangely relaxing but a bit lonely as well. He was relieved when Blaine finally arrived.

"Hey." Blaine smiled as he greeted his husband-to-be with a kiss and set his briefcase down on the counter. "You ready to plan this wedding?"

Kurt blinked, admittedly taken aback. "You mean...now?"

Blaine shrugged. "Yeah, why not? We've got a couple hours before we need to pick up Ellie and meet up with Coop. We were planning on talking about everything soon anyway, so I thought we could just sit down and start to work on the basic details...the location, maybe a date, stuff like that."

Kurt had to admit that he was nowhere near prepared to start planning *today*, but Blaine's utter unpredictability was one of the things he loved the most about the man he was going to marry. He figured there was no harm in starting to work out the general details.

He stepped into Blaine's office and grabbed the laptop in case they needed to look anything up online, then carried it out to the kitchen table. Blaine was already sitting in his usual chair, writing something on a yellow legal pad. Kurt set the computer down on the table and took a seat next to Blaine, who finally clicked his pen to close it and pushed the notebook towards Kurt a little bit.

"It looks dumb, but I've found this is the best way to go about planning anything," Blaine explained as Kurt studied the chart of who-what-where-when that Blaine had drawn up. "We don't want to do *too* much planning today, so this will at least give us an easy way to get started with the basics."

"Okay." Kurt moved the notebook even closer to himself and snatched the pen out of Blaine's hand. "First one's easy." He smiled as he located the box labeled *Who* and wrote in *Kurt & Blaine*, then drew a little heart next to it for good measure.

Blaine had to giggle when he saw what Kurt had done. "By 'who' I was thinking more along the lines of some people we might want to invite, but I think I like that better."

"Ahh. Sorry." Kurt set the pen down and pushed it along with the notepad back over toward Blaine. "Maybe you should write."

"It's okay. We'll come back to that. It's probably a good idea to start narrowing down the guest list later, anyway," Blaine suggested. "All right. Next is 'what.'" He clicked the pen and began to write, reading his words aloud as he did so. "*An outdoor wedding ceremony with family and friends with a catered reception to follow.*"

Kurt smiled as he watched the words materializing on the page, flowing from the tip of the pen as Blaine wrote. Everything was suddenly becoming more and more real to him, but at the same time he couldn't believe that he was actually sitting here with Blaine and the two of them were planning their wedding.

"Where," Blaine read next, then turned to Kurt. "Where would you like to get married, Kurt?"

"Hey, don't stick this all on me. You're getting married, too," Kurt reminded him teasingly. "Where would *you* like to get married, Blaine?"

"Somewhere outside," Blaine told him, reaching for the computer and turning it on. "But we already agreed that that was happening. Let's research some places and maybe just get some ideas, we don't have to narrow it down *today*."

But, as it turned out, they *did* manage to narrow it down that day. After about an hour of Googling different local outdoor venues and discussing which ones they liked and didn't like, they finally decided on a place where they wanted to get married.

"So, Wrigley Square in Millennium Park," Blaine confirmed finally, "right at the foot of the monument. That okay with you?"

"That is definitely okay with me," Kurt replied, studying the picture on the screen. He'd seen it in person before, but now that he knew that it was where he was going to be married, he was looking at it in a new light. "I think that'll be really cool, with the pillars and the fountain...it's definitely unique, but not so unusual that people will be questioning our sanity."

"And look at this." Blaine pointed to a little blurb of text on the screen underneath the picture. "'Wrigley Square has always been an ideal and picturesque location for weddings' ...blah blah blah...oh, here. 'In June

2011, 35 same-sex couples gathered here for a mass ceremony in which they were all joined in civil unions.' How awesome is that?"

"It's pretty awesome," Kurt agreed with a smile. "And now over a decade later, we're going to be legally married in that exact same spot. Speaking of getting married, now that we know 'where,' we should decide on 'when.'"

"Good idea." Blaine reached for the large desk calendar, which he'd placed on the other side of the table, and scooted it closer to them. He began flipping through the large sheets. "Okay, so we're looking at sometime next spring... and a weekend would probably work best, just because people are gonna need to get here from out of town and stuff." The calendar was open to the page for the following April, so Blaine stopped paging through it. "When is Buckley on spring break?"

"Oh, we don't have to do it then," Kurt told him, shaking his head. "I just said that because then I wouldn't have to miss work, and I don't know how well the kids would do with a substitute for that length of time, but it's really no big deal, I can find someone to sub for me for as long as—"

"Kurt." Blaine gently cut him off, then repeated the last question he'd asked. "You are adorable when you ramble, but when is spring break?"

"It's from Monday the eleventh through Friday the fifteenth. We have that entire week off," Kurt told him.

Blaine studied the calendar. "What do you think about having the wedding on Saturday the ninth, then?"

"I'm definitely okay with that," Kurt said, trying to hold back a smile. "April ninth it is."

Blaine marked the date on the calendar simply by drawing a heart around the number 9.

"April ninth," he said proudly. "That's the date that we're going to be celebrating our anniversary every year for the rest of our lives, Kurt. How amazing *is* this?"

Kurt had given up trying to contain his smile. When he spoke, he could barely raise his voice above a whisper. "It's *so* amazing."

Blaine returned his smile, sharing a lingering gaze with Kurt for a second before turning back to the calendar. "Then that gives us from Sunday the tenth through the following Sunday, the seventeenth, for

our honeymoon," he said, then glanced at Kurt. "I'm definitely open to suggestions for that, because I want whatever makes you happy, but I'll just tell you that I *do* have somewhere special in mind that I really want to take you."

Kurt's heart started to flutter in anticipation. "Will you tell me, or is it a surprise?"

"I'll tell you if you really want to know, but I'd really like to keep it a surprise for as long as possible," Blaine admitted. He placed his hand over Kurt's on the table, locking their fingers together. "But I want you to be able to relax and enjoy our time together that week. That's why I wanted to go that week, while you were on spring break. I knew you'd be all worried about your kids, so this way you won't have to miss any work. Sound good?"

Kurt didn't say anything. He stood up and took the two steps necessary to get to where Blaine was sitting, then lowered himself down into Blaine's lap and looped his arms around his neck.

"You really know me way too well," he said with a breathless smile. "And a surprise honeymoon...Blaine, this is so romantic. It's all I ever dreamed of but never thought I'd get."

"Yeah, well, you deserve it," Blaine murmured. "You deserve a perfect wedding day, Kurt, and I want to make sure that it's nothing less than that."

Kurt was on the verge of tears and he didn't even care. Earlier that same year, he'd been wondering if the pain and violence would ever stop. Now, here he was, sitting with the man of his dreams as they planned their wedding together. It was all so surreal to him. He ducked his head down and captured Blaine's lips in a kiss, partially to show his love and appreciation and partially as a way of making sure Blaine was really there and this was really happening.

"I love you so much," Blaine whispered when they broke away a few seconds later. "*So much*, Kurt."

"I love you too," was Kurt's broken response. He was still smiling, completely heady and drunk on love as he grabbed Blaine's yellow notepad off the table and began to read the details of their wedding out loud.

"So what I'm getting from this," he began, "is that Kurt and Blaine are getting married in an outdoor wedding ceremony on April ninth at Wrigley Square in Millennium Park, Chicago, Illinois, with a catered reception to follow." He set the notepad down at the table and smiled at Blaine. "That sounds absolutely perfect to me."

"It does, but there's one thing this list is missing." Blaine reached around Kurt and grabbed the notepad and pen to write one more thing, making sure to position the paper in such a way that Kurt couldn't see what he was writing. He wrote for a long time; Kurt busied himself by playing with a few curls that had sprung loose from the gel on the top of Blaine's head.

"Better." When he was finally finished, he set the pen down and handed the notepad to Kurt.

As he scanned the page, Kurt noticed that Blaine had added one more box to the bottom of his chart. This one was labeled *Why*.

"'Because I, Blaine Anderson, would love nothing more than to take you, Kurt Hummel, to be my husband,'" Kurt read aloud, fresh tears springing to his eyes. "'To have and to hold from this day forward; for better or for worse; for richer or for poorer; in sickness and in health; to love and to cherish from this day forward until death do us part. I love and adore you beyond words, Kurt, and I look forward to spending forever with you.' Oh, *Blaine*."

He was sobbing by this point, and Blaine instinctively wrapped his arms around him to hold him close.

"God, if I'm this much of a wreck now, imagine how bad it'll be at the actual wedding," Kurt giggled through his tears.

Blaine shook his head. When he spoke, there were joyful tears evident in his voice, too. "No, I'll be the same way, trust me. Remember how I completely lost it when you proposed?"

Kurt nodded, smiling fondly at the memory. "I thought it was adorable. You might be one of the most powerful attorneys in the state, but you're not afraid to cry, and I think that's so sweet. Plus, it doesn't exactly hurt my ego to know that I'm the one who made you that happy. To see that gorgeous smile and know that I'm the reason for it." He traced the soft curve of Blaine's lips with his index finger. "It still amazes me to know that I can do that to you."

"What can I say? You make me happy," Blaine said simply. "And it still amazes *me* that I get to keep you forever. I can't even *believe* my luck."

"Well, get used to it," Kurt told him with a smirk. "Because I'm going to be around for a *long* time."

They were both smiling as their lips met in another tender kiss. Blaine knew immediately that he didn't mind whatsoever that Kurt was always going to be there. He didn't mind one bit.

xxx

Blaine had to admit that his older brother was one of the most observant people he'd ever known. When the four of them met up for dinner later that night, they'd barely gotten situated at the table before Cooper spoke up.

"So Blaine, Kurt, what's going on with the two of you? Something seems different. You seem happier."

"They've been smiling at each other ever since they picked me up from camp," Ellie told him. "*Something's* up."

"You two get along way too well," Kurt said with a smirk, then glanced at Blaine. "Should we tell them?"

Blaine responded by taking Kurt's hand and smiling at his daughter and brother. "Kurt and I sat down together earlier today and worked out some of the details of the wedding."

"We're getting married on April ninth at Wrigley Square in Millennium Park downtown," Kurt continued with a smile of his own, picking up right where Blaine had left off.

Cooper immediately jumped up from the table, borderline knocking over his glass of Coke, and stepped around to squish Kurt and Blaine both in a gigantic hug which was somewhat awkward seeing how they were both still sitting. Ellie, not wanting to be left out, got up from her seat as well and scurried around the table to join in on the massive group hug.

"Cooper...can't breathe," Kurt gasped, collapsing into giggles all the same. "I feel the love, but I kinda need oxygen."

"Sorry 'bout that." Cooper let both of them go. "Seriously, though, I'm so proud of you guys for going through with this even after what happened yesterday. I definitely think it's safe to say I have the coolest little brother and brother-in-law in the world."

"I won't *officially* be your brother-in-law for another eight months, three weeks and two days," Kurt pointed out. His proud smirk fell into doubt after a few seconds. "I think I counted that right."

"How many days is that?" Ellie asked excitedly. "Tomorrow at camp we're gonna make paper chains. I can make one with enough links as days until the wedding and we can rip one off every day until it gets here!"

"Oh, god, sweetie. That's going to be a *lot* of paper," Kurt pointed out, laughing. "Maybe you should save some for the other kids." He took a sip of his Diet Coke and smiled. "All I know is that you are going to be the cutest flower girl *ever*."

"Yay!" She clapped her hands cheerfully. "Is Uncle Cooper going to be in the wedding?"

"Yep. He and Uncle Finn are going to be co-best men," Blaine told her.

"Dibs on making the toast," Cooper announced.

"Don't both people have to be here for you to call dibs?" Blaine asked.

Cooper rolled his eyes with mock exasperation. "Fine. We can both do a toast. Or do one together, something like that. We'll get together before the wedding and work something out, I'm sure. I haven't seen him in forever...maybe I'll invite him out to LA later this summer and we can go to a Dodgers game or something just to catch up."

"Oh! Speaking of ball games, that reminds me." Blaine fished his wallet out of his pocket and took out a long white envelope. "Coop, you won't be in town this Thursday, will you?"

"Nah. I gotta fly back to LA on Monday," Cooper told them. "Why, what's happening on Thursday?"

"We're having a company outing to the Sox game. I just got the tickets today at work...Kurt and I thought it would be fun to go with Ellie." Blaine slid a few tickets out of the already-opened envelope. "But for some reason, they gave me four tickets. I didn't realize it until I opened the envelope when I was already home, so I couldn't just give it to someone at the office...I was gonna see if you wanted to come, but I didn't think you'd still be around then."

"Just find someone else you can invite along or give the extra ticket to," Cooper suggested. "You guys know a lot of people. I'm sure you can find *someone* who would want to go."

The realization struck Kurt so quickly that he wouldn't have been surprised if an actual light bulb had appeared over his head.

"Actually," he said, "I know just the person we can take."

xxx

In all his fourteen years, most of which had been spent playing or watching baseball, Michael James Horowitz had never been to an actual live game. It was an extremely pleasant surprise, then, when Mr. Hummel called him at Hummel House and invited Michael to come to the White Sox game that Thursday night with him, Blaine, and their daughter. Michael had spent years watching his favorite team on TV and wistfully wishing that he could be there to watch the action in person, so of course he jumped at the chance to go.

Stepping into an actual major league ballpark was like stepping into his lifelong dream. And not only that, but for once in his life he actually felt like he was part of a family. They stopped by a food stand on the way to their seats and Blaine asked Michael and Ellie, their daughter, what they would like to eat. He didn't seem to be awkward or uncomfortable with treating Michael as part of the family, and Michael thought that was even cooler than being here at an actual baseball game.

Their seats were in the lower deck along the third base line, just a few rows back from the White Sox dugout. Michael hadn't been expecting them to be so close to the field, but then again, Blaine was a rich lawyer who could probably have his choice of seats anywhere in the park. He watched in awe as the players left the dugout one by one, heading out to the field to warm up. *Someday that'll be me down there.*

He was so busy taking in the overwhelming magic of his lifelong dream that he was startled when little Ellie Hummel-Anderson tapped him on the arm. "Look down there."

Michael looked to see where she was pointing. Right by the dugout, just a few yards in front of where they were sitting, a few of the White Sox players were signing autographs for some fans that were gathered there.

Ellie turned excitedly to her fathers. "They're doing autographs! Can we go?"

Mr. Hummel smiled. Michael realized for the first time that his smile and his daughter's were almost identical. "Michael, do you want to take her down there so you guys can get some autographs?"

"Yeah, definitely." He felt a huge involuntary smile growing on his face, completely unable to believe that he was about to meet some of his heroes. He picked his game program up from under his seat so the players would have something to sign, then stood up. "C'mon, Ellie."

Kurt's heart overflowed with happiness as he watched the two of them descend the steps and head down to the row of seats right in front of the dugout where the rest of the fans waiting for autographs stood. Here was a kid who had not only grown up in extreme poverty, but also been kicked out of his home because of something he couldn't change. Now he was really getting to experience his dream for the first time.

Suddenly someone tapped him on the shoulder from behind. He immediately turned around to see an elderly couple in the seats directly behind them, smiling warmly.

"You two are good dads for bringing your kids here," the woman told him. "Your son looked so happy."

"Oh, he's not—," Kurt started to say, then hesitated for a moment. "My son."

He looked at Blaine, and Blaine looked back at him, and the two of them glanced down toward where Michael and Ellie were standing and getting autographs. As usual, he'd been able to tell exactly what Blaine was thinking just from looking into his warm hazel eyes. Kurt had suddenly thought of an idea, and he was happy to see that Blaine seemed to be on the same page.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Too soon, summer faded into fall. Both Kurt and Blaine were suddenly struck with the realization that, although it seemed a lifetime away, their wedding would be here before either of them knew it. They were being as proactive as possible – they'd managed to get the venue booked just in the nick of time and had all the floral arrangements and decorations all figured out. They'd managed to get a lot accomplished and that made Kurt extremely happy, given that he was a perfectionist, but he had to admit that it was stressing him out a bit.

One afternoon after returning home from a long day of teaching, he spent nearly two hours on the phone with the caterer, trying to work out the menu he and Blaine had chosen. Just a few minutes after hanging up, he was still leaning against the kitchen counter running his hands through his hair, trying to figure out how all of this was going to work, when the door to their apartment opened. Blaine was home.

Blaine was wearing a cheerful smile when he stepped through the door, but his expression fell before he could say a word when he saw Kurt.

"You look exhausted." He greeted Kurt with a kiss, letting his lips linger for just a second longer than usual.

Kurt smirked humorlessly. "Nice to see you, too," he cracked dryly. "I was just on the phone with the caterer for longer than anyone should have to be."

Blaine frowned. "That doesn't sound fun."

"It wasn't," Kurt said, then sighed. "I don't remember it being this stressful when I planned my dad and Carole's wedding back in high school."

"You weren't the one getting married that time," Blaine reminded him gently. He took Kurt's hand and guided him over toward the kitchen table; Kurt practically collapsed into a chair. Blaine remained standing behind him and began softly massaging his shoulders. "Think about it this way. It's gonna be so worth it when we're exchanging rings, and saying 'I do,' and being pronounced husband and husband."

"Oh god, that feels good," Kurt practically moaned, relaxing instantly under Blaine's touch. "And it'll be worth it when I'm spending the night with my amazing husband on our honeymoon in some mysterious exotic locale which I do not know the name of yet."

"I actually just called the travel agent and started setting up plans while I was on my lunch break today. I could tell you where we're going, if you want," Blaine offered. His hands kept moving in slow, steady kneading motions on Kurt's shoulders, soothing the tension in his muscles.

"No!" Kurt protested with a giggle. "I want it to be a surprise for as long as possible."

"If you insist," Blaine said with a casual shrug. "You're going to love it, though. I promise."

"I already know I will," Kurt sighed happily, closing his eyes, feeling more relaxed than he had all day.

"By the way, before you get *too* comfortable," Blaine said after a few seconds, "would you be okay with leaving for the honeymoon the day after the wedding? I know that's kind of what we were planning on doing anyway, but I just wanted to make sure you were still all right with it. I need to get back to the travel agent guy and confirm when we want to leave."

"Oh, yeah, that's definitely okay with me," Kurt told him. "We could spend our wedding night in a nice hotel around here, then leave the next morning to fly to wherever it is you're whisking me away to." He turned around and smiled at Blaine, who was still absentmindedly rubbing his shoulders although Kurt was noticeably much more relaxed now.

"You make it sound unrealistically romantic when you put it like that. 'Whisking you away,'" Blaine joked. "I'm only human, you know."

"You don't give yourself enough credit." Kurt turned around in his chair so he was facing Blaine with a sweet smile on his face. "You happen to be quite the romantic, Blaine Hummel-Anderson."

They'd fallen into the habit of using their future combined surname when they were alone like this, just as their own special little way of commemorating the joyous occasion that was just a few months away. Even so, Blaine smiled every time his husband-to-be referred to him as such. It made everything seem that much more real to know that he and Kurt were going to share a last name sometime in the not-so-distant future, because they were going to be married. It was still hard for him to believe that all of this was actually happening.

"I have good reason to be." Blaine, for once the taller of the two, smiled as he leaned down to give Kurt a kiss; Kurt tilted his head up to meet him, a smile of his own on his lips.

When they broke apart, Blaine smiled at him for a moment longer before moving to sit in the chair next to him at the table. "By the way, something else happened while I was at work today."

Kurt chewed nervously on his lip. "Yeah?"

"Emily called me from Hummel House," Blaine said slowly. "She said Michael's been talking about wanting a foster family, or a family to adopt him, or something like that."

Kurt watched his expression carefully. Blaine paused for a moment before continuing. "She said he'd mentioned us and our family."

In all honesty, Kurt had no problem whatsoever with what Blaine had just said. Sure, they would need to discuss some things before any steps were taken, but he'd always had the feeling that Michael needed people like himself and Blaine to take care of him. Not because they were gay and so was Michael; instead, because they truly cared about him and accepted him exactly as he was - something that he'd unfortunately never gotten from his own father.

"I would be more than happy to have him come live with us, or even adopt him if that's what he wants," Kurt said. "I mean, I already see him kind of as a son. Is that weird? I'm not even technically old enough to be his father."

Blaine shrugged. "Neither of us are, but that doesn't matter in the grand scheme of things. What *does* matter is that you and I are adults; about to be legally married in a few months; both of us make a decent living; we can provide food, water, shelter, all that...but most importantly, we accept the kid just the way he is."

Kurt digested all of this for a second. "You're right," he said. "And when you think about what he's said about his home life...his dad didn't really seem to be much of a dad. His mom died when he was pretty young. I don't even really think he knows what it's like to have actual parents. We can be that for him, if that's what he wants."

"Definitely," Blaine agreed. "I mean, even without the whole homophobic asshole thing with his dad. For some reason I get the feeling that he never even really spent much time with Michael. You think his old man ever took him to the park to play catch and practice fielding grounders? Do you think they ever just sat down and watched the Sox on TV together? For some reason, I get the feeling that they didn't."

"The kid's basically been on his own his whole life," Kurt mused. "Well, if he's sure about this, he can go from having one dad who doesn't really count, to two dads."

"Two dads who actually give a shit about him." Blaine smiled proudly. He took Kurt's hand. "I think we should do this. Obviously we're going to have to sit down at some point and work out how a second child is going to affect us financially, but I know we can afford it...and besides, he deserves a second chance, and it's never too late for that."

Kurt moved his chair closer to Blaine's and pulled him into a hug.

"This is actually happening," he murmured into Blaine's shoulder. "We're actually having another kid."

Blaine laughed and pulled Kurt closer. Everything was far from official, but he already knew that Kurt was going to be the best father Michael Horowitz ever could have asked for.

xxx

The wedding preparations seemed never-ending, but for all the pressure Kurt had put on himself, he was thankful to have an opportunity to relax and have fun for once. A few weekends after his initial discussion with Blaine about the possibility of adopting Michael, he and his husband-to-be dropped Ellie off at Emily's house so she could have a much-anticipated play date with Parker, who she affectionately called her "best friend." Then he and Blaine headed into the heart of downtown together, where they met up with Savannah for their official engagement photo shoot. To Kurt's delight, she seemed just as excited as they were.

"Oh my god, you guys both look fantastic," she gushed almost immediately. "I don't mean to brag, but these photos are going to be amazing. I already know it."

"I take full credit for the outfits," Kurt said proudly. He had to admit, the two of them *did* look fantastic. They'd decided to go for a casual urban theme for their shoot, and Kurt, the more style-conscious of the two, had spent what seemed like hours browsing through catalogs for the biggest trends in men's fashion this fall. He'd finally decided on a navy blue peacoat with a black scarf for himself and a beige sweater over a white button-down for Blaine, both with dark-wash jeans.

"He went a little catalog crazy," Blaine said simply, and Kurt shot him a quizzical look. Before either of them knew what was happening, Savannah raised her camera and snapped a picture.

"Hey!" Kurt giggled when he heard the shutter click. "I didn't know we were starting."

Savannah showed him the picture she'd just taken. Blaine was shrugging a little bit, and Kurt was glancing at him with one eyebrow quirked. Both had the tiniest hints of smiles on their faces.

"Oh, that's actually pretty cute," Kurt admitted, trying to hide a smile.

"Sometimes candids like that one turn out even better than posed pictures. They're more natural," Savannah told them. "Anyway, congratulations. You guys have your first engagement photo."

Over the course of the next few hours, they obtained even more engagement photos – three hundred and sixteen, to be exact. Blaine thought they must have covered nearly the entire downtown area, but he admired Savannah's genuine passion for what she did – including the relentless way she hailed taxi after taxi in order to get them around the city. When all was said and done, the trio took a seat on a park bench – Savannah in between Kurt and Blaine, so both of them could see – and looked through every single picture she had taken.

She'd captured them from behind, standing side-by-side on the Franklin Street bridge, Blaine leaning against the railing and looking out at the river with Kurt's head on his shoulder. Just as she'd mentioned at the beginning of the session, she stayed true to her love of candid shots, such as those she'd managed to get of the two talking and laughing as they walked hand-in-hand down the Magnificent Mile. She had several adorable shots of the two sitting on the steps beside the fountain at the Hancock Building, kissing and nuzzling noses. Kurt, the taller of the two, dipping Blaine into a passionate kiss right along the water's edge outside the Adler Planetarium. Blaine holding Kurt close and kissing his forehead underneath the L train tracks. Cuddling in a doorway framed by green ivy and bright graffiti. Playfully chasing each other around a grassy field with the Ferris wheel at Navy Pier in the background. Embracing tenderly on the exact spot where they would be married, Wrigley Square at Millennium Park, faces close and eyes closed as they melted into each other. Finally, to end the shoot, they'd gone up to Blaine's office and stood in front of the floor-to-ceiling glass windows that took up the entire far wall, using the entire city as their backdrop as they shared tender kisses in the glow of the sunset.

Kurt was practically in tears by the time they'd gone through all the photos. He knew it might have been pathetic, but they'd turned out even better than he'd dreamed.

"Savannah, these are so beautiful," he told her sincerely. "They turned out perfect. Thank you so much for doing this for us."

"I can't even pick a favorite. They all look incredible," Blaine agreed with a smile. "And doing the shoot was so fun. Thank you."

Savannah gave them an appreciative smile. "Oh, no problem. Thank *you* for asking me to do this. You guys are adorable *and* a ton of fun to work with."

Kurt was still smiling at the very last picture, which was still displayed on the screen. "I can only imagine how gorgeous the wedding pictures will be," he told Savannah with a wink.

"Those will be beautiful, too. I already know it," Savannah said confidently. "You boys make my job easy."

They stayed there for a little while longer, Kurt and Blaine discussing which shots were their favorites and Savannah offering her input, before deciding that they should probably get going. It was dark outside, and they still had to get back to Emily's to pick up Ellie. They had no idea that when they got there, their world was about to be turned upside down yet again.

xxx

"Stressed out" was the only decent way of describing how Emily looked when she answered the door. Her dark hair was falling out of a messy ponytail; she wasn't wearing makeup and there were dark circles under her eyes. She looked like she desperately needed a good night's sleep – but even so, Savannah (who had come with Kurt and Blaine so that she could show her girlfriend the pictures from their photo shoot right away) smiled as she leaned over to greet her with a kiss.

Emily was blushing and even smiled the tiniest bit when Savannah broke away, which brought life to her tired complexion. "Hey, you guys, how did it go?"

"It was amazing. She did a fantastic job and Blaine and I had so much fun," Kurt told her with a smile.

"You have to see these. I'm so happy with how they turned out," Savannah gushed. "These two did beautifully."

When Emily spoke, she sounded just as distraught as she'd looked when they had first seen her. "Oh, I'd love to, but I actually really need to talk to Kurt and Blaine. It's important...something happened."

For whatever reason, Blaine suddenly had a vile taste in his mouth. "Is it bad?" he asked, even though he knew that it probably was.

Emily nodded and wheeled herself aside so they could get through the doorway. "Well, it's not bad *yet*, but it has the potential to turn into a whole big mess. Do you have a minute?"

The three of them stepped through the doorway of Emily's small but comfortable little house. Savannah immediately excused herself, saying that she was going to get on the computer and start getting the pictures organized so that Blaine, Kurt and Emily could speak privately. Emily led Kurt and Blaine past the living room, where Parker and Ellie were watching some 3D animated movie about talking animals, into the kitchen where she rolled herself over to the counter and began pouring a cup of coffee.

"Would either of you like anything to drink?" she asked the two of them.

Kurt nodded at the coffee pot she'd been using. "I'll have some of that, please."

"Me too," Blaine told her.

She got them their coffee and the three of them sat around the kitchen table. Emily sounded nervous when she finally spoke.

"Okay. You two are still interested in maybe having Michael come to live with you, right?"

"Yes," Kurt told her, nodding. After discussing it further with Blaine earlier in the week, he'd called Emily and let her know that they were more than willing to bring Michael into their family if that was what they wanted.

"Okay. I talked to Michael about it the other day and he's still very much intent on that as well. He said he thinks he'd really feel at home with you and your family and that he already *does* feel like part of the family when he's around you guys and Ellie," Emily explained. "We were going to organize a time for you two to come in and talk with him about it, but there were some legal things I needed to take care of first."

Blaine noticeably perked up a bit when she said "legal things." If the tone of the conversation hadn't been so serious, Kurt might have smiled. It was sweet how passionate Blaine was about his profession.

"Nearly every single kid who runs away from home and comes on their own to live at Hummel House has come from a situation that involves violence and physical abuse. When they're ready to go into foster care or even to have a family permanently adopt them, there's a process we have to go through in order to prove that the child's birth parents or legal guardians are unfit to raise the child. That way we can officially give the new family legal custody of the child."

Blaine nodded. "That makes sense."

"With every other kid we have living at Hummel – and there aren't a whole ton of them who have come on their own – that whole process has been relatively easy because there was clear evidence of abuse in their former household, or at least clear evidence of some other type of problem – alcohol, poverty, anything like that which would make a parent unfit, unable or unwilling to raise a child. We were able to get those kids into the custody of foster or adoptive families almost right away. With Michael, it's different. His father didn't exactly have the best financial situation going on, but he's got a relatively decent job that can support Michael and his brother. He doesn't appear to be an alcoholic or a drug addict. They have a house. He's obviously very homophobic, but there are no clear signs of any kind of abuse that would be able to be used against him. That's where this process is going to start getting difficult."

"But Blaine and I will be able to give him an even better home life than that," Kurt protested. "First of all, there's the obvious fact that we are both clearly the furthest thing from homophobic. Plus, we'd give him better financial security. We make great money."

He paused, frowning. "Blaine makes great money. I do what I can. But still."

"It doesn't matter," Emily said. Her voice was grave and solemn. "I had to call Michael's father and explain the situation. The conversation went okay, because he made it clear that he had no desire to care for or support his gay son, but then he kind of dragged it out of me that his son would be living with a gay couple if this whole adoption thing were to actually happen. I didn't mention you two by name, but Michael's father wouldn't have any of it. He said he'd rather have Michael living at home with him than living with two...y'know. I don't think I have to say the exact term he used."

"I understand," Kurt said. His face was burning with anger, but he forced himself to stay calm.

Blaine shook his head. "No. We can't let that happen. His father is a known homophobe and Michael's out to him now. He can't go back there. It's not safe."

"That's what I think, too, but we need to prove that somehow," Emily agreed. "Michael told me that he has no desire whatsoever to go back and live with his dad. He said he wants to live with you guys. He's old enough to have an opinion on this kind of thing, so hopefully his feelings will be taken into consideration with this whole mess."

"And even if his father isn't violent or abusive now, that's not to say that he won't turn down that path if Michael goes back there," Kurt added. "I can see that happening. Even if he's not physically abusive, you know there's going to be the emotional and verbal side of it. He's made it perfectly clear how he feels about Michael being the way he is, and there's nothing good that can happen if he gets his son back."

Emily glanced at Blaine. "As the only person with any legal experience here, what do you think?"

Blaine was staring into space, somehow managing to look completely focused at the same time as he thought.

"I think something definitely needs to be done," he said. "We wouldn't even be having this discussion if Michael were going to live with a straight couple. The only reason his old man wants him to come back and live with him, from what I gather, is because he doesn't want Michael to be around people who might influence his sexual orientation. He probably thinks that by having Michael come back to live with him, or by having him live with a heterosexual couple, he'll 'learn' how to be straight."

"That's sick and twisted, but knowing how his father is, it wouldn't surprise me if that's exactly what he thinks," Kurt acknowledged.

"Like you said, only bad things can happen if Michael starts living with his dad again. It's not safe for him there. Even if he *did* have some enlightening experience and realized that there's nothing wrong with being gay, Michael would still be living in fear the whole time, worrying that he'd go back to his own ways."

"Just look at me," Kurt mumbled, thinking of how enamored he'd become when Dave Karofsky had supposedly repented from his violent ways in high school.

"Exactly," Blaine agreed, nodding. "Your experience is living proof that no matter how much someone appears to have changed, there's still a chance that they could snap back into being the way they were at any moment. We can't take that chance with a kid like Michael. He needs to be in a loving, accepting home where there's no chance whatsoever of his parents turning on him. If he wants to come live with us, because he feels that he can find that acceptance in our home – which he can – then that needs to be our goal. This is a custody issue. There's no way we can get around this without going to court. We need to show them that, given his father's attitude about homosexuality, there's absolutely no way that Michael can ever be comfortable or feel safe in that home."

Kurt and Emily were sitting in stunned silence the whole time as he spoke. Neither of them so much as blinked.

"Okay. Well, it looks like we've got ourselves an attorney," Emily said a few seconds after Blaine had finished talking.

"You can represent 'the gay family who wants to adopt Michael,'" Kurt said as jokingly as possible. "Would you be able to work it that our names wouldn't be mentioned in court, or anything like that? Like...would we be able to remain anonymous? I feel like things would be unnecessarily complicated if they found out that the attorney for Michael's side of the case would also be one of his adoptive fathers."

Blaine considered this. "I'll see what I can do, but they might need our names," he admitted. "We might be able to use pseudonyms or something. I'll look into it."

Emily seemed much more relieved now after getting everything out in the open. "Michael's going to be so happy when he hears about this," she told them. "He was so excited about the possibility of coming to live with you guys, so he was pretty crushed when I tried to explain the whole situation with his dad."

"We're excited about it, too," Kurt said. "We were planning on maybe making the whole adoption thing official this coming summer. School will be over, and Michael will be out of eighth grade, so it won't be weird for me to have him as a student. Plus, we'll be legally married by then. Blaine said that would make the whole process a lot easier as far as being able to have custody and all that."

Blaine slumped over, looking exhausted, and rested his head in his hand. "I have to admit, I never saw this coming," he said. "But we'll figure it out. I know we will."

"If anyone can win this for us and Michael, it's you." Kurt smiled affectionately and took Blaine's free hand, rubbing gentle circles into the skin with his thumb. Emily nodded in agreement, and it looked like she was about to say something when suddenly Ellie and Parker darted out into the kitchen.

"Do you want chocolate or vanilla?" Parker was asking Ellie as they scurried over to the freezer. Either they hadn't seen the three adults in the room or had chosen not to pay attention to them. Emily cleared her throat and her son immediately turned around.

"Hi, Mommy! Hi, Mr. Kurt and Mr. Blaine! Can Ellie and I have some ice cream?"

Emily sighed. "Parker, it's way too late for ice cream. Bedtime was an hour ago but I let you stay up later because Ellie is here and I needed to talk to her dads about something."

Blaine glanced at the clock above the stove and stood up. "Oh, god. We should get going. Ellie, sweetie, come on. It's past your bedtime, too."

"But ice cream sounds really good," Ellie protested.

"Elizabeth, we need to go. We don't want to keep Miss Emily and Parker up all night." Kurt's voice was gentle, but slightly more stern than Blaine's had been. "We have ice cream at home, you can have some tomorrow."

The three of them started making their way to the door and Emily rolled herself along behind them so she could say goodbye. Before they left, Kurt leaned over and gave her a reassuring hug when he noticed that she was starting to look distraught again.

"Don't worry about this, okay?" he murmured. "We've got the best and hardest-working lawyer in the state on our side. I would know, I'm marrying him."

He half expected Blaine to make some kind of sardonic remark, but he had already taken Ellie out to the car. Emily reached up and hugged him back. "I don't know what I ever did to deserve a friend like you, Kurt Hummel."

She smiled up at him as he pulled away. "I'm so happy Michael's going to live with you guys. He's an awesome kid and you and Blaine are such great dads. He's going to be very happy."

Kurt was sufficiently touched by her newfound confidence. He leaned over and kissed her cheek.

"Let me know when you want us to come and meet up with him. Thanks again for watching Ellie."

She called goodbye to him as he headed down the front steps and slid into the passenger seat of Blaine's car in the driveway. Blaine smirked at him as he started the engine. "You two are cute."

"If both of us were straight, I'd marry her," Kurt joked. "But I'm gay, so it looks like you're stuck with me."

Blaine rolled his eyes in fake exasperation as he pulled out of the driveway. "Oh, how will I ever go on?"

"You know you love me," Kurt teased, and Blaine had to give him the benefit of the doubt because it was true.

The rest of the car ride was relatively quiet. For a while Kurt thought that Blaine wasn't saying much because he was tired from their long but fun afternoon, but it wasn't until they were back home that he finally got a chance to really look at his fiancé and determine that something was wrong.

"You look worried," he observed as they stood in the hallway after saying goodnight to Ellie. He pulled Blaine close and lovingly stroked the side of his face as he looked into those hazel eyes he'd become so familiar with. "Please tell me what's wrong."

Blaine sighed and leaned his face closer into Kurt's touch. "I'm just sick of people being intolerant," he said. "My parents can't accept that I've found the love of my life and I want to marry him. Michael's dad can't accept the fact that his son is who he is and that he's found a family who will truly care for him and love him for himself. It's the twenty-first century, Kurt. It frustrates me that we should even be having discussions like this anymore."

Kurt dropped his hand from Blaine's face and pulled him completely into a hug, holding him as close as possible.

"I know it sucks, but that's why we have people like you in the world," he murmured as he rubbed one hand up and down Blaine's back. "You fight for equality and let people know that things need to change. Remember the first time you sang 'Man in the Mirror' at that gay rights rally or whatever?"

Blaine nodded into his shoulder and Kurt continued. "You definitely still live by those words, Blaine, and it shows. You want to change the world, so you're doing what *you* can instead of sitting back and waiting for someone else to do it. I've never had anything less than the fullest of confidence in you, and I never want you to forget that."

Overwhelmed with emotion, Blaine closed his eyes and gently squeezed Kurt closer to him.

"I love you so much," he whispered.

Kurt pulled back and smiled at him. "I love you so much more."

"Not a chance." Blaine leaned in and kissed him passionately, speaking against his lips. "Nobody has ever loved anyone or anything more than I love you."

A flash of mischief flicked through Kurt's beautiful eyes and he smiled seductively. "Prove it, then."

Blaine was mouthing at Kurt's neck, lavishing the skin with soft little licks and kisses. His words were warm on Kurt's skin as he spoke.

"Challenge accepted."

xxx

Kurt snuggled against Blaine, breathing him in. He caught the scent of sex and sweat and lubricant, as well as all the other things that made Blaine smell like Blaine – his cologne, his shampoo, mint toothpaste, and even a few traces of the coffee he'd been drinking earlier. To Kurt, it smelled like home.

"Have I ever told you," he said softly, pulling back and rolling over on his side so he could really look at Blaine, "that you are really, really, ridiculously good at that?"

As much as he loved the tender glow in Kurt's eyes, it was suddenly really starting to bother Blaine that they were barely touching. He needed to feel Kurt's soft warmth close to him, so he wrapped his arms around his fiancé's body and pulled the two of them flush together.

"That's a pretty big compliment, considering the source," he whispered, nuzzling against the side of Kurt's face.

"Pretty big," Kurt repeated, not being shy about staring down at Blaine's cock.

"Speak for yourself." Blaine reached down in between their bodies and wrapped one hand around both of their soft lengths. Unsurprisingly, Kurt felt himself getting hard again already.

"Oh, Blaine...t-that feels so good..."

"Mmmm, I know," Blaine moaned. He slid his hand up and down, pumping them both to hardness at the same time.

"So good," Kurt repeated in a whisper, still extremely sensitive after coming down from the high of his first orgasm.

It wasn't long before both of them were hard again. Blaine kept his hand around both of them, stroking up and down lovingly as he held them together. He leaned down to kiss Kurt, who bucked his hips up into Blaine's touch and moaned deliciously into his mouth.

Their beautiful rhythm lasted for a few more minutes before Kurt realized he was slipping closer and closer to the edge. He captured Blaine's lips in another deep kiss to muffle the scream he knew he was about to emit, and when he finally came Blaine managed to keep on kissing him for a few seconds before he hit his climax as well. They both spilled out into Blaine's hand and looked into each other's eyes as they caught their breath after coming down from their high.

Blaine let go of their cocks and brought his hand up near his face, flicking his tongue out to taste.

"We taste good together," he observed, offering his hand to Kurt.

"You are so dirty," Kurt giggled, but tasted Blaine's hand all the same. "Oh my god, that is so hot."

"*You* are so hot." Blaine traced Kurt's lips with the sticky tip of his index finger.

"And you're still dirty," Kurt whispered, putting one hand on the back of Blaine's neck and pulling him in for a kiss. "Lucky for you, I like dirty boys."

They kissed lazily for a moment, moaning as they tasted themselves together. When they broke away, they kept their gaze locked, their faces still close enough that their noses touched.

"Did that prove just how much I love you?" Blaine asked softly.

Kurt smirked. "Which one? They were both pretty damn incredible."

"Good," was all Blaine said. He brought Kurt close to him again and they kissed until they fell asleep in each other's arms.

xxx

"I just don't understand why all this has to happen *now*. I can tell it's stressing Blaine out, and I *hate* seeing him like that." There was a pause. "Do you think we should still go through with this?"

Burt Hummel had been pacing around the kitchen, talking to his son on the phone for over an hour now. Well, Kurt had done most of the talking. He'd told Burt about how Blaine's parents didn't approve of them and refused to attend the wedding. He explained the whole situation with some kid named Michael who was in Kurt's music class at school; he was gay and had run away from home and wanted to come live with Kurt and Blaine, but his homophobic father and the child custody laws or whatever weren't going to make that easy. Kurt had been ranting about all of this for so long that his voice was starting to sound hoarse.

"Go through with the wedding?" Burt asked in response. "That's up to you, kid. You can get married whenever you want. You could go to the courthouse downtown and get a marriage license today, if that's what you wanted."

There was a weak smile in Kurt's voice. "I know, and I *do* want to get married. I just don't know if maybe we should put it off for a couple months or maybe even years. Blaine's putting so much pressure on himself and I don't know if maybe postponing the wedding will make him less stressed out."

Burt pondered this for a few seconds. "You really want to know what I think?"

"Sure," Kurt said.

"Okay. His parents are still going to be intolerant assholes no matter *when* the two of you get married. That's not going to go away. Even if you get married five years from now, they'll still be like that. I'm not saying they can't change, but from what I can tell, they seem pretty set in their beliefs. I don't really think postponing the wedding is going to help much with that."

Kurt seemed to be considering this. "Okay."

"As far as the thing with Michael goes, I think Blaine should focus on that case and let you get the wedding organized. That's not to say he can't help out, because it's his wedding too, but as far as calling people and ordering things...don't make him do that. And you should kind of stay off his back with this case. Let him get everything worked out...he knows what he's doing. If you both just focus on one thing, that's half the pressure gone right there."

There was a hesitation before Kurt answered. "I think we were going to kind of do it that way anyway, but you're right. It *would* be a lot less pressure on both of us."

"And about Blaine's parents...don't even worry about it," Burt advised. "If they want to miss their own son's wedding to the person he loves, that's their problem. They're the ones who are going to have to live with that decision. Not you."

"I know," Kurt acknowledged. "Blaine doesn't seem to think there's any chance of getting through to them. He's already thinking about just having his brother walk him down the aisle."

"I was wondering how you were going to do that," Burt admitted. "So you're going to wait for him at the end, or...?"

"Nope. You're walking me down," Kurt informed him. There was a smile in his voice. "We're having three aisles. The way the venue is set up actually makes it really easy for that. There's gonna be a central aisle for the rest of the wedding party, and that will be where Blaine and I walk out together after the ceremony. Then we'll have two side aisles, one on either side of it, and we'll each walk down one of those at the same time and meet together at the front."

Burt tried to mentally picture the setup Kurt was describing. "Y'know, I kinda like that."

"I do, too," Kurt agreed. "Plus, that way we won't be able to see each other before the ceremony. We're not sticking to every single wedding tradition by any means, but we both liked the idea of seeing each other for the first time that day when we're actually up at the altar together."

"I'm so proud of you, Kurt," Burt blurted out of nowhere as soon as Kurt had finished speaking.

Kurt paused for a moment, but there was a smile in his voice when he spoke. "Thanks, Dad."

"I mean it," Burt said. "You got yourself out of a really shitty situation, and now you're getting married to someone you really love. And who loves *you*. I gotta admit, when you first came out to me when you were in high school, I was kind of skeptical that you would ever have this opportunity, but you guys proved me wrong."

He heard Kurt laugh. "I'm glad we did."

"I'm glad you did, too," Burt agreed.

Kurt sighed happily. "Well, I'd better get going. I have some calls to make about wedding-related things this afternoon." Burt could tell he had a huge smile on his face. "Go look at our engagement pictures. I emailed you the link...our friend Savannah took them and she couldn't have done better."

"Will do," Burt told him. "I'll let you go call your wedding people."

Kurt laughed. "Okay. Bye, Dad. It was nice talking to you."

Burt said goodbye and hung up the phone, then immediately headed for the computer to check his email. Sure enough, the very first message in his inbox was from Kurt. He opened it up.

Kurt's message consisted of nothing but a smiley face emoticon and a hyperlink, which Burt clicked. He was immediately taken to a website that identified itself as *Savannah Nichols Photography*, with a simple, contemporary layout. The title of the post read *Kurt and Blaine's engagement session: a love story ten years in the making*.

Burt scrolled down a little bit and began reading the little introductory blurb of text.

Today I was given the remarkable honor of photographing two of my dear friends, Kurt Hummel and Blaine Anderson, in downtown Chicago. These two fell in love after trying to suppress their romantic feelings for each other for a decade and I was so unbelievably thrilled when Kurt proposed to Blaine in Washington D.C. over the summer. The three of us had so much fun at their urban-style outdoor shoot, and the gorgeous autumn foliage downtown couldn't have been more perfect. Not only are Kurt and Blaine two of the sweetest guys I've ever met, but they are so beautiful together. Once you look at their pictures, you'll be able to see just how deeply in love they are. I adore these two with all my heart and wish them nothing but the happiest of lives together.

Burt began to scroll down and look at the pictures. He felt something clench at his heart almost immediately as he noticed how *happy* Kurt looked. How happy *both* of them looked. Even in the more serious pictures, where neither of them were smiling, it was clear as day just how in love the two of them were. It blew Burt's mind to think that Blaine's parents couldn't see that and accept it.

There were a lot of pictures, but all of them were equally touching. Burt felt himself getting teary-eyed as he scrolled down the page, which was rare for him, but he couldn't help it. His little boy was all grown up and so, so in love.

There was more text underneath the very last picture. It took Burt a few seconds to realize that there were no more pictures. He went a little numb as he read.

Kurt and Blaine will be married April 9 this coming year in an outdoor ceremony downtown with their family and friends. I hope you all enjoyed seeing their pictures just as much as I enjoyed shooting them. I had a blast working with these guys and I'm crazy excited to take pictures at their wedding in a few months! :)

Underneath the post itself were several comments. Burt saw one that was signed "K & B," which thanked Savannah over and over again for doing such a wonderful job and telling her that they were beyond thrilled with how their pictures had turned out. Underneath a few more comments from people with names Burt didn't recognize (probably Kurt and Blaine's friends, or random visitors to Savannah's photography website) he came to an add-your-own-comment box. Without even thinking, Burt began typing.

Wonderful photos. I've never seen my son look as happy as he does with Blaine, and you captured that perfectly. Thank you for shooting these and for sharing them with all of us. I look forward to meeting you at the wedding in a couple months. – Burt Hummel

After posting the comment, he scrolled through the pictures one more time before closing the tab. He was back to his email inbox, with Kurt's message still displayed on the screen. He was about to sign out, but something made him look a little more closely.

For the first time, he noticed that the message had been carbon-copied to Bill and Lisa Anderson. Kurt and Blaine wanted Blaine's parents to share in their happiness so badly that they'd sent them a link to their engagement pictures in the hopes that they'd forget their homophobic ways and see just how in love their son was.

An idea suddenly popped into his head, so Burt logged out of his email and grabbed the phone on the desk so he could call Carole at work. There was a lot that he needed to tell her and he hoped she'd be willing to help him out.

Chapter Thirty

It was the first freezing, bitter cold day of November when Burt Hummel found himself trudging up the walkway of an unfamiliar home with his wife to have a serious heart-to-heart conversation with a couple they hardly knew.

Bill and Lisa Anderson knew they were coming, but Burt had purposely been very vague when explaining to them over the phone why he and Carole wanted to come and talk to them. Burt didn't know the Andersons very well, but based on what Kurt had told him about them, he was honestly surprised that they'd been okay with him and Carole coming over. He only hoped that he and his wife would be able to talk some sense into these people. It was tough knowing that Kurt and Blaine were so upset about their reaction to the engagement and flat-out refusal to attend the wedding, so Burt – always the protective father – was going to do the best he could in order to change things so that his son and future son-in-law could finally have some closure.

"I'm nervous," Carole admitted as they stepped up onto the front porch of the Andersons' simple yet charming home. "I hope we can get through to them. I know it's probably killing Blaine."

"Yeah, I know. Poor kid can't even convince his parents to come to his own wedding," Burt agreed. "The two people on earth who should accept and support him no matter what..."

Carole smiled gently and placed one hand on his arm to silence him. "Let's not get all worked up just yet."

She pressed the doorbell and stepped back, waiting patiently for someone to come and answer. Burt heard the sound of footsteps approaching from inside just a few seconds before the door swung open.

"Hello, Burt. Carole," Lisa Anderson greeted them, not showing any signs of intolerance just yet. "Come on in."

Despite her hospitality, Burt couldn't help but notice that she seemed to have her guard up as she stepped aside so that he and Carole could get through the door. He'd met Lisa and her husband a few times back when the boys had been in high school, but Lisa's behavior already seemed different than Burt remembered. He supposed it had something to do with the fact that their sons were now romantically involved as opposed to being just good friends. Even so, he didn't let her somewhat obvious discomfort

get to him. He greeted her politely and did the same to Bill a few seconds later when he appeared in the front hallway.

They made their way inside, making casual small talk about the weather (which was cold) and Burt and Carole's drive into town (which had been long). Lisa showed them into the family room and invited them to have a seat on the couch before asking if they would like anything to drink. Burt politely refused at the same exact moment Carole shook her head and said, "No, thank you." She seemed to be on the exact same page as him – both of them just wanted to get this discussion started already.

"So, Burt and Carole," Bill Anderson began nonchalantly, "what brings you to our humble abode today?"

Burt cleared his throat and tried to keep his tone as even as possible as he spoke. "We wanted to talk to you about Kurt and Blaine's wedding, actually."

"Oh, don't even get Bill and I started on that," Lisa said exasperatedly with a roll of her eyes. "Blaine's taking this 'gay' phase way too far. Nothing personal against you two, but I can't believe he actually wants to marry another man."

Burt shot a glance at his wife. Carole looked like she was trying not to show utter disgust at Lisa's words.

"I'm sorry, I don't think I understand," Carole said slowly. "You think...you think Blaine is just going through a phase?"

"We don't *think* he is," Bill commented matter-of-factly, "we *know* he is. Boys are supposed to like girls. It's as simple as that. Anything else is just unnatural."

"Let me ask you something," Burt said carefully. "Have you looked at the link Kurt emailed us? The one for the website with their engagement photo shoot pictures?"

Lisa shrugged. "I clicked on it, but as soon as I saw the title 'Kurt and Blaine's Engagement Session' or whatever, I closed the tab. I don't need to see my son involved with something like that."

Burt had been trying to remain relatively calm, but something in the way she had spoken particularly irritated him. "Oh, so now my son's a *something*."

"She didn't mean it like that," Bill cut in, immediately jumping to his wife's defense. "Kurt's a great guy. Really. Lisa and I are perfectly fine with Blaine being friends with him, but we don't think it's natural or right for them to be romantically involved like this."

Carole opened her purse and extracted her iPhone, a Christmas present that Kurt and Finn had gotten for her one year. She thumbed through the pictures on the camera roll and stopped when she came to a shot from the engagement session – she had saved a few of her favorite pictures so that she could show her friends when she told them that her stepson was engaged. This particular photo showed the two men locked in a tender embrace in front of the Millennium Monument at Wrigley Square – exactly the spot where they would be married in a few months. Blaine's arms were around Kurt's waist and his head was resting on the taller man's shoulder; Kurt was holding Blaine as close as possible, his lips pressing a kiss to the top of Blaine's head. Blaine's eyes were closed as he relished the moment while Kurt's were partially open, looking at Blaine like he couldn't see anything else in the world.

She held her phone out toward Bill and Lisa so they could see the picture. "Please tell me what about this is unnatural."

Bill's eyebrows shot up in surprise when he first looked at the picture, but other than that, Burt couldn't read their expressions to see how they were reacting to it. Carole gave them a few seconds to study it before taking her phone away.

"Have you ever seen your son look that happy or that much in love?" she asked. There was an undertone of politeness in her voice, letting them know that she was genuinely trying to get through to them and that she and Burt hadn't come here to prove them wrong about anything.

"I, um...I can't say I have," Lisa admitted.

"I've never seen Kurt look like that, either," Burt chimed in. "And he was in a relationship with someone else for about eight years before he and Blaine got together. Not once in those eight years with that other guy did I ever see him look *that* much in love."

Lisa looked at him quizzically. "If you don't mind me asking, what brought an end to that other relationship?"

As difficult as it sometimes was to talk about, Burt knew he had to tell them. Maybe – just maybe – it would help the stubborn Andersons to see just how much their son loved Kurt.

"Long story short? The guy was a violent, abusive asshole," Burt said. "He'd come home from a night of drinking and start beating Kurt up for no reason at all. And you've seen Kurt – he's not the smallest guy, he's pretty tall and he's got some muscle on him...but he was hardly any match for this guy. Dude was huge. He used to play football. It was hard for Kurt to fight back. So one night, he took Ellie – that's his daughter – and drove all the way up to Chicago. Blaine had known what was going on and he almost insisted that Kurt and Ellie come up to live with him. He wanted them completely out of that situation. Your son may have very well saved *my* son's life."

Bill and Lisa were silent for a long time as they took all this in. When Bill finally spoke, his voice was hesitant.

"So...Kurt essentially moved in with him right away...and they ended up deciding to be together?"

"I don't really know if they *decided* anything," Burt told him. "Kurt told me they talked about it one night and they both found out that they'd been secretly in love with the other ever since high school. Now, I'm not too good with talking about that deep, emotional stuff...but it seems to me like their feelings for each other had always been there."

He sat back and continued with a more relaxed tone. "With all due respect, folks...your son isn't going through any kind of phase. Neither is ours. They've gone through hell and high water just to be together and they're getting married whether the four of us like it or not. And I know it would mean the world to Blaine if you could just be *happy* for him, instead of making him feel like he's doing something wrong by marrying the love of his life."

Bill and Lisa just sat there in stunned silence for a few seconds before Carole began looking for another picture on her phone. When she found what she was looking for, she spoke up again.

"Would you like to see your granddaughter?" she asked.

Without waiting for either of the Andersons to answer, she passed them her phone so that they could see the picture. Kurt had sent it to her a few weeks earlier, when it had been warmer outside and the Hummel-Andersons had decided to go for a nice autumn bike ride on the paths along Lake Michigan. In

this particular picture, which Kurt had taken, Blaine was standing behind Ellie on her bike, holding it steady, getting her used to her brand new two-wheeler without training wheels. He had just been about to let her go and let her ride by herself, and both of them had huge smiles on their faces – Ellie's was one of exhilaration, but Blaine's smile was nothing but pure fatherly pride and joy.

Burt had to bite back a smile when Lisa immediately gasped upon seeing the picture. "Oh, my goodness. She's beautiful. How old is she?"

"Just turned seven in August," Burt informed her.

Bill studied the picture for a few seconds. "She's Kurt's biologically?" he asked, and Burt nodded. "I can tell. She looks so much like him."

"I'm sorry, you said her name was...Ellie, right?" Lisa asked, obviously embarrassed about having to clarify the name of her own grandchild.

"Elizabeth Anne Hummel-Anderson," Carole told her. "Ellie for short. She was named after Kurt's mom, but Blaine adopted her a few months ago so now she has his last name, too."

"She does look a lot like Kurt," Lisa agreed. "She's such a gorgeous little girl." She hesitated for a second; her voice was wary when she spoke again. "I know it's not really my place to be asking you this, but do you think Bill and I will ever get to see her?"

"That depends," Burt said, shrugging one shoulder. "With all due respect, none of us can deny that you two haven't exactly been the most hospitable when it comes to homosexuality. Ellie's grown up with two dads her whole life. It might hurt her to know that her new grandparents have a pretty hostile attitude towards gay people."

Lisa shot a pleading look at her husband. Bill was frowning slightly as he thought of how to respond to what Burt had just said.

"It's always been difficult for my wife and I to come to terms with Blaine being the way he is," he finally said. "But...ever since we found out about this whole engagement, and now seeing how happy my son is with his daughter...I've been starting to think that maybe we *have* been just a little too hard on him."

Burt heard Carole exhale deeply. It almost seemed like she was breathing a sigh of relief.

"It's going to be hard," Lisa admitted. "And I'm still not entirely sure if I would be comfortable attending something as big as a wedding. But my husband is right...I think maybe it's time we try and open up our hearts and minds and just try and accept the fact that our son is in *love*."

"*Thank you*," Burt heard himself say without even thinking. "That's all Kurt and Blaine are asking for. They just want—"

"They want us to acknowledge, accept and respect their love," Lisa interrupted, an undertone of an epiphany present in her voice. "Those were Blaine's exact words when we went to go visit them and they told us they were engaged."

"That really is all they want," Carole told her, and Burt could tell she was trying hard not to sound like she was desperately pleading. "I know it would mean so much to both of them if you could open your hearts to the love they share."

"Like my wife said, it'll be a difficult process, but I'm willing to work on it," Bill told them. "At the end of the day, I just want my son to be happy...and if being with Kurt makes him happy, then why the hell should we care?"

"Exactly. We may be their parents, but they're adults now. We can't control what they do...and quite frankly, the heart wants what the heart wants," Burt said simply. "Their hearts seem to be drawn to each other, and nothing we say or do will stop that."

Despite his outward calm demeanor, on the inside he was practically cheering. He couldn't wait until Kurt and Blaine heard about the progress he and Carole had made.

xxx

Before Kurt knew it, the day of his and Blaine's big custody battle for Michael was upon him – but as much as it broke his heart, he couldn't stay at the courthouse and participate in the actual hearing. In order to avoid any controversy, he and Blaine had decided to use pseudonyms so that there would be no conflict of interest over the fact that their family's attorney would also be one of Michael's adoptive fathers were they to win the case. Kurt thought it might look suspicious if he hung around, and he needed to get to work and teach anyway, so after dropping Ellie and her friends off at school he accompanied Blaine and Michael to the local courthouse with no plans of staying very long.

"Are you sure you're okay with testifying today?" he asked Michael, fatherly concern already evident in his voice and they hadn't even stepped into the courtroom yet. Although it wasn't common for children to testify in cases such as this, Blaine thought that this should be an exception since Michael's side of the story was crucial. After Michael had agreed to testify, Blaine managed to obtain permission from the judge allowing him to do so. Kurt trusted Blaine's judgment beyond doubt, but paternal instinct told him that he needed to make absolutely sure that his future son was okay with this.

Michael nodded. "I'm fine. I don't think it'll be too hard. I just gotta get up there and say what happened, right?"

"Just like we practiced," Blaine told him. "And you don't have to get up on the stand if you don't want to. If you're not comfortable with that, we can always arrange to have you speak with the judge privately."

"I don't want to do that," Michael told him. "I want to get up there and let everyone know what an asshole my old man is."

"Good for you. You're going to do great, I know it," Kurt told him with a reassuring smile. He pulled his phone out of his pocket and quickly checked the time, only to notice that the hearing was scheduled to start in about ten minutes and Blaine and Michael probably needed to be heading into the courtroom. "Okay. I should probably get out of here."

He stepped closer to Blaine and gave him a sweet, reassuring kiss on the lips that lingered for a fraction of a second longer than Blaine had been expecting, which was a nice surprise. "I love you so much. You're going to be amazing."

"Let's just hope the judge thinks so too, for this guy's sake." Blaine laughed and jokingly squeezed Michael's shoulder.

"You trust him, right?" Kurt asked Michael, shooting a teasing smirk at Blaine.

"Yeah, definitely," Michael said. "I don't know much about legal stuff, but if he won a Supreme Court case, he must be pretty good."

"He's excellent. I'm just teasing. You're in good hands." Kurt laughed and gave him a hug. "Good luck with your testimony. I'll see you at school this afternoon." They had already agreed that Blaine would drop Michael off at school after the court hearing.

Blaine and Michael said their goodbyes to Kurt and headed into the courtroom, chatting casually about something that Kurt could no longer hear. He watched his future husband and hopefully-future son disappear beyond the heavy courtroom doors and turned away with a smile on his face. He already had a great feeling about this and he only hoped he would be right.

xxx

That afternoon at work, Kurt didn't take his lunch to the teachers' lounge to socialize with his colleagues while he ate, as he usually did. Instead, he opted to stay in his classroom and eat, his phone sitting right in front of him on his desk. He was expecting Blaine to call back with news about the hearing any minute now, and he knew that being around other people would only make him more anxious as he waited. As much as he hated being alone in the bleak inner-city classroom, he knew it was the best option in this particular situation.

His phone finally vibrated and Kurt was so startled that he practically choked on the bite of sandwich he'd just taken. After taking a quick glance at the screen to make sure that it was in fact Blaine calling, he slid his thumb across the screen to answer the call and pressed the phone to his ear with a breathless, "Hello?"

"Hey, we just got out of court," Blaine told him. "It went pretty well, but, um...we *did* run into a few last-minute setbacks."

Kurt bit his lip nervously. "Like what?"

"Well, the opposition tried to challenge the fact that the other party – AKA you and I – didn't show up in court and didn't use their real names," Blaine said warily. "The judge told me that in order for this to be fair, we needed to reveal the names of the other couple and they needed to appear in court to testify in person. They were originally going to postpone the trial until tomorrow, so the 'other couple' could come to court, but then I finally had to tell them that you and I are the couple planning on adopting Michael and that postponement wasn't necessary because I could testify on behalf of us."

"Oh, no." Kurt tried to keep his voice even, but an unintentional undertone of worry slipped into his voice as he spoke. "How did...how did Michael's dad and his attorney react to that?"

"They tried to challenge it, of course, but the judge told them that I'm legally allowed to represent myself and my family," Blaine said. "It was kind of tough, because I wasn't expecting that I would have to testify,

so it was kind of like being put on the spot. But I think I did pretty well. You should have seen Michael, though. He did an amazing job."

"Aww, I knew he would." For the first time since answering his phone, Kurt let his nerves melt away into a smile. "Was he really nervous?"

"He was a little nervous at first, but he was definitely confident once he got up there on the stand," Blaine told him. "And he may have actually sealed his own fate and won the case for us."

"Really?" Kurt's face lit up into a hopeful smile. "What happened?"

There was a smile evident in Blaine's voice as he responded. "He was asked if his father had ever been physically violent or abusive toward him, and he said that it wasn't until he unofficially came out that his dad ever laid a harmful hand on him. I guess the day he got kicked out and came to Hummel House, his dad picked him up by his collar and yelled at him, and kind of shoved him a little bit, and that was all after he'd managed to figure out that Michael's gay. Now that the judge knows for sure that these physical actions started *after* Michael came out, I honestly don't think he'll let him go back and live with him."

"Oh my god, that's amazing," Kurt said, breathing a huge sigh of relief. "I mean, it's not amazing that his dad tried to hurt him, but it's amazing that he remembered that and thought to mention it. I really hope the judge takes that into consideration."

"I think he'd be an idiot *not* to consider it," Blaine said. "Anyway, we're in the car now, I'm bringing Michael to school. How's your day been?"

"Long," Kurt admitted. "I haven't been able to get this trial off my mind. I just wanted to know how it was going and how everything turned out...it killed me that I couldn't be there."

He could tell that Blaine was trying to reassure him. It was working. "Well, I hope you feel better knowing that it went really well today. I hate knowing that you're upset."

"I'm doing fine now. Don't worry about me," Kurt told him, laughing a little bit. "Just go back to your office and do whatever it is you do after arguing in court."

"Whatever you say," Blaine said. Kurt could still hear the smile in his voice, and that made him unbelievably happy. "I love you, Kurt."

No matter how many times Blaine said those words to him, Kurt still felt his heart skip a beat.

"I love you too. Thanks for calling." He paused. "I'll see you later on."

They said their goodbyes and hung up. For the first time all day, Kurt finally felt like he could breathe.

xxx

Blaine dropped his phone into the cup holder next to his seat, then glanced at Michael out of the corner of his eye as he stopped at a red light. "Can I give you one piece of advice? When you get your license in a couple years, don't talk on the phone while driving like I just did."

Michael responded with the last words Blaine had ever expected to hear. "You mean I can actually drive when I turn sixteen?" His voice was incredulous, as if he'd never even considered what Blaine had just proposed.

Blaine wasn't sure why he'd even feel the need to ask. He shrugged one shoulder nonchalantly. "Of course. Unless you don't want to, but what teenage kid doesn't want to drive?"

The light turned green, so Blaine moved his foot to the gas and proceeded through the intersection.

"I just never thought I'd be able to," Michael admitted. "A couple times I mentioned that I was excited to get my license and stuff, and my dad would just start yelling and telling me there was no way in hell I'd be driving, because we didn't have enough money for me to get insurance or something. So I just kinda thought it would never happen."

He stopped and thought for a moment before continuing. "It's actually kinda weird to call him my dad now. He wasn't really much of a dad, anyway."

Blaine did his best to smile reassuringly, even though he was starting to get a little mad. Michael's father had done just about everything in his power to prevent his son from getting anything he ever wanted.

"Think of it this way," he said. "Judging by how things went in court this afternoon, it looks like you'll soon have *two* dads to make up for the one that was never really there before."

Michael looked at him hopefully. "Would *you* guys let me drive?"

"Absolutely," Blaine told him.

"Cool," Michael said, a huge smile taking over his face. "It'll be nice not to have to worry about money. Or getting kicked out of my house for being gay."

"Kurt and I will worry about the money," Blaine assured him. "You just focus on being a kid. And we're probably the last people on earth who would ever kick a gay person out of our home, if you hadn't figured that out yet." He laughed.

"Yeah, somehow I had the feeling you two would be okay with that," Michael joked. Blaine was so happy to see him letting loose and goofing around a little bit – it was like he was finally remembering how to be a kid again. "So if you wouldn't kick a gay guy out, does that mean that when I get a boyfriend, he can sleep over all the time?"

"Hey, we haven't even gotten the official verdict from the judge yet, don't start testing the boundaries already," Blaine cracked, smiling to let Michael know he was just joking. "Why? Is there someone you've got your eye on?"

"Not anyone who's actually gay," Michael admitted. "Every once in a while these guys who live a few blocks away come to our lot to play baseball with us, and a couple of them are hot but they're all straight and they all have girlfriends."

"I feel your pain," Blaine told him. "I can't tell you how many straight crushes I've had. But y'know what? Someday, you'll find a guy who's just as brave to be himself as you are. And he's out there somewhere, wondering what it would be like to meet someone just like you."

In that moment, more than ever before, Michael found himself wishing that they would win the custody case. Here Blaine was actually giving him hope that he would find an amazing guy for himself someday. Earlier that same year, Michael never would have expected to hear words like those coming from someone who he saw as a parental figure.

By then, Blaine had pulled up along the curb in front of the sad-looking structure that was Buckley Middle School. Michael unbuckled his seatbelt but didn't get out of the car just yet; instead, he turned to Blaine with an appreciative smile.

"Thanks a ton. And not just for talking to me just now...thanks for wanting to be one of my dads. And thanks for actually giving a crap about me."

"I promise you can always count on me to give a crap," Blaine told him with a smile. "Do you have the note to give to the office?"

"Yeah, right here." Michael held up the piece of paper that would excuse him from missing half a day of school. He opened the door and stepped out of the car. "Thanks so much again. See ya."

"Have a good day," Blaine called after him. He kept the car parked along the curb until Michael disappeared safely into the school building, then pulled away with a smile on his face. It didn't matter that there was still no official decision for their case just yet. He knew he and Kurt had a son.

xxx

The weekend immediately following the custody hearing, Kurt and Blaine had both decided that it was time to put the stress of that ordeal behind them. They knew it would be a while before a decision was made, and there was nothing left they could do – Blaine had already done the best he could possibly do in court, and it was time to focus their attention on something else. Something much more enjoyable than stressing out over a child custody hearing. On that blustery afternoon, they found a sitter to watch Ellie for a few hours while they headed downtown together.

"This is it, right?" Blaine asked, hesitating before opening the door to the jewelry shop Kurt had pointed out.

Kurt simply smiled and pulled the door open. "This is it. This is where I came and found your ring."

Blaine gave his hand an affectionate squeeze as they stepped into the shop. It was a little bit more crowded than the last time Kurt had come here to pick out Blaine's engagement ring; all of the available salespeople were busy helping other customers so nobody greeted them seconds after they'd stepped through the door. Kurt found he didn't mind, though. He was well aware of the fact that he and Blaine were a relatively high-profile local couple and he didn't want any unnecessary attention to be drawn to them. Picking out wedding rings was something that was supposed to be a personal choice and experience, and he wanted the least amount of outside interference possible.

He managed to inconspicuously lead Blaine to display of men's jewelry that he remembered was at the back of the store. Thankfully, there wasn't much of a crowd near the display cases there. Kurt began perusing the selection of rings inside the case, searching for a platinum band that would be *perfect* for Blaine. They'd already agreed that they were each going to pick out the rings that they were going to give to the other at the ceremony, so he thought he'd look for something simple yet romantic that he could slip onto Blaine's finger.

He knew it really shouldn't have been a difficult task, but the longer he stood there looking at the rings in the case, the more he found himself thinking about just how significant this was. Whatever he picked out, Blaine would be wearing it for the rest of his life as a symbol of their love and commitment to each other. He wanted to make sure that his choice was something that flawlessly symbolized their love and that Blaine would adore.

Blaine was the first of the two to find something. He caught the attention of an employee behind the counter, who happily unlocked the display case and handed him the ring. Blaine could tell that the woman recognized them, but she didn't say anything, and for that he was thankful. Like Kurt, he wanted this to be as personal an experience as possible.

Kurt offered his hand to Blaine without even looking at the ring just yet. He trusted Blaine's judgment completely and he knew that whatever Blaine was about to slip onto his finger would be wonderful in some way. He noticed Blaine blushing and biting back a smile as he moved the ring into place on Kurt's finger.

"What do you think?" Blaine asked nervously.

Kurt was struck breathless the moment he got a good look at the ring. From a distance it looked like simple platinum, but up close he could see the pattern that was very, very lightly engraved all the way along the outside – interlocking infinity symbols, representing how long their love would last.

"It's so beautiful," he whispered. His voice was so soft that he wasn't even sure if Blaine could hear.

Blaine took Kurt's hand, holding it lovingly in between both of his own, and looked him in the eyes. "Do you want it?"

Kurt knew it probably wasn't a good idea to go with the very first ring without even looking at any of the others, but there was just something about this particular ring that touched his heart. He nodded, unable to stop smiling. "I don't even want to take it off."

"You kind of have to," Blaine teased. "Fortunately in a few months, when I *officially* give it to you, you'll never have to take it off again."

Kurt pretended to consider this for a second, then finally slipped the ring off his finger and placed it in the small, black velvet box that the saleswoman behind the counter offered to him. "I guess I can live with that."

He turned his attention back to the rings in the display case. "Now I need to pick one for you."

As much as he loved the ring Blaine had chosen for him, Kurt didn't want to give Blaine the exact same one. They had already agreed that they would give each other different rings, instead of a matching set, in order to symbolize the beautiful way in which their two different hearts were becoming one. Still, Kurt thought it would at least be nice if the styles of the two rings were somewhat similar, so that it would represent their union in a way.

He noticed there were a few more wedding bands marked with the infinity symbol and resisted the urge to jump for absolute joy when one caught his eye. On this ring, the symbol was twisted directly into the metal of the band, making it impossible to tell where it began and where it ended. Just like Kurt's love for Blaine, it was everlasting – it had always been there, there was no specific point in time when it officially began, and it would endure forever.

"Could I see that one, please?" he asked the saleswoman, pointing to the ring in the case. She took it out for him and he slipped it into place on Blaine's finger, secretly thrilled by the significance of the gesture.

Blaine held his hand up to admire the ring and Kurt had the distinct pleasure of watching his face melt into an emotional smile.

"Oh, Kurt, it's so perfect. I love it."

Kurt repeated the same question Blaine had asked him just a few minutes earlier, a huge smile on his face. "Do you want it?"

"Absolutely," Blaine told him. "I think it's neat how both of ours have the little infinity symbol worked into it somehow. It goes on forever. I think that's a nice touch."

"I do, too," Kurt said, then hesitated abruptly as an idea came to his mind.

"Blaine?" he asked carefully.

His husband-to-be was still admiring his ring. "Yeah?"

Kurt spoke slowly, trying not to trip over his words. "What would you think about getting them engraved?" he asked. "I just thought it would be sweet, since both of our engagement rings have engravings along the inside. Maybe you could have your name engraved in the ring you're giving me, and mine will be engraved in the one I give you. Something like that."

To Kurt's immense relief, Blaine's response was immediate and positive. "I love that. I think it's beautiful," he said. "It would be like always having a part of you with me."

The saleswoman who had been quietly assisting them up until this point suddenly seemed too excited to hold her tongue much longer. "Would you like to purchase them today?"

Kurt looked at Blaine and, upon receiving a tiny smile from his fiancé, turned to speak to the saleswoman with a huge smile on his face. "We'll get them today. How long does the engraving usually take?"

"If you leave the rings here with us overnight, we can have them both engraved and ready to be picked up tomorrow," she told him.

"Sounds perfect," Blaine replied with a smile, never once taking his eyes off of Kurt.

They stayed in the store for a few more minutes to discuss the engravings with the saleswoman and all three of them agreed that Kurt's original idea of having each other's name inscribed in the rings was a great idea. After agreeing to come back the next afternoon to pick up the engraved rings, they left the store hand-in-hand and walked back to where Blaine had parked his car, neither of them saying a word.

When they finally got back to the car, Blaine was just about to put the key in the ignition when suddenly Kurt stopped him with a gentle touch on the hand. Startled, he turned to look at Kurt, who let their gaze linger a moment longer before leaning in and kissing him affectionately on the lips.

Blaine's eyes flew open and he made a little noise of surprise in the back of his throat upon the impact of Kurt's lips, but he allowed himself to close his eyes and relax into the kiss. When they broke away a few seconds later, Kurt's face was graced with Blaine's favorite smile and there were tears of joy shining in his mesmerizing color-changing eyes, which looked blue today. Blaine pictured the exact same expression on Kurt's face as they stood at the altar together, exchanging the rings they'd just picked out, and decided that his husband-to-be had never looked lovelier.

"It's all so real now," Kurt whispered. "We have our wedding rings picked out. We're getting married in five months and three days."

Blaine gave him an adoring smile. "I think it's so cute how you're counting down."

"Please, like you're not," Kurt teased with a smirk playing his lips.

"Fine," Blaine admitted. "One hundred and fifty-four days. I'm doing mine a different way than you are."

Kurt took Blaine's hand and slipped his fingers into the empty spaces between Blaine's. Their hands fit perfectly together, just like puzzle pieces. "I'd count the hours if I could," he murmured. "Maybe even the minutes."

Blaine raised their interlocked hands to his lips and kissed Kurt's knuckles. "I'd marry you right this second."

"Hey, that's not entirely impossible," Kurt joked. "We can just walk right back into the store to get the rings and head on down to the courthouse."

"You wouldn't," Blaine acknowledged. "Not after you've already put so much hard work into this wedding."

Kurt nodded. "You're right," he said. "As much as I want to marry you *right now*, I want to make this a perfect wedding for you. You don't deserve anything less. I want this wedding to be something we'll be telling our great-grandchildren about when they come to visit us at our retirement home in seventy years or so."

"Seventy years," Blaine repeated, his mind blown in the most wonderful way at the thought of spending that much time with Kurt. He knew, however, that he would continue to love Kurt for much longer than that. "That's amazing, Kurt."

"We'll be ninety-seven," Kurt told him, laughing a little bit, "and I'll still love you just as much as I do right now. Maybe even more. *Definitely* more. I love you more and more every day."

He was smiling just the tiniest bit, the corner of his mouth hitched upward into a sweet little half-grin, but as Blaine studied Kurt's face he saw so much in him. He saw his past – the beautiful boy he'd met on the stairs at Dalton and who he would soon call his best friend. He saw his present – his fiancé, soon to be his husband, who Blaine worshiped, loved and adored with everything he had. And he saw his future – the man with whom Blaine would grow to be ninety-seven. Maybe even one hundred.

"I love you so much, Kurt," he finally said, his voice drenched with emotion. "Never, ever forget that."

From the beautiful smile that spread across Kurt's face, Blaine could tell that he never would.

xxx

After they returned home, it was a relatively quiet evening in for their little family. Kurt and Blaine played Candy Land and Chutes & Ladders with Ellie and watched a movie on TV before deciding to head to bed a little earlier than usual. It had been an incredible yet emotional day, and their experience at the jewelry store buying rings had left both of them exhausted in the best possible way.

Blaine was just stepping out of the shower when he heard the phone ring. For a moment he was confused, because it was after ten and he had absolutely no idea who would be calling at this hour, but shrugged as he wrapped a towel around his waist and began to dry off. Kurt would deal with whoever it was.

He strained to hear what Kurt was saying on the phone to whoever had called, but the bathroom walls muffled the sound and Blaine couldn't really understand a word that was being said. Eventually he gave up trying to eavesdrop and finished getting ready for bed. Whoever had called must have had a lot to say, because by the time Blaine left the bathroom after brushing his teeth and changing into the t-shirt and flannel pajama pants he'd been wearing to bed now that it was cold out, he could still hear Kurt keeping up his end of the conversation.

"I honestly don't know what our plans are," Kurt was saying. It sounded like he was in the kitchen, but Blaine stayed right where he was rather than heading out there to listen. "I'd have to talk to Blaine and see what he wants to do."

There was a pause while the other person spoke, then Kurt continued. "Well, like I said, it's up to him. Something like this should be his decision. If it makes him uncomfortable, we won't go."

The person on the other end of the conversation talked for a long time. Blaine could hear a few "Mhm"s and "Okay"s from Kurt, which didn't really tell him much. When Kurt finally got to speak, it was clear that the conversation was drawing to a close.

"I can't make any promises, but I'll talk to him. We'll get back to you later this week."

After another short pause, he said goodbye to the person on the other end of the line and hung up. Within seconds, Blaine heard familiar footsteps headed down the hall to their bedroom.

Kurt was wearing his navy blue silk bathrobe, which looked beautiful against his pale skin – and, it appeared, nothing else. But Blaine couldn't let his physical desires get the best of him right now, not when Kurt looked so confused and distraught.

"Hey," he said, standing in the doorway of their bedroom, awkwardly twirling the tie of his robe around his finger. "Um...that was your mom."

As if Blaine hadn't already been wondering what the hell was up with this random phone call late at night. "What did *she* want?"

Kurt came over and sat on the edge of the bed next to Blaine. "She told me...well, first she started apologizing over and over for calling so late, but she just *had* to talk to one of us, and blah blah blah. Anyway, she said that she and your dad have been talking a lot this past week. I guess my dad and Carole came to see your parents and they showed them some pictures of us from our engagement shoot, and some of Ellie."

"Oh, god," Blaine mumbled under his breath. He couldn't even imagine where this was about to go.

"She said that seeing those pictures really hit home with both of them," Kurt continued. "And...she told me that even though it's going to be difficult for both of them, they want to try and work through the prejudices they hold so that they can be happy for you. For us."

"I'm not exactly sure how I feel about this," Blaine admitted.

"I know it seems completely out of the blue, and she even admitted that herself, but I think she's honestly being sincere. They're really going to try," Kurt said, and Blaine had no choice but to believe him. "She said she was sorry for how she and your dad acted when we had them come visit a few months ago and that they're both going to try very hard to open their minds so nothing like that happens again. She said she can't guarantee anything but that they're both willing to try."

Blaine rolled his eyes. "It's about *time*. I mean, I've only been gay for twenty-seven years."

Kurt was silent for a few seconds. It was obvious from the look on his face that whatever he had to say was going to be hard to put into words and he was attempting to think of the best way to verbalize it.

"She told me that they both want to start by getting to know us – me and you – as a couple, and she admitted that she'd really like to meet her granddaughter," Kurt said, then laughed humorlessly. "That's when she did the unthinkable."

"What's the unthinkable?" Blaine asked carefully.

Kurt pressed his lips together in a wry smile and glanced at Blaine out of the corner of his eye.

"She invited us – you, me and Ellie – to come down for Thanksgiving in a couple weeks."

Chapter Thirty-One

Kurt stared at his reflection in front of him for a long time, paying no mind to the tuxedo shop saleswoman flitting around him and inserting various pins and needles. If this much work needed to be done just for a simple tux, he thought, he didn't even want to imagine what brides had to go through when purchasing actual dresses for their weddings. He adjusted the black tie around his neck and didn't even make a sound when the saleswoman accidentally stuck him with a pin.

"There we go," she commented when she was finished, dusting off his shoulders as if he were some kind of trophy that needed to be polished. "How does it feel? Do you like it?"

Kurt looked at himself for a long time in the tall mirror, slowly letting it sink in that this was the outfit he'd marry Blaine in. He'd kind of been in a trance the whole time he'd been here at the tuxedo shop, because it still seemed impossible to believe that he was actually marrying *any* man, let alone Blaine. Back when he was in high school, he'd never even dreamed that he would have the opportunity to be legally married someday, so the fact that this was all very real and happening and he was actually purchasing a tuxedo that he was going to wear at his wedding still seemed surreal to him.

The saleswoman, who was probably old enough to be his mother, was looking at him with an expectant smile. Kurt forced himself to snap out of his stunned reverie so as not to be rude and ignore her.

"I love it," he told her with a genuine smile. "I think this is definitely the one."

This certainly seemed to please the saleswoman. She turned to Ellie, who had accompanied her father to the fitting so that he could take her to look for a flower girl dress when they were finished at the tux shop. "Sweetie, how do you think your daddy looks?"

"Like a handsome prince in a fairy tale," Ellie said happily.

Kurt giggled and couldn't help but blush at her sweet compliment. "Thank you, honey. I'm glad you think so. I can be Blaine's Prince Charming and he'll be mine."

"They should write a fairy tale about you two," Ellie decided. "All the stories I know have a prince and a princess in them. I want there to be one with two princes."

"I think your daddies' wedding day will be just like a real-life fairy tale," the saleswoman told her with a smile. "They'll be the most handsome princes ever, and you can be their little princess."

Kurt smiled as Ellie came over and gave him a hug. "She'll be a beautiful little princess. We're going flower girl-dress shopping after we're done here."

"Oh, how fun," the saleswoman agreed with a smile. "Is your fiancé coming here anytime soon to get fitted?"

"I have no idea when he's coming," Kurt told her honestly. "The one wedding tradition that we both really wanted to stick with is *not* seeing each other before the wedding and not knowing what the other is going to look like. We agreed on black tuxes with black ties, but we're each going out separately to get our own outfits so neither of us knows what the other is going to look like."

"Y'know, I think that's a great idea." The saleswoman nodded in agreement as she held a tape measure up to Kurt's arm to double-check the length of the sleeves or something. "Not many couples do that nowadays. I think it makes it more romantic."

"That's what we thought, too," Kurt said with a tiny smile, holding his arm away from his body a little bit to make it easier for her to measure. "We're literally going the *whole* day without seeing each other. Like, one of us is going to spend the night before the wedding at a hotel or something so we don't see each other at all. It'll be *so* worth it when I see him for the first time during the actual ceremony."

Casual small talk about the wedding continued in much the same fashion as the saleswoman finished measuring various parts of the tuxedo, then Kurt went back into the dressing room to change back into his own clothes. He placed the official order for the tuxedo and agreed to come back and pick it up shortly before the wedding, and he and Ellie left the shop en route to the large department store at the other end of the mall. Kurt was thankful for the opportunity to go out and spend time with his daughter and start buying their outfits for the wedding, but at the same time there was a feeling of nervousness eating away at him. He wasn't sure exactly what it was, but he tried his best to push his fears aside so he could help Ellie pick out the perfect flower girl dress that would make her feel like a princess.

xxx

An hour later, Kurt still wasn't feeling any less anxious even as he sat across from his daughter in the food court, both of them sipping smoothies and snacking on giant soft pretzels. Ellie was chattering away about how much she loved her new dress, which was packed into a garment bag and sitting on the chair next to Kurt, and how excited she was about the wedding because it was going to be a fairy tale just like the lady at the tuxedo shop had said. Kurt couldn't help but smile as he chewed thoughtfully on his pretzel and listened to every word she was saying. Her genuine happiness and excitement reminded him what this was all about – a beautiful event in which he and Blaine would become husband and husband. Yes, planning it was going to be extremely stressful, but he had to stop letting that stress get to him and just relax.

His phone vibrated on the table and he slid his thumb across the screen to answer the text message he'd just received. It was from Blaine, in response to the picture Kurt had sent a few minutes ago of Ellie wearing her flower girl dress and a radiant smile just outside the dressing room.

Tell her she looks beautiful! :) also, are we still talking to her about thanksgiving tonight?

Ah, yes. There was also the whole issue of Blaine's parents and their invitation for Kurt, Blaine and Ellie, along with Burt and Carole, to join them for Thanksgiving dinner which had been stressing him out. It wasn't so much the thought of actually spending the holiday with his future in-laws that bothered Kurt – if they were willing to try and become more accepting of his and Blaine's love, then he was all for it. But he and Blaine still had to explain the situation to their daughter, and he was definitely *not* looking forward to that. He always detested having to explain other people's hatred and homophobia to her, because she was still very young and couldn't understand why some people still had some inexplicable hostility toward gay couples. She'd grown up with two fathers for her whole life and he knew that it was still difficult for her to know that not everyone was accepting of her daddies' love for each other.

He took a big bite of his pretzel, wiped his greasy fingers off on a paper napkin and texted Blaine back.

Yeah, I think we need to. But I have to admit I'm nervous :(it bothers me that we should even have to explain something like this to her.

"That was Blaine," he told Ellie as he set his phone down after sending his reply. "He saw the picture I sent of you in your dress and he says you look beautiful."

"Yay!" Ellie said happily. "Did you send him one of you in your outfit?"

"Oh, no. He doesn't get to see that until the actual wedding day, remember?" Kurt told her with a playful giggle. "If he sees what I look like now, he'll just want to marry me right away, and all the wedding planning will be for nothing." He had to admit, he'd looked *good* in his tux. He couldn't wait to see the look on Blaine's face when he first saw him on their wedding day and made a mental note to ask Savannah to get a picture of that.

"That wouldn't be good," Ellie agreed. "If it's gonna be like a fairy tale then it has to be perfect."

"It will be," Kurt promised her. "I've been in love with this man for over ten years now and for most of that time, I never even dreamed we'd be anything more than just good friends, let alone getting married. He deserves to have a perfect wedding. I won't let it be anything less than that."

He noticed that Blaine had texted him back, so he quickly read his fiancé's response.

It bothers me too, and I know it's going to be hard but I have faith in us :) we've made it through even worse things than this, right?

"Blaine's gonna love it so much," Ellie was saying. "He kinda feels the same way you do. He told me a couple nights ago that he always wanted to marry you, even when you first met a long time ago."

"Hey, ten years is hardly a long time," Kurt joked.

"It's older than I am," Ellie countered, taking a sip of her smoothie, and Kurt had to give her the benefit of the doubt. He remembered being a little kid and finding it hard to picture things that had happened before he'd even been born.

"Touché," he conceded, raising one eyebrow. Then, out of curiosity, "What made you guys start talking about me and him, anyway?"

"It was that night when you had to stay up really late working on school stuff," she told him, and Kurt immediately flashed back to a few evenings prior, when he'd stayed up much later than he normally cared to stay up, switching his entire lesson plan for the next day around because he'd found out at the last minute that there would be some all-school assembly which would interfere with a few of his class periods. "He was tucking me in, and he asked if I wanted to hear a bedtime story, and you guys have been talking about the wedding so much that I thought it would be kinda cool to hear about how you guys fell in love. It really is like a real life fairy tale."

"Really?" Kurt asked with a smile. "What all did he tell you?"

"He said you guys met at his school when you were there visiting, because you were thinking about switching schools and going there," she said. "Everyone was going down some stairs to go watch Blaine and his singing group do a song, and you were walking behind him so you tapped him on the shoulder so you could ask what was going on."

Kurt closed his eyes and let his mind travel back a decade, to the first time he ever laid eyes on his true love. "Oh, I remember that like it was yesterday. I remember he turned around and I saw his face for the first time and my breath kind of caught in my throat because he was so gorgeous."

"Blaine said that too!" Ellie told him eagerly. "He said he turned around and suddenly it was hard to breathe for a second because you were beautiful."

Kurt blushed and ducked his head. "Oh, please, I was not. I was just an awkward-looking teenage boy. I had really clear skin, but that's about it. He was stunning, though."

"Blaine says you were beautiful," Ellie repeated. "And he said he told you where everyone was going and he grabbed your hand and took you on a shortcut."

It was impossible for Kurt not to roll his eyes at that. "That was so *not* a shortcut. If anything, it took us longer. We were among the last people to get there."

"He said it wasn't really a shortcut," Ellie admitted. "He just wanted an excuse to hold your hand because you were cute."

"He doesn't know what he's talking about. I was not cute," Kurt muttered dryly under his breath. He'd first met Blaine during a very low period in his life, during which the man with whom he'd later spend eight years was shoving him into lockers and spitting venomous insults into his face, so his self-esteem at that point in time hadn't exactly been monumental. To this day it was still hard for him to look back on that time in his life with much confidence.

Ellie continued as if she hadn't heard him. He'd spoken so quietly that she probably hadn't. "And then when everyone got there, he started singing the song. Except he told me he was singing it to you the whole time."

"Oh, I could have fallen in love with him right then and there," Kurt reminisced with a fond smile. "He was so dreamy. I wish I would have followed my heart and just switched schools so I could be with him, but there's nothing I can do about that now."

He began mindlessly folding up his empty pretzel wrapper into a tiny square, keeping his head down so Ellie wouldn't have to see the regret in his eyes. She knew all too well how his story ended up – he'd eventually chosen Dave instead of letting his guard down and confessing his true feelings to Blaine. By doing the latter instead of the former, he could have saved himself a lot of pain. He couldn't help but feel that he'd let his daughter down by making her go through that turmoil.

"It's okay, Daddy," Ellie reassured him. She placed his tiny hand over his and he gave it a little squeeze. "We ended up with Blaine. We're happy now."

"I know, sweetie," he told her. "And I am so, so lucky to have him. He saved me in so many ways and...I don't even want to think about what would have happened to me if it hadn't been for him." His voice was softer all of a sudden, quiet and thick with regret. "I just hate that *you* had to go through all that trouble earlier this year. No kid should have to live with that."

Before Ellie could respond, Kurt's phone buzzed again – another text message from Blaine. He frowned as he picked up his phone to answer it. He hadn't even responded to Blaine's last message yet.

And by the way...I love you :)

Kurt bit his lip and blinked a few times because suddenly he honestly felt like he was going to cry. Here he'd been hating himself as he thought about all the pain he'd put himself and his daughter through, and Blaine's simple text message had managed to warm his heart and bring a smile to his face. It was almost as if his husband-to-be had sensed that he was upset with himself and had decided to send him a small reminder of love just to pick him up.

He shook his head in disbelief and let a smile grow on his face as he texted his fiancé back. There was no point in dwelling on past regrets when there were so many beautiful things for him to look forward to. "But you're right. We made it through all that and now I actually get to marry that dreamy boy who I met on a fancy staircase at a prep school."

Thanks for that, baby. Doesn't hurt to be reminded ;) love you sososo much. see you at home.

He was well aware of the fact that he sounded like a giddy lovesick teenager, but he couldn't help it. Blaine still managed to make him feel like that, even now that they were engaged and planning their wedding. Now that Kurt thought about it, Blaine made him feel a lot of things that nobody else could.

They polished off their smoothies and threw their trash in one of the garbage containers on their way out. Kurt wasn't nervous anymore; he had no reason to be, not with Blaine on his side.

xxx

Kurt had decided to go all out with dinner that night. He'd bought a large pot roast at the grocery store earlier in the week and was currently whipping up some homemade mashed potatoes to go with it when Blaine arrived home, looking flustered but still smiling.

"Hey." Kurt turned away from the counter so he could greet his fiancé with a light kiss on the lips. "You look happy, how was your day?"

"It was excellent," Blaine told him, pulling open the fridge and taking out a can of pop for himself. He grabbed a Diet Coke for Kurt and slid it across the counter to his fiancé, who thanked him and cracked it open. "I drove over to Hummel House on my lunch break to see Michael and he had some pretty great news."

Kurt wasn't surprised to hear that Blaine had gone to see Michael. They both had been making frequent trips to visit him at Hummel House a few times a week, both together and separately, since he was more or less their son but wasn't legally permitted to actually live with them until the court officially granted them custody. Still, Kurt was intrigued. "Do tell."

"You're never going to believe this." Blaine smiled and leaned against the counter on his elbows, as if he were about to tell Kurt a juicy secret. "So he's over at that vacant lot playing baseball like, every day. Right?"

Kurt nodded. "Every single day, rain or shine. I'll be interested to see if they keep playing when we start getting snow in a couple weeks."

"Apparently some local baseball scouts heard about how good he is and headed over there to check it out," Blaine informed him. "Get this. They want to keep an eye on him because they think he has a lot of promise, and if he keeps improving and getting even better, he could be on track for a full ride baseball

scholarship to a D1 school here in a few years. And that's not even the best part – he might not even need to play in college. They said he's got the potential to be professionally drafted right out of high school."

"Are you serious?" An elated smile spread across Kurt's face as his heart suddenly filled with pride for the amazing kid he already considered to be his son. "That's *amazing*! And I thought those scouts only started watching players when they're in high school."

"They thought he was *in* high school until they actually talked to him after watching him play," Blaine said incredulously, as if he couldn't even believe what he was saying. "They were shocked to learn he's only fourteen. But they decided he's so good that they're going to keep an eye on him for the next few years because they think he's got a lot of talent and potential to be even better. Think about it, Kurt. He's got the chance to play in the big leagues someday. He really does."

Kurt stared at the large bowl of mashed potatoes he'd been mixing up, then glanced at the oven where he knew the roast was just about done. In the sink sat a strainer filled with a blend of fresh vegetables that he'd also been planning on serving with dinner. Suddenly it seemed inappropriate for them to be having such an elaborate feast without their whole family present.

He looked at Blaine again. "I think we need to take all of this over to Hummel House and have a celebratory meal with our son."

"I think that's a great idea, but what about the twenty or so other residents?" Blaine mused. "Don't get me wrong, I definitely think we should acknowledge him, but it might be a little weird for us to bring all this food just for ourselves and Michael while the other residents are eating the dinner prepared by the staff cooks in the same dining room."

"Good point." Kurt bit his lip and glanced at the digital clock on the stove. It was a quarter after five; he knew that the dinner service at Hummel House didn't start until six.

Without thinking about it any longer, he strode over to the pantry and began pulling ingredients off the shelves, speaking over his shoulder to Blaine as he did so. "Could you please call Emily over at Hummel House? Tell her to hold off on dinner tonight."

xxx

About forty minutes later, Kurt, Blaine, Ellie and Michael were all sitting together as a family in the dining room at Hummel House, eating the food Kurt and Blaine had prepared and brought along. The other residents of the home, seated at the surrounding tables, were enjoying the same fare. Kurt had guessed that the roast, mashed potatoes and vegetables alone wouldn't be able to serve all twenty residents, so with some help from Blaine he'd also made a quick batch of fettuccine Alfredo and garlic toast, as well as a large salad. To his immense delight, everyone seemed to be enjoying the meal. He'd managed to catch a few comments from people sitting at nearby tables, all of them remarking how delicious the food was, and his heart swelled with happiness and the knowledge that he'd truly done something amazing for these people.

They'd asked Emily and the other staff members if they could please not make a big deal about the meal, but for some reason Kurt wasn't surprised in the least when he suddenly heard his friend's voice coming from the front of the room through a microphone. "Hi! Could I please have everyone's attention for just a minute?"

Everyone turned toward the front of the room to hear what she had to say; some people stood up so they could see her better since she was in her chair. Emily had a huge smile on her face and she looked happier than Kurt could recall her looking in a long time.

"I hope you all are enjoying your meal," she said, and there was a murmur of agreement from the residents. "I just wanted to let you all know that the delicious food you're eating was prepared lovingly and brought here tonight by my dear friend Kurt Hummel, the namesake of this place, and his fiancé, Blaine Anderson. They're joining us for dinner this evening along with their daughter Ellie and their son Michael."

She gestured with a smile to the table in the back of the dining room where the family was seated, so of course everyone turned to look at them and, for some reason, started to clap. Kurt, humbled by their recognition, smiled and waved a little bit even as a burning blush took over his face. Blaine wrapped an arm around his shoulders and gave them a smile of his own.

"I know you guys told me not to make a big deal about this, but I give credit where credit is due." Emily was still speaking into the microphone, but it was clear that she was only acknowledging Kurt and Blaine in that particular moment. "Enjoy your evening, everybody."

It took them longer to eat than it otherwise would have, due to the fact that various residents of the house kept approaching their table at various times to thank Kurt and Blaine for thoughtfully bringing them dinner. By the end of the meal, Kurt thought it was safe to say that every single person in the room had personally acknowledged them at some point, and with each and every grateful compliment he received, the more assured he became that they'd done the right thing.

The dining room was mostly empty when the four of them finally finished eating, and before they could get up to go, Emily wheeled herself over to say something to them.

"Hey, I hope you don't mind that I acknowledged you like that, but I thought these folks deserved to know where their wonderful meal came from. Every single one of them loved it," she told them, then hesitated a little bit before glancing at Michael. "And I hope *you* don't mind that I called you their son. I know you guys aren't due to hear back from the custody court until next month at the earliest, but I—"

"Screw whatever the custody court says," Michael cut in. "These guys *are* my dads."

"And you're our son." Blaine gave him a confident fist bump. "Our awesomely talented, already-being-checked-out-by-baseball-scouts son."

"My big brother!" Ellie exclaimed happily, and Michael smiled as he leaned over to give her a one-armed hug. He was already so caring and protective of her, just like any big brother would be, and seeing the bond that the two of them had already formed made Kurt ridiculously happy.

"I guess we're all in agreement that this is our family, then," Kurt relented, giving the others a huge smile. It didn't even matter that they hadn't gotten an official decision from the custody court yet, because they knew it was true.

xxx

Shortly after leaving the dining room, the four of them ended up in one of the large rec rooms where many of the residents liked to spend time together in the evenings after dinner. Kurt and Blaine had both agreed that since Michael was their son, future court decisions be damned, it was only appropriate to invite him to join them for Thanksgiving with Blaine's parents in Ohio. Michael had eagerly agreed to come, and although he didn't say much about it, Blaine got the feeling that he'd never really had a *real* Thanksgiving dinner with lots of family and good food. This was the perfect opportunity to for him to experience the

holiday the way it was meant to be celebrated, especially now that the Andersons had expressed a willingness to open their hearts and minds to the love that Kurt and Blaine shared.

Since they had yet to have their discussion with Ellie about what to expect when they arrived at Blaine's parents' home later that month, they'd wordlessly agreed to talk to both her and Michael about it before they left Hummel House that evening. Blaine did most of the talking.

"Ellie, I know we've already mentioned this to you once before, but it's worth sharing again," he began carefully. "And Michael, you definitely deserve to know what you're in for. My mom and dad, in the past, haven't exactly been very accepting of me for being gay. In fact, they flat-out refused to come to our wedding when we first told them about it."

He looked at Michael, checking how he was responding to all this. Michael merely shrugged and mumbled, "Doesn't bother me, I guess. I'm kinda used to it."

"It's getting better, I promise," Blaine assured him. "My parents invited us down for Thanksgiving because they've decided to try and let go of their old beliefs. Kurt's dad and stepmom are going to be there too...they're actually the ones who went and talked to my parents and tried to convince them to open up their minds. They *want* to try and accept us. They're honestly trying to change...and I've gotta say, this is a huge step for them. I'm hoping that having dinner with us will make them realize that we really *are* just like any other normal family."

"That's awesome," Michael said. "That they want to try and change how they see things. I definitely want to come along and do what I can to help out."

"You can help just by being yourself," Kurt told him. "You're a great kid, Michael. I know they're going to love you. And like Blaine said, this is already a huge step in the right direction for them...I really do think that this is going to work out and they're going to start to accept us. We just thought you deserved to know what was going on before we head down there."

"Yeah, thanks for letting me know." Michael's voice grew quiet all of a sudden. "Do you want me to...come out to them?"

"Only if you want to," Kurt said, and Blaine nodded in agreement. "If you feel comfortable telling them and you think it might make a difference, then by all means go ahead and do it. But *nothing* says you absolutely

have to come out to them, or to anyone. Like I said before, just be yourself. That's the best thing you can do."

"I can do that," Michael told them. "I just want to make a difference with them."

xxx

Before any of them knew it, the week of Thanksgiving had arrived and Kurt, Blaine, Michael and Ellie were piled into the brand-new SUV Blaine had recently purchased to accommodate their larger family and hitting the road to Ohio. It was a relatively quiet drive, with Kurt and Blaine making small talk in the front seat and Michael listening to his iPod and Ellie coloring in some of the coloring books she'd brought along before eventually falling asleep, as she tended to do on long car trips. They made only one stop somewhere in Indiana to stretch their legs and use the restroom and get something to eat, and when they got back in the car Kurt took over behind the wheel to drive the rest of the way.

It was dark when they finally made it to Burt and Carole's quiet suburban home. In order to ease the tension a little bit, Kurt and Blaine had both thought it would be easier on Ellie and Michael if they spent one night at the Hudson-Hummels' before all six of them drove to the Anderson home for Thanksgiving dinner the next day.

"You okay, buddy?" Blaine asked Michael as they stood on the porch, waiting for Burt or Carole to come and answer the door. He'd noticed that his soon-to-be-son looked a little nervous, and he couldn't really blame him, because this was naturally a bit of an awkward situation.

Michael bit his lip and nodded. "I'm fine. I just always get nervous meeting new people."

"Well, you have nothing to worry about," Blaine reassured him. "Burt and Carole are awesome. They're going to love you."

As if on cue, the door was swung open at that exact moment by an enthusiastic Carole, who looked unbelievably happy to see them. Burt was standing just a few feet behind her; both of them stepped aside so that the four on the front porch could come in. Hugs were given all around and when Michael extended his hand to introduce himself to Burt and Carole (who had already been informed about the adoption situation by Kurt and Blaine), he was immediately pulled into a warm hug as well.

Despite Kurt's protests, Burt and Carole both put on their coats and headed outside to help unload the car. It was freezing cold and a few snowflakes were already starting to drift down from the sky, which Kurt thought was unusual considering the fact that they hadn't even gotten any snow in Chicago yet. After showing everyone to their rooms – Kurt and Blaine would be in Kurt's old room, Michael would have Finn's, and Ellie would be in the guest room – Burt and Carole left their son and his family to unpack and get settled in.

"It's coming down pretty hard now," Kurt commented as he glanced out the window at the now-heavily falling snow. "I'm wondering if I should go out there and shovel the driveway."

Blaine, who was sitting on the edge of the bed, reached out for his hand. Kurt hadn't noticed what he was doing and unknowingly stepped away from his fiancé's hand so he could get a better look out the window.

"Don't go out there, baby," Blaine protested with the cutest little pout on his face. "It's cold outside."

"I've got to go away...," Kurt sang with a smile on his face, his musical intuition having kicked in immediately when Blaine had accidentally quoted the popular holiday tune.

"But baby, it's cold outside," Blaine sang back to him. He stood up from the bed and crossed the room over to where Kurt was standing, then spoke in his normal voice. "Really, though, I don't want you to freeze out there."

"You're so cute when you're protective," Kurt told him with a sweet little smile, effectively stepping away and pulling his coat on. "But I'm gonna go shovel anyway. It's already getting pretty bad and if we wait until the morning it'll be even worse...plus, I worry about my dad with his heart..."

Blaine knew there was no way he would convince Kurt to stay inside, so he reached for his own coat. "At least let me come out and help you."

Kurt rolled his eyes but kept smiling all the same. "Fine."

They were heading down the hall toward the stairs when suddenly the sound of a familiar giggle caught Blaine's attention. He stopped and peered into the nearest open door, Finn's bedroom where Michael was staying, and motioned for Kurt to come and look.

Ellie and Michael were sitting on the floor at the foot of the bed, an open book in between them. Michael was pointing something out to Ellie and saying something that sounded like, "Look, there he is again," which elicited another giggle from the little girl.

Kurt stepped into the room, a knowing smirk growing on his face. "Do I even *want* to know what you two are up to?"

"Oh, I was just looking at some of your brother's old high school yearbooks," Michael told him. "Carole said they were good for a laugh."

"I bet she did," Kurt murmured, kneeling on the floor beside his daughter and peering over at the open page, which was dedicated to the New Directions glee club. He immediately winced when he saw a large, candid picture of his teenage self dressed in a black costume with a red tie, obviously in the middle of singing a song and looking extremely enthusiastic. "Oh my god, how embarrassing."

"New Directions senior Kurt Hummel shows his spirit onstage during a competition," Blaine read the caption aloud with a mischievous grin. Kurt hadn't even noticed him sitting down on the floor beside him to look at the book. "Aww, look at how cute you were."

Kurt punched him lightly on the arm and Blaine jokingly shot him an offended look while Ellie pointed to another picture on the page. "Look, there's Uncle Finn."

Kurt had barely glanced at the photo she had pointed out, which showed his stepbrother caught in the middle of some awkward dance move he hadn't known how to do, when suddenly his daughter's excited squeal caught his attention again. "Hey, there's you and Blaine!"

Blaine frowned as he looked to see what she was referring to. "Why am I in your guys' yearbook?"

Kurt squinted to look at the picture as well. It had been taken at some competition; he couldn't remember which one. He and Blaine, who was dressed in his Dalton uniform, were kicked back on one of the enormous couches backstage, a bottle of Diet Coke in Kurt's hand and a large can of Red Bull in Blaine's. They must have been having quite the hilarious conversation, because both of them were laughing.

"Show choir competitions were intense onstage, but camaraderie and new friendships between members of opposing groups were always quick to form behind the scenes. Here, Kurt Hummel shares a moment with a member of the Dalton Academy Warblers," Kurt read, his voice barely above a murmur.

"'Sharing a moment'? Really? That's the phrase they used?" Michael joked. "Geez, even the yearbook editor people thought you two belonged together."

Kurt studied the picture a moment longer. He wished he could go back in time to that exact moment and speak to his teenage self before Teenage Kurt sat down on the couch with Blaine. *This is the boy you're going to marry someday. He already loves you more than you can imagine.*

"They didn't even put my name," Blaine said sadly. "I'm just 'a member of the Warblers.'"

"I wouldn't take it too personally," Kurt reassured him. "I doubt the yearbook committee paid much attention to who people from other schools were."

He stood up, afraid that if he stayed much longer he'd become completely engrossed in the yearbooks and faded memories. "Anyway, we were just on our way out to shovel the driveway. Don't go *too* crazy making fun of me."

"We'll try our best," Michael joked. "These are actually pretty cool to look at, not even kidding."

Kurt tugged Blaine up from the floor and they headed for the door, but not before Blaine turned back around and said, "Oh, make sure you check out his senior picture, it's *adorable*." There was the sound of rustling pages, probably as Michael and Ellie flipped through the book to look for said picture, as Kurt playfully shoved a giggling Blaine out the bedroom door.

When they finally made it downstairs, Burt and Carole were sitting in the living room with the television turned to the nightly news. Carole looked up from the book she'd been reading when she heard the two men enter the room. "Where are you two headed?"

"We're going out to shovel the driveway and sidewalks," Blaine told her. "The snow's already coming down pretty hard so we figured if we start shoveling now, it'll be a lot easier in the morning."

"You'll do no such thing. Burt can take care of it," she protested. "You two have been driving all afternoon...stay in here and relax, have some hot chocolate. I was just getting ready to make some."

"No, really, it's fine," Kurt insisted. "We've been cooped up in the car all day so it'll be nice to get outside and move around a little bit." Burt, who had already started standing up from the couch, immediately sunk

back into his seat, obviously trying to hide his relieved expression. "We promise we'll come in and have some of that hot chocolate as soon as we're done," Kurt added to appease Carole.

Five minutes later, the two of them were bundled up in coats, scarves, hats and gloves and shoveling away outside. The snow was still falling heavily around them, making their work seem fruitless when a light dusting began to cover an area of the driveway they'd just cleared, but both of them knew that at least this would get some of the snow out of the way now. They worked in peaceful silence for a few minutes before Blaine finally spoke.

"I still remember that conversation we were having in the yearbook picture, y'know," he commented nonchalantly. "I never knew there was a candid picture of it, but I still remember that moment."

Kurt stopped shoveling for a moment and turned to Blaine with a bewildered smile. "Really?"

"Sectionals, senior year," Blaine reminisced. "It was during intermission and your group had just performed a few minutes earlier. We were up first right after the break and for some reason I was worried about this one dance move in our routine that I could never seem to do correctly, so I was telling you about it. You told me not to worry, that if even Finn could manage to dance his way through an entire routine without seriously injuring himself or someone else, then I'd have no problem. And then we started laughing and I guess that's when they snapped the picture."

Snow drifted quietly to the ground between them for a few seconds, then Kurt shook his head in disbelief as he smiled and continued shoveling. He'd completely forgotten about that moment up until now, but it had all come back to him when Blaine described it. "You astound me, Blaine Anderson."

Blaine shrugged, as if his ability to perfectly recall a moment that had occurred years ago was nothing special. "I just remember how beautiful you were," he mused, half to himself and half to Kurt. "You were still on an adrenaline high from performing, and your eyes were all lit up and you were kind of flustered, but I remember thinking it was adorable. And you couldn't stop smiling. You know I love that smile."

"Can I ask you something?" Kurt asked hesitantly, and when Blaine nodded he continued with his bold question. "Did you love me? Even then?"

"Of course I did," Blaine responded immediately, not even looking up as he tossed the large clump of snow on his shovel out of the way.

Kurt's heart was suddenly pounding so hard that he could practically hear it in his ears. He'd known that Blaine had been in love with him for a number of years before they'd officially become a couple, and in the same way he had secretly been in love with Blaine during that time as well, but that picture had been taken only about a year after they'd first met. Blaine couldn't have fallen in love with him *that* quickly, could he?

As if he could read Kurt's mind, Blaine continued. "I never believed in love at first sight until it happened to me. With you. The moment I turned around on those stairs, Kurt...before you even told me your name, my heart skipped a few beats and that little voice in my head told me *That's him.*"

"Oh, Blaine," Kurt whispered, his heart filling with regret and his eyes with tears. "You loved me for *that long* and I was too stupid and scared to tell you I felt the same..."

Blaine abandoned his snow shovel in the middle of the driveway and stepped over to where Kurt was standing, then took his shovel and set it down beside them. He wrapped Kurt in his arms, holding him close both for warmth and for the sheer fact that he *needed* to feel Kurt close to him.

"Kurt," Blaine said slowly, and the other man's gorgeous glaz gaze instantly met his eyes. "I know you have your regrets. Trust me, I have mine, too. And...and I know you've been hurt so much in your life, and it breaks my heart to think about that, but the important thing is that you've moved on from that point in your life and you're stronger now. We don't need to dwell on our regrets and think about what could have been...not anymore. We had a beautiful friendship for ten years that developed into a beautiful romance and now we're actually getting *married*, Kurt. We have so much to look forward to...and I can't wait to spend the rest of my life with you."

Kurt was blinking rapidly, probably to hold back the tears that Blaine could see glistening in his eyes. "No regrets?" he asked softly.

"No regrets," Blaine repeated confidently, squeezing him even closer. "Just love."

On any other occasion, Kurt would have made a snarky comment about his fiancé's adorable Katy Perry obsession, but he couldn't this time due to the fact that his lips were suddenly very busy making their familiar acquaintance with Blaine's. The snowfall had let up a little bit; it wasn't as heavy as it had been a few minutes ago, but it still floated lightly down to the ground and created an effect so magical that Kurt wondered for a delirious moment if he was in some kind of cheesy romance movie. He still couldn't

believe his luck, that he'd actually ended up with the man of his dreams after years of secretly wishing and hoping.

They broke away after a while, smiling as they gasped for air, their breath appearing as little puffs of cold air between them. Blaine took advantage of the quiet moment to drink in just how exquisite Kurt looked. There were snowflakes glistening in his hair and on his eyelashes; his smile was so radiant that it touched his eyes and brightened them with pure adoration. His cheeks and the tip of his nose had turned a deep pink from the cold and his full, beautiful lips were plump and swollen from kissing. He looked like an angel that had fallen straight from heaven and for some reason Blaine wanted to cry.

"What?" Kurt asked after a while, his voice so quiet and still touched by the smile he wore. He couldn't even see how flawless he was.

"You're so perfect." Blaine leaned in closer and kissed the tip of his nose, which was slightly redder than it had been a moment ago and ice cold. Kurt giggled and scrunched up his face and Blaine thought that was so cute that he just *had* to give him another kiss, this time properly on the lips. They stayed outside for a while longer, mouths fused passionately together, neither of them noticing nor caring how cold it was. Blaine was perfectly content to stay right where he was, wrapped up in Kurt's strong arms and reciprocating the caress of those warm, soft lips.

Eventually they managed to break away long enough to finish shoveling the driveway and finally headed inside, where they cuddled together on the couch by the fireplace sipping hot chocolate. It was the perfect end to an exhausting yet wonderful day, and Blaine couldn't help but wish that tomorrow would be just as good.

xxx

The following afternoon, all six people managed to fit comfortably into the Hummel-Andersons' new SUV so they could all make the trip to Blaine's parents' house together. Kurt, always the concerned father, had been checking with both Ellie and Michael every so often to make sure they were still okay with doing this. Ellie had been mostly quiet about it, not saying much except that she felt all right about everything and reaffirmed her trust in Kurt and Blaine when she told them that she knew they wouldn't make her go if she didn't want to. Michael, on the other hand, was more verbally optimistic about the situation.

"Something good is gonna happen here today," he announced as they all got out of the car and began making their way up to the Andersons' front porch. "I don't know what it is, but I've just got a feeling."

He turned to Blaine hesitantly as Carole stepped forward to ring the doorbell. "Is it weird to be feeling that way? I haven't even met them yet?"

"No, it's not," Blaine assured him. "I have a good feeling, too. The fact that they actually invited us here today is already a good sign. At this time last year, even saying the *word* 'gay' around my parents would have made them freak out."

The door was opened from the other side and Blaine held his breath as his father greeted them with a somewhat formal air. "Hello, everybody, come on in."

The six of them stepped into the foyer and Bill Anderson poked his head into the kitchen, where his wife was presumably fixing up dinner. "Lisa, they're here."

Sure enough, a few seconds later, Blaine's mother appeared. She looked a bit stressed, probably from spending all afternoon cooking, but her face immediately softened into a smile when she caught sight of her son and his family. "Oh, hello, it's so nice to see you all."

Blaine could tell that she was being sincere, so he decided to take a risk and introduce his parents to their grandchildren.

"Mom, Dad, this is Ellie," he told them, placing a gentle hand on his daughter's shoulder. "And this is Michael."

He had called his parents the previous week and explained the whole situation with Michael to them, so it wouldn't be a surprise when he showed up with their family for Thanksgiving, and it was clear to Blaine from the look in his parents' eyes that they already loved their grandchildren. He shared a brief, hopeful smile with Kurt. Maybe this was going to be easier than he'd thought.

"Hi," Ellie said shyly, waving a little bit and trying to inconspicuously slip behind Blaine, who immediately stepped aside so that she wouldn't be able to do so. He knew she could be shy when meeting new people, so this wasn't anything new, but he was already confident that his parents loved her and he didn't want her to be afraid.

"It's nice to meet you both," Michael told them, sounding genuinely sincere despite the given awkwardness of the situation.

"It's wonderful to meet both of you," Lisa told him and Ellie, and Blaine could swear there were tears in her eyes. She directed her attention to where Kurt and Blaine were standing, a few feet behind their son and daughter. "And boys, I...*we* owe you both an apology." Bill Anderson stepped up beside her and draped an arm over her shoulders as she continued. "We're sorry that we've been so close-minded over the years, but seeing how much you love each other and what a beautiful family you have is really starting to open our eyes."

"Thank you," Kurt said humbly. "He might not admit it, but I know that's exactly what Blaine has been waiting to hear you say."

Blaine was too choked up with a sudden onslaught of emotion to really attempt to speak, so he settled for giving Kurt a smile and squeezing his hand in appreciation. All of a sudden, this was almost too good to be true.

"Well, come on in. Dinner's almost ready, you're right on time." Lisa motioned for them to come further into the house and Bill offered to take their coats. With every passing second, Blaine could feel the tension melting away and he only hoped the rest of the afternoon would continue in much the same fashion.

As they sat down to dinner together, he leaned over to Michael and spoke to him quietly enough that nobody else at the table could hear. "You doing okay so far?"

Michael nodded. "I'm fine. This is going better than I thought it would."

He was about to ask Ellie the same question, but decided against it when he noticed her happily babbling away to Lisa about school and the upcoming first grade holiday concert, in which she had a solo. Lisa was hanging on her granddaughter's every word. Blaine smiled to himself as he took a seat in between Michael and Kurt. He wasn't sure why he'd been so worried in the first place.

The meal was delicious and everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves, but for some reason Blaine held his breath when his father spoke up after everyone was more or less finished eating.

"I think this has been a wonderful holiday and I'm glad I got to spend it with all of you," Bill said to the rest of the group at the table. "Why don't we all go around and share what we're thankful for?"

There was a murmur of agreement from around the table, so he began. "I'm thankful that you all were able to come and share this holiday with us, and I'm thankful for Kurt, Ellie and Michael. You all make my son so happy and I'm so glad he's got a family of his own."

Lisa, who was sitting to his right, went next. "He took the words right out of my mouth. I'm so thankful that you're happy, Blaine, and I'm also thankful for Burt and Carole for opening our eyes to the love that you and Kurt share."

Kurt was sitting beside her. Blaine adored the sweet smile that lit up his face as he began. "I'm thankful that Blaine came into my life during a very dark time and I know my seventeen-year-old self would be very thankful that I finally got him." The rest of the family laughed for a moment, then he continued. "And I'm thankful for both of my kids, who make me the luckiest father in the world."

"I'm thankful for my wonderful, amazing, beautiful husband-to-be," Blaine said confidently when it was his turn. He noticed a tiny smile and a blush touching Kurt's face out of the corner of his eye. "He inspires me every single day and I'm so proud to love him. And I'm thankful for all of you, because every single one of you makes my life incredible in some way."

Kurt leaned over and kissed his cheek, taking one of Blaine's hands in both of his own as Michael took his turn.

"I have a lot to be thankful for lately," he said. "My life's changed so much over the last few months. I'm thankful that I have a real family now for the first time in my life. I know it won't be official until probably next month, but I know it's true. I've got the two best dads ever and an awesome little sister-," Ellie smiled and leaned over to give him a hug when he mentioned her, "and it turns out I got some really cool grandparents, too. And I know it sounds kinda dumb, but I'm also thankful for baseball because it's my passion and now I know I have a chance of really getting the chance to play in the big leagues someday."

"I'm thankful for my daddies and my brother," Ellie said happily. "And also for Grandpa Burt and Grandma Carole, and Grandpa Bill and Grandma Lisa."

Blaine could tell his parents were touched that she'd thought to include them. This whole experience was proceeding along more smoothly than he could have dreamed.

"I'm so thankful for every single one of you," Carole said simply.

Burt was last. "I'm thankful for my grandkids, and I'm thankful that marriage equality is becoming more and more widespread. My son deserves to marry the man of his dreams and I couldn't be more excited to see that happen."

Kurt, still holding Blaine's hand, linked their fingers together under the table as a sweet smile touched his face. "Thanks, Dad."

Blaine couldn't help sneaking a look at his parents. He couldn't tell for sure by their facial expressions, but he thought it was pretty safe to say that they felt the exact same way as Burt.

xxx

Later that evening, after everyone else had left, Lisa Anderson was just finishing putting all the clean dishes away in the kitchen when something on the counter caught her eye.

She picked it up and studied it for a second, wondering if Kurt and Blaine had possibly left it there for them. She couldn't think of any other way that it possibly could have magically appeared on the kitchen counter.

After looking at it for a moment longer, she called her husband into the room. "Bill? Could you come here for a second?"

Bill, who had been watching postgame football coverage on ESPN, appeared a few seconds later. Without saying a word, Lisa handed him the photograph she'd found.

It was a shot from Kurt and Blaine's engagement photo shoot, featuring the happy couple sitting on some stairs next to a fountain and smiling as they nuzzled noses. A few lines of simple black text floated in the cloudy sky above them.

Kurt asked. Blaine said yes. Save the date.

The date, according to the small line of numbers beneath that, was April 9. Just a few months away. Lisa glanced at the save-the-date announcement, then back at her husband.

"They want us to come to their wedding," she said quietly.

"Then we'll go to their wedding," Bill responded simply.

Lisa pulled him into a hug, relishing how wonderful it felt to have let go of her unwarranted prejudices. Her son was happy, and she had no right to take that away from him. Besides, seeing how happy Kurt made Blaine in turn made *her* happy. She'd never seen her son smile the way he did whenever Kurt was around.

She gave her husband a rueful smile as she pulled away from the embrace and walked across the room to the desk where she kept her calendar. After flipping through the pages until she came to April, she picked up a pen and wrote *Blaine & Kurt wedding* on the little square for the ninth.

Chapter Thirty-Two

The Hudson-Hummel family of Lima and the Anderson family of Westerville proudly announce the engagement of their sons, Kurt Hummel and Blaine Anderson of Chicago, Illinois.

Kurt is the son of Burt Hummel and the late Elizabeth Hummel; he is also the stepson of Carole Hudson. He graduated from the Ohio State University in 2016 with a degree in music education. He is currently employed at Buckley Middle School in Chicago as a music teacher.

His fiancé, Blaine, son of Bill and Lisa Anderson, also graduated from OSU in 2016 with his bachelor's degree. He went on to law school, earning his degree in 2019. He is a partner at the well-known Chicago law firm Carter & Anderson.

Both men are strong supporters of the gay rights movement who attracted national attention earlier this year when they won a landmark Supreme Court case dealing with the rights of the LGBT community to join organizations such as labor unions.

The couple has one daughter, Elizabeth. They are in the process of obtaining legal custody of and adopting their second child, a son named Michael.

The wedding will be held April 9 in an outdoor ceremony at Wrigley Square in Chicago's Millennium Park.

Kurt smiled to himself as he tucked the newspaper clipping back inside the envelope it had been sent in and set it at Blaine's place at the kitchen table for him to see when he came home. He was pretty sure his stepmother could hear his grin through the phone.

"I love it, Carole. Thanks so much for sending that to us. Blaine and I were talking about putting an announcement in the paper up here, but we weren't sure how we would go about doing that or if you and Dad and the Andersons would want to be a part of it, since we live out of state...but this is perfect. Thank you."

"Actually, you need to thank Lisa Anderson," Carole told him with a smile of her own evident in her voice. "It was all her idea. She wrote it up and emailed it to me and your father to ask if we would be okay with her publishing it in the local paper. All I did was clip it out and send it to you so the two of you could see it."

Kurt knew that Blaine's parents had been making a valiant effort to shed their previous intolerance, but this he had not expected to hear.

"This is amazing," he said softly into the phone, then giggled a little bit. "Blaine's gonna cry when he reads this and I tell him who wrote it. I already know it."

"Isn't he there right now?" Carole sounded somewhat surprised. "Don't tell me he's at work. It's Christmas Eve."

"No, he's working," Kurt sighed. "I told him to take the day off, but he said he wants to work as much as he can before the wedding, because he knows he'll have to take a lot of time off for that and the honeymoon. I think he said he's coming home early, though."

As he spoke, he was pacing around the Christmas tree that shimmered in the living room, mindlessly rearranging ornaments and adjusting lights to keep his free hand busy. There were no presents just yet – he and Blaine had to play Santa that evening and set them all out, but he already knew the room was going to be absolute madness in the best possible way come morning. And although they had still yet to hear a decision from the child custody court, they'd managed to get permission to let Michael spend the night in what would be his room once he officially moved in with the family, just so he could experience Christmas with everyone. Blaine was going to pick him up from Hummel House on his way home from work.

"You've got yourself a good, hard-working man, Kurt," Carole told him. "Take good care of him."

"Oh, I do," he promised her. "I'm busting out my mom's old recipe book so I can fix something really special for dinner tonight. He works so hard; he deserves a nice meal."

"That's sweet," Carole told him. "I hope he knows how lucky he is to have you."

As if on cue, the apartment door opened at that exact moment. In stepped Blaine and Michael, both of them with their arms full of grocery bags. Kurt raised one eyebrow but smiled as he responded to Carole.

"Oh, I think he knows I'm a keeper," he said, turning a flirtatious wink to his fiancé over his shoulder.

"He's right there, isn't he?" Carole guessed.

"Yeah, he and Michael just got home," Kurt told her. "I'm gonna show him what you sent us. Thank you so much again."

"You're welcome, honey," Carole said kindly. "I'll talk to you soon."

Kurt said goodbye to her and hung up before crossing the room to where Blaine and Michael had obviously been trying to figure out what his conversation had been about. Neither of them had moved since entering the room.

Kurt lifted the bags Blaine was holding out of his arms and set them on the counter before turning to greet his future husband with their customary kiss hello.

"You two are bad eavesdroppers," he pointed out with a joking smirk before turning to unload the bags he'd just set down. For whatever reason, Blaine had purchased a ton of food even though their refrigerator and cabinets were full.

"Well, hello to you too," Blaine joked as he and Michael began to help putting the groceries away.

"I never said I wasn't happy to see you," Kurt teased, pressing an innocent kiss to Blaine's cheek as he walked by. "How are you two doing today?"

"Pretty good," Michael replied with a casual shrug. "Really excited. I'm glad I get to have a real Christmas this year."

"Every kid deserves to have a real Christmas every year," Blaine told him. "But you're a part of this family, so there's absolutely no way we wouldn't think of including you."

"We take care of our own," Kurt told him nonchalantly before turning to Blaine. "By the way, what's with all the food? You just went grocery shopping earlier this week."

Blaine suddenly froze in place as he was reaching into the refrigerator to put something away. "I guess this kind of ruins the surprise, then."

"What surprise?" Kurt asked, suddenly flirtatious as he stepped over to where Blaine was standing and looped his arms around his neck. Michael had left and gone out to the living room to watch TV now that all the groceries were put away, so the two of them were completely alone in the kitchen.

Blaine put his hands on Kurt's waist and pulled him closer, keeping his voice low as he spoke. "Mmmm, just the surprise plan I had to make a really nice dinner for you and the kids tonight."

"Well, that's awkward," Kurt murmured, giggling a little bit, "because I was planning on doing the exact same thing to surprise *you*."

Blaine laughed quietly. "No way. You were not."

"I was, actually." Kurt let his face inch even closer to Blaine's as he spoke. "In fact, I was just talking about it with—"

The thought of his phone conversation a few minutes earlier with Carole suddenly reminded him about the engagement announcement sitting on the kitchen table. He slipped out of the embrace and abruptly turned to grab it. "Oh, that reminds me."

Blaine pouted as Kurt reached for the envelope containing the newspaper clipping on the table. "Hey, not fair. I wanna kiss you."

"There will be plenty of opportunities for kisses after you read this," Kurt told him with a sweet smile as he handed him the envelope. "I think you'll be pleasantly surprised."

Blaine looked skeptical, but opened the envelope all the same and let the clipping slip out into his hand. His face brightened into a smile when he noticed the small picture of the two of them that accompanied the short article. "Hey, look, there we are."

"Just read it," Kurt encouraged. He was practically jumping out of his skin with excitement to see what Blaine's reaction would be.

Blaine began reading to himself, a tiny smile growing bigger and bigger on his face the further he read. By the time he was finished, he was positively glowing.

"This is so cool," he said, turning to Kurt with pure excitement and love shining in his eyes. "Did Carole write this?"

Kurt simply shook his head, smiling a little bit as he rocked back and forth on his heels.

"Your dad?" Blaine guessed again, only to earn another shake of the head from Kurt. "Who was it, then?"

"Your mom wrote it," Kurt told him, unable to stop smiling. "She wrote it and put it in the paper back in Ohio. Carole clipped it out and mailed it to us, but she said it was all your mom's idea."

Blaine started to read it over again, but this time he bit his lip and blinked rapidly several times. Kurt knew him well enough by now to figure out that his fiancé was trying to hold back tears.

"Proud to announce the engagement of their sons," Blaine read aloud quietly. He looked up into his fiancé's eyes, smiling Kurt's favorite smile and speaking with tears choking his voice. "Did you see that, Kurt? She's *proud* to announce that I'm marrying you."

"I know, baby." Kurt pulled him into a hug, wrapping Blaine as close to him as possible as his fiancé began to cry tears of overwhelming happiness. He rubbed both hands up and down Blaine's back and nuzzled his face into the crook of his neck, breathing him in.

Blaine picked his head up and looked at Kurt with a new twinkle of hope shining in his eyes. "Do you think this means she and my dad will come to the wedding?"

"I think so," Kurt told him with a smile. They hadn't mailed the official invitations yet – they were waiting to do that until after the first of the year, but something gave him the feeling that Blaine's parents would respond with a yes. "I don't see why they'd advertise it like that in the paper and then not come."

"Well, we *did* leave that save-the-date card on the counter when we left after Thanksgiving," Blaine recalled, giggling a little bit. "I guess that really made them think about whether they wanted to come or not."

Kurt shook his head in disbelief but kept right on smiling. "This is so amazing. We actually got through to them."

"I never could have done it without you," Blaine whispered, then leaned in closer and claimed the kiss he'd been anticipating.

Just a few seconds later, though, Blaine was the one to break the kiss so he could speak. He leaned his forehead against Kurt's and placed one hand on his fiancé's soft cheek; Kurt smiled and instinctively nuzzled his face against Blaine's hand.

"And by the way," Blaine murmured, his voice barely audible, "I most *definitely* know you're a keeper."

Kurt had to stop and think for a moment before realizing that Blaine was referring to part of Kurt and Carole's phone conversation that he'd overheard. He smiled and lifted Blaine's hand off of his face, only to bring it to his lips and press a lingering kiss to the tips of his fingers.

"Good," he said softly. "It took me ten years and a hell of a lot of pain to get you. I'm not letting you go anytime soon."

It was immediately clear to him that Blaine had become distraught with what he'd said.

"Kurt, please don't even think about what he did to you anymore. He's not worth a second of your thoughts. I don't want you to let him hurt you anymore." Blaine's voice was desperate, almost pleading.

Kurt bit his lip and looked down, suddenly finding it difficult to meet Blaine's eyes. "I know that. And I know you love me, and that means the world. It's just...sometimes those memories come back to me, and it *hurts*. I try not to think about it, but it's not something that's easy to forget. I don't even want to think about what a mess I'd be if you hadn't saved me."

He'd finally spoken the words that had been hard to admit even to himself. For whatever reason, he'd been thinking about the abuse more and more lately, and he wasn't sure what had brought it back to him with such full force. He thought it might have been because one year ago, he and Ellie were celebrating Christmas back in Ohio with Dave, who was just months away from becoming a monster. The fact that this was his first Christmas with Blaine made him unbelievably happy, but he couldn't help but remember how different things had been just a year ago.

"I don't ever want you to hurt," Blaine murmured, pulling Kurt close to him again. "I want to make everything perfect for you."

Kurt shook his head. "I just keep thinking about last Christmas and how stupid I was. I never saw it coming. I had no idea that just a few months later I'd be bailing out with Ellie, driving all the way up here in one night just to get out of that hellhole."

He attempted to swallow the large lump in his throat before he continued. "And I'm so happy to be here with you this year, don't get me wrong. It's just...I don't even know. I don't miss my old life at all, but it's just sad to think that things changed so quickly from that point."

It was times like that when Blaine hated Dave Karofsky with every fiber in his being. He absolutely could not wrap his mind around how anyone could look straight into Kurt's beautiful eyes and have any desire to hurt him. He wished that he could have physically been there for Kurt during those months of turmoil at the beginning of the year, as opposed to being two whole states away. What he would have given to be able to protect Kurt and give that Karofsky asshole a piece of his mind...

But he couldn't be angry. Not now. Right now, his precious Kurt needed to be held. So that's exactly what he did – he held Kurt close to him, neither of them saying a word for the longest time, but words weren't necessary. He could feel Kurt gradually relaxing into the embrace, so he tightened his arms and gently brought him even closer.

Kurt finally pulled away, but Blaine was pleased to see that he was wearing a relieved smile.

"Thank you," he said sincerely. "I don't...I'm not sure what came over me just then. It's just that I've been thinking about that whole situation a lot lately and I'm not sure why...I think it might have something to do with the holidays and all the memories associated with that. And I just kind of lost control there, I guess. I'm sorry."

"Kurt, you don't have to apologize for the things you're thinking and feeling," Blaine told him. "You've been so unbelievably strong after everything that happened to you. You don't have to be strong all the time. We all need our moments to be weak."

Whenever Blaine said something especially profound, as was the case here, Kurt was suddenly overwhelmed with love for him. He pulled Blaine close to him again and smiled blissfully as he whispered into his ear.

"God, I can't wait to marry you." The words, warm against Blaine's skin, still managed to send a chill down his spine.

"Likewise," Blaine murmured. He squeezed Kurt closer to him for a second before pulling back and giving him a smile. "Why don't we make dinner together tonight?"

Kurt couldn't think of anything that sounded more perfect.

xxx

Later that night, after ensuring that both Ellie and Michael were fast asleep, Kurt and Blaine transported all of the already-wrapped gifts from the top shelf of the closet in their bedroom to their customary spot underneath the Christmas tree. They didn't have a fireplace mantel on which to hang the stockings, but they made do and hung them along the top of the entertainment center which housed their TV. The whole time, Blaine couldn't help but smile to himself as he thought about the fact that this was a tradition that he and Kurt would be continuing for the next several years.

He also knew that this was the moment in which he needed to present Kurt with the experience of a lifetime that they'd cherish for many more than just several years. Which is why, the second the last gift had been set in its place under the tree, he stopped his fiancé before the other man had a chance to even turn toward the hallway which led back to their bedroom.

"Kurt. Wait."

Kurt turned to face him, a hesitant expression wavering on his face. "What is it?"

"I want to give you your Christmas present now," Blaine told him. He quickly ducked behind the tree and grabbed the small package he'd secretly hidden on the floor there. Kurt looked adorably confused and intrigued as he accepted the gift, smiling when he noticed that Blaine had written *Kurt Hummel-Anderson* on the tag.

The box Blaine had handed him was very thin. Once Kurt had done away with the wrapping paper, he found himself looking at several travel brochures resting on a bed of tissue paper. The brochure on the top featured a stunning picture of the Eiffel Tower and text that read *Bienvenue à la Cité de l'Amour*.

He looked up at Blaine with disbelief shining in his beautiful eyes. "You don't mean..."

"Kurt," Blaine said slowly, a smile growing on his face, "how would you feel about going to Paris on our honeymoon?"

Kurt didn't say anything for a long time. He looked at Blaine for a few seconds longer, then averted his gaze back to the brochures in the box. He picked up the first one and began to page through it, skimming through enticing descriptions of candlelit dinners at real French restaurants, romantic strolls through the Luxembourg Gardens, moonlit boat rides along the Seine, passionate nights spent in one of the city's most

luxurious hotels. He imagined doing all these things with Blaine and couldn't help but realize that he was suddenly blinking rapidly to hold back the tears in his eyes.

"I would love nothing more," he finally said in response to Blaine's question, affirming his answer with what he knew had to be a ridiculously bright smile.

Blaine let a huge smile of relief spread across his face. He'd always known that Kurt had wanted to go to Paris, but something about presenting the idea had made him nervous. He knew it probably had something to do with the fact that Kurt's mesmerizing eyes and stunning smile could still do erratic things to his heart, even after they'd known each other for a decade.

"Good," he finally managed to say, taking the box with the brochures away from Kurt and setting it aside so he could hold both of his fiancé's hands. He looked right into Kurt's eyes, which somehow looked even more beautiful than usual as they reflected the tiny lights from the Christmas tree – the only source of light in the otherwise dark room. "I wanted to keep it a surprise for even longer, but we both need passports and it'll be a good idea to start applying for those soon. They usually take a few months to get."

Kurt didn't seem to be concerned about applying for passports or anything of the like. He was still trying to wrap his mind around the fact that the man of his dreams, with whom he'd secretly been in love for a decade, was taking him on an exotic honeymoon to the most romantic city on earth. One more blink of his eyes made him realize that there were still tears there. For a delirious moment, he wondered if he'd ever be able to stop crying.

"You already made me the happiest man alive when you agreed to be my husband," he said softly, his voice strong and meaningful despite his tears. "But I think it's safe to say that you've outdone yourself, Blaine Hummel-Anderson."

Blaine pulled him closer and closed his eyes as he nuzzled his face into the warm spot where Kurt's neck melted into his shoulder. He inhaled deeply, breathing him in, and let it out as a content sigh.

"Merry Christmas, Kurt," he whispered. "Do you realize that next Christmas, we'll be married?"

It was almost too much for Kurt to take in. He ducked his head and captured Blaine's lips in a warm, passionate kiss. Blaine's eyes widened a bit in surprise at the sudden contact of Kurt's lips, but when Kurt

pushed himself closer and put just the slightest bit more pressure on Blaine's lips, he let himself relax and kiss his fiancé back with just as much affection.

"Thank you," Kurt murmured breathlessly once they broke away. "Thank you. Thank you. For Paris, and for saying yes when I asked you to marry me, and for saving me, and...for everything."

He pulled Blaine close to him again, making sure Blaine could hear the smile in his voice as he whispered, "I love you."

Blaine would never, ever get tired of hearing Kurt say those words to him. No matter how many times he heard them, they still made his heart skip a beat or two or five.

"I love you, too," he said back. His voice was soft, but carried all the affection in the world.

Kurt pulled away from the embrace. The smile on his face was sweet and innocence, but there was a coy kind of mischief shining in his eyes. Blaine had seen that look before, and he knew exactly what Kurt wanted.

"Let me show you how much I love you," he whispered, reaching out and running one hand slowly down Blaine's chest.

Blaine's eyes widened as Kurt's hand, instead of stopping, continued its downward journey below the waistband of his pajama pants. "Are we about to have amazing, mindblowing, celebratory, we're-going-to-Paris sex?"

"You bet." Kurt winked and extracted his hand from Blaine's pants, eliciting a murmured curse from his fiancé. "Gotta practice for the honeymoon."

He began walking away, making a big show of swaying his hips as he walked slowly down the hallway. Blaine's mind must have short-circuited for a moment, because suddenly Kurt was stopping and turning around and asking, "Are you coming?" in that sexy little way of his with one eyebrow quirked and his lips slightly pouted.

He immediately understood the intentional double entendre in Kurt's question, though, which was enough to make him hurry into the bedroom and tackle a giggling Kurt playfully onto the bed.

xxx

Christmas morning in the Hummel-Anderson household, as it turned out, was a very heartwarming and peaceful holiday. Neither Kurt nor Blaine, although they hadn't admitted it to the other, would have imagined their lives ending up this way – just one short year ago, it would have seemed impossible to think that they were not only living together and engaged, but the proud fathers of two wonderful children. With that said, though, neither would have wanted things any other way.

Blaine snuggled close to Kurt on the couch as they watched Ellie and Michael open their presents. Ellie took great pride in showing everyone what "Santa" had brought her; Michael played right along and pretended that he still believed, too. As he watched the scene unfold before his eyes, Blaine found himself blinking back tears of disbelief. This was everything he'd ever wanted – a family and children of his own; an engagement ring on his finger, courtesy of Kurt, who he'd secretly loved for what seemed like an eternity – and it had all come to him so quickly. Sometimes he still felt that if he blinked, all of this would be gone in an instant, and he wasn't going to take any of it for granted.

He couldn't wait to take Kurt to Paris and give him the honeymoon of his dreams, because Kurt deserved nothing less than the most perfect, romantic getaway. But for now, he was perfectly content to cuddle with his future husband and pretend to be genuinely surprised when Ellie showed him what "Santa" had given her.

When the last gift had been unwrapped and both kids eagerly went their separate ways – Ellie to "introduce" her new dolls to the others she already had in the dollhouse in her room, and Michael to his own room to set up his new video game system – Blaine reluctantly stood up from the couch and began picking up as many scraps of wrapping paper as he could. While he was doing so, he didn't notice Kurt standing up and reaching behind the tree to pick up one more gift.

"Stop that." The sudden sound of his voice startled Blaine, who immediately dropped all the wrapping paper he'd picked up and turned around to face his fiancé. Kurt was standing there with a tiny smile tugging up the corners of his lips as he offered the wrapped box he was holding to Blaine. "I still haven't given you *your* present."

Blaine hesitantly took the box and headed over to sit on the couch. "Kurt, you didn't have to get me anything."

"Blaine, you're going to be my husband. You don't just *not* give your fiancé a Christmas present," Kurt countered with a smile. "Besides, it's just a little something. It's nothing compared to Paris."

He sat down on the couch beside Blaine, who began peeling away the wrapping paper on the box. When it was completely unwrapped, he stared down at the logo on the lid in disbelief before even lifting the top off to see what was inside.

"No fucking way." He laughed in complete and utter disbelief. "Kurt, you did *not*."

"I did so," Kurt said proudly. He bounced up and down a little bit with excited impatience. "Open it, open it."

He was so cute that Blaine just *had* to do what he'd asked. He lifted the lid off of the box and, sure enough, staring right back at him was a genuine black-on-platinum Rolex watch.

"Do you like it?" Kurt asked hopefully, and when Blaine gave a speechless nod he continued just as eagerly. "Yay, good. I should probably explain why I got you this."

"Yeah, you should. Jesus, Kurt, this is gorgeous, but I can't even imagine how much it must have cost..."

"Don't *even* talk, Mr. I'm-taking-Kurt-to-Paris," Kurt countered teasingly. "Okay, so do you want to know why?"

"Touché," Blaine acknowledged as he gently slipped the watch out of the box and began fiddling with it, looking to see how to set the time. "Okay, go ahead and tell me."

But Kurt wasn't about to tell him just yet. "First of all, promise you won't laugh. It's a little cheesy."

"I promise I won't laugh. Now will you *please* explain to me why you felt the need to spend your life's savings on the coolest watch I've ever seen?" Blaine teased.

"Okay," Kurt said carefully, seemingly down from his gift-giving high. "This is going to sound so cheesy when I say it out loud, oh my god. But I wanted to give you something that kind of symbolized our love, I guess. And I realized that one of the strongest forces we've had to deal with is time. We both knew we loved each other back when we met in high school, but we waited a decade to reveal those feelings and make that love real. During those ten years I was absolutely aching to be with you, and based on what

you've told me, you felt the same kind of longing for me. Time seemed to be against us for so long, but now it's on our side. We're getting married and we have the rest of forever to spend together. It's almost like we're making up for lost time in some ways, but we're also not thinking about the past when we have an entire future to spend together."

He paused for a moment, letting Blaine take this all in, before continuing hesitantly. "That...sounded a lot less dumb in my head. But yeah. I thought a really nice watch would kind of symbolize the time we spent waiting for each other, the time we've spent together, and the time that's yet to come. I got an engraving on the back, too."

Blaine was already overwhelmed by the fact that Kurt had managed to make a simple gift so significant, but all the same he found himself turning the watch over so he could see what was engraved. Sure enough, on the back of the face where the time was displayed, there were a few simple words.

Until the end of time...

Kurt Hummel-Anderson

Blaine was speechless for a moment as the power of the words overcame him. When he was finally able to speak again, his voice came as a whisper. "God, Kurt, it's so beautiful."

"I'm glad you like it," Kurt said softly, a warm smile of satisfaction touching his face. "Merry Christmas, Blaine."

"Our last Christmas as a non-married couple," Blaine reminded him teasingly. "Merry Christmas, Kurt."

They shared a lingering, passionate kiss before breaking away and simply smiling at each other. It was times like this when they both were reminded of just how passionately in love they were, and how they absolutely couldn't wait to get married.

Reality soon sunk back in, though, as it has the tendency to do. Suddenly Kurt was remarkably aware of the fact that the two of them were alone.

"First Christmas with us all together as a family, and our kids are both off doing their own thing," he pointed out with a wry smile.

Blaine shrugged in agreement. "Welcome to the twenty-first century, I guess. I'm sure they'll come out when it's time for dinner. No kid can resist yummy Christmas food."

"Good point," Kurt told him, but stood up from the couch all the same. "I'm just going to check on them."

"Get my laptop from our bedroom and bring it out here, while you're at it," Blaine told him. "While we have some time to ourselves, we might as well start looking up romantic things to do in Paris."

That smile and those warm hazel eyes were, as always, completely impossible for Kurt to resist. He felt his face softening into an involuntary smile of his own. "I'll be right back."

Ellie's door was partially open; he could hear her playing with her dolls and acting out some kind of conversation between them. That was nice. He decided to leave her alone with her imagination and turned around, only to notice that Michael's door across the hall was closed.

That was strange. Michael wasn't the type of kid who really ever needed a ton of privacy. Even when he was staying at Hummel House, as was still the case most of the time, he usually kept the door to his room open. Kurt, feeling his concerned-parent instinct kick in, knocked hesitantly on the door.

The second he'd done so, though, he wished he hadn't. Suddenly from the other side of the door he heard Michael's muffled voice hastily speaking to someone else.

"Hey, um, I gotta go really quick. My dad just knocked on my door." There was a short pause, then Michael laughed. "*One* of my dads. I'll call you back in a few minutes, okay?"

Kurt awkwardly stood there for a few seconds, feeling bad that he'd interrupted what sounded like a phone call. Before he could think of what to do, he heard Michael's voice, now much louder, calling to invite him in. "Hey, it's open, come on in."

Still hesitant, Kurt turned the doorknob and stepped into his son's room. Michael was sitting in his desk, in front of his closed laptop (an older model that Blaine no longer needed for work and had subsequently bestowed upon Ellie and Michael to use whenever they needed). He seemed fidgety – almost nervous, which only added to Kurt's concern. The gaming system he'd said he wanted to set up was still in its box on his bed.

"I was just making sure everything was okay. You normally don't shut your door like that," Kurt said carefully. "Sorry if I interrupted anything...it sounded like you were on the phone with someone."

"Skype, actually," Michael told him. "He just got a laptop for Christmas, so we were just talking for a little."

Color Kurt intrigued. "Who's 'he'?"

Michael blushed as a huge smile grew on his face before he even started talking. "Just this guy."

Kurt couldn't help but smile in response. It was nice to see how happy Michael was about this mystery guy on whom he was obviously crushing. "Aww, is he your boyfriend?"

"Not yet," Michael admitted. "His name's Jake. We're still kind of just flirting, I guess. We definitely like each other, but we haven't made anything official."

"Jake," Kurt repeated, racking his brain to try and recall if he had any Jakes in his classes. "Does he go to Buckley?"

Michael shook his head. "He's actually a year older than I am. He's a freshman at Central High. I met him when he and some of his friends started coming to our lot to play ball with us last month before it started to snow."

"So he's a baseball guy, too," Kurt said, nodding a little bit in approval. "That's great. It's always nice to find something that you have in common like that."

"Yeah, definitely," Michael agreed. "It's kinda funny, though. Back when I first met him, he was the only guy from his group that didn't have a girlfriend, even though he was the best-looking out of all of them. I still just kind of assumed he was straight because him being gay would have been too good to be true, y'know?" He shrugged nonchalantly. "But it turns out he's gay, too. Now I'm kinda wondering if I should just officially ask him to be my boyfriend, or if it's too soon for that." He looked at Kurt helplessly. "What do you think?"

Kurt considered this for a second. "You really like him, don't you?"

Michael nodded. "Yeah, I do."

"And he likes you?"

"Somehow, someway, yeah. I guess I got lucky with that one."

"Then go for it," Kurt told him. "The heart wants what the heart wants. If you're ready, then I don't see any problem with asking him to make it official."

He paused for a moment before responding. "But just remember that both of you are still very young. You don't have to go rushing into anything you're not ready to do."

"I know," Michael told him, rolling his eyes but still smiling a little bit. "I think I'm gonna do it. I'm gonna ask Jake to be my boyfriend next time we see each other in person."

"Good for you," Kurt told him with a smile. "I'm glad you found someone that makes you happy. I don't think I've seen you smile this much in...ever."

He turned and headed for the door. "I'm done being nosy now, I promise. I'm really sorry again for interrupting you."

"Don't worry about it," Michael told him blithely. "It's kinda nice to get someone else's opinion about everything."

"Well, if you ever need to talk about anything, I'm always here," Kurt reminded him. "Or Blaine. You can talk to both of us."

"Okay," Michael told him with an appreciative smile. "Thanks so much again."

"No problem," Kurt said, then stepped out the door and closed it behind him to give him some privacy.

He stepped into his and Blaine's bedroom to get the computer and carried it back out to the living room with a smile on his face, unable to believe that they were actually about to start planning their honeymoon. But as he got closer, he noticed that Blaine appeared to be talking on the phone with someone now, too.

What is it with me walking in on other people's conversations today? Kurt shrugged and continued out into the living room, but froze when he managed to catch what Blaine, who was pacing around nervously, was saying.

"Really? He wants to...*Monday*? Look, I'm really sorry, but I'm not sure if I can get an argument developed on such short notice...is there any way we can postpone it?"

Kurt wasn't even sure what the conversation was about, but for some reason he felt his heart sinking. Blaine had his back to him; he couldn't see that Kurt was still standing in the threshold of the hallway, gripping the laptop so tightly that his knuckles were turning bone pale.

"You're absolutely sure?" Blaine asked with wary hopelessness after listening to the other person talk for a few seconds. He gave a sigh of despair and sounded so utterly despondent that Kurt wanted nothing more than to cross the room and hold him in his arms. "Okay. Thanks for letting me know. I'll see what I can do."

He hung up the phone and shoved it into the back pocket of his jeans as he turned around to face Kurt with a forlorn expression clouding his face. "That, um...that was the judge for the custody case."

"Oh," Kurt said as nonchalantly as possible, trying not to let his nervousness slip into his voice. Maybe this wasn't going to be as bad as he was anticipating. "I thought the courts were closed today."

"They are, but he called me from his cell at home," Blaine explained. "Michael's dad wants to reopen the case."

Now Kurt was just plain confused. "What? But why? Weren't they already in the process of making the decision? Is that even allowed?"

Blaine shrugged. "Apparently now that some new information has been released that wasn't available at the time of the previous hearing...yeah, it is."

"New information?" Kurt asked in response, raising one eyebrow.

"There was a scouting report released by some of the scouts who went to see Michael play ball last month. It contained basically a whole bunch of information about upcoming prospects, who they want to keep an eye on, stuff like that," Blaine told him. "There was some information about Michael in it, and his dad

somehow found out about it and read it. Now that there's public information available about his son's baseball talent, he wants to manipulate that and claim that he was the one who nurtured that talent and encouraged him to play ball. He thinks it will make the court realize that he *is* aware and supportive of his son's dreams. Michael has a serious chance of making it to the pros one day, and his old man wants to take all the credit."

He ran one hand nervously through his hair before he continued. "And since that scouting report wasn't available at the time of the first hearing, he's technically allowed to ask for a retrial. Custody cases can get kind of sensitive. Any information that could affect the well-being of the child is significant. It might just seem like a stupid baseball scouting report, but they need to take it into consideration."

"That's bullshit," Kurt said without hesitation. "Michael told me that one of the main reasons why he started to go out and play baseball so much was because it gave him a chance to escape from his home life."

He paused for a horrified moment as he suddenly recalled the Skype conversation he'd accidentally interrupted just a few minutes earlier. "And he definitely can't go back to live with his old man *now*. Has he told you about Jake?"

"Jake?" Blaine asked, clearly implying that he hadn't.

"It's this guy he likes. They've been flirting and Michael wants to ask him to be his boyfriend. They're Skyping right now," Kurt explained. "I know it might just seem like a silly middle-school romance to people like us, but this is really important to Michael. He's never had a boyfriend before. And there's no way either of them would be able to feel safe in such a blatantly homophobic environment."

"Oh my god." Blaine sank down onto the edge of the couch and buried his head in his hands. "This is terrible. I can't even believe this is happening right now."

He stood up from the couch just as quickly as he'd sat down and paced over to the hall closet, where he immediately began pulling on his coat and slipping into his boots. "I have to go into work. They want to take it back to court in two days and I have nothing prepared."

All of this had come on so quickly and Kurt still couldn't really believe what was going on, but those few simple words from his fiancé absolutely broke his heart.

"Blaine," he said softly, his voice already breaking with tears, "it's Christmas."

Blaine couldn't even look at Kurt when he said that. He knew that the second he looked into his fiancé's eyes, he would have no other choice but to stay home and he couldn't do that now. He needed to get to work on this case so that he had a better chance of finally unifying his family.

"Kurt, I have to. I don't have anything here. All my information for the custody case is at my office...I didn't think I'd need it anymore," Blaine explained hastily. "I have to go, Kurt. I know it seems terrible to be going to work on Christmas, but this will be so good for our family. For Michael. Please, Kurt, think of our son. Do you even understand?"

"Why won't you look at me?" Kurt asked, tears liberally pouring down his face now. "Can you at least give me the respect of *looking* at me?"

Blaine reluctantly looked up at Kurt's red, tear-soaked face. He wanted to step closer and kiss every single one of his tears away. It took all his strength not to do just that, because the overwhelming intensity of emotion that overcame him just from looking at Kurt was even worse than he'd imagined.

"And what makes you think I don't understand?" Kurt asked, his voice much quieter now. "Of course I understand, Blaine, but anyone would be upset upon first hearing that their future spouse has to unexpectedly go into work on *Christmas*."

"I wish it didn't have to be this way," Blaine said apologetically. "I wish there didn't have to be a whole court argument about whether or not we're fit to raise a fourteen-year-old boy. But this is the way the world is, and now I have literally a day and a half to develop an additional argument as to why we should finally have custody of our son. I don't like it any more than you do, Kurt, but this is the way it has to be."

Kurt looked at him for a long time. When he finally spoke, his voice was almost completely broken.

"Okay," he said almost inaudibly.

"You're okay with me going?" Blaine asked in response.

"Yes," Kurt snapped, a little more harshly than he'd intended. "Go."

Blaine flinched, but turned and headed out the door without saying another word.

The sound of the door shutting behind his fiancé suddenly made Kurt very aware of the fact that his family's first Christmas together was, all in all, a bit disappointing. The kids were both off in their rooms doing their own thing, and now his husband-to-be was *working*. He knew that the time Blaine spent at his office this afternoon would ultimately benefit their family and especially Michael, but he wished it didn't have to be this way. He wished Blaine didn't have to make this kind of sacrifice just to prove that they were worthy of adopting their son.

He stood there in the middle of the room for a moment, not knowing what to do with himself, before deciding that it would probably be a good idea to tell Michael about the new situation. He was, after all, the main character in this courtroom drama that had essentially consumed their lives. Kurt sighed and turned to head down the hall toward Michael's room.

This time, though, he made himself stop before knocking on the door. He could barely hear Michael's muffled voice talking on Skype, and something made him stop and listen.

"...and I was actually gonna wait to ask you this until next time we see each other in person, but...fuck it," Michael was saying, laughing nervously a little bit before his tone became more serious. "Would you maybe want to, um...take this one step further and make it official?"

There was silence while Jake said something that Kurt couldn't hear. When Michael spoke again, there was an obvious smile in his voice.

"Yeah, I guess I am," he said, sounding somewhat less nervous, though there was still an undertone of anxiousness in his voice. "So...do you wanna be boyfriends?"

It was very middle school-esque and sounded somewhat awkward, but after all, Michael was only a fourteen-year-old kid pursuing his first real relationship. The innocent naiveté in his tone was enough to make Kurt start tearing up again. He couldn't even believe this was happening.

"Cool." Michael's voice was overcome with what sounded like a smile of relief. Kurt didn't think he'd ever sounded happier, and in that moment he knew that Jake must have said yes. The tears in his eyes were starting to surrender and slip down his face. Kurt made no effort to hold them back.

"This is so awesome," Michael was saying in disbelief. "I have a boyfriend. You're my boyfriend."

That was too much for Kurt to handle. He knew he had to tell Michael about the new court situation at some point, because Michael deserved to know more than anyone else, but he just couldn't do it right now – not when he was so happy about getting his first real boyfriend. Before he could hear another word, Kurt turned away from the closed door and continued the rest of the way down the hall to his and Blaine's bedroom.

After closing and locking the door behind him, Kurt leaned up against the wall and sunk into a sitting position down on the floor. He curled himself up into a tiny little ball and finally let the tears he'd been trying so hard to restrain fall down his face.

He wasn't even sure why he was crying anymore. Maybe it was the fact that he didn't get to spend Christmas with his fiancé, because said fiancé had ended up having to go into work to prepare an argument for a case that would determine if Michael legally got to be their son. Maybe it was the nature of the court case situation itself – they'd come so far, and Kurt, Blaine and Michael had all been optimistic about the impending results of the original hearing, but now they were facing such an unexpected setback and it was difficult not to be disappointed. Or maybe it was because Michael, a kid who had obviously struggled with accepting himself in the past, had finally worked up the courage to admit his feelings to a boy he liked and subsequently end up with his very first boyfriend, only to have a situation like this looming over him. None of it was fair, and Kurt hated the fact that one step closer to equality seemed to be equivalent to two steps back.

He hadn't had a good cry in quite a while, so it actually felt kind of nice to just let the tears flow. There was one thing missing, though. Maybe it was selfish, but in that moment, Kurt just needed Blaine there to hold him and kiss his tears away.

Doing the best he could with his imagination, Kurt closed his eyes and tried to pretend that he was in Blaine's arms. For one reason or another, though – Kurt suspected it had something to do with the fact that he was a 27-year-old man and no longer a small child with a boundless imagination – it wasn't long before he opened his eyes and was suddenly confronted again with the reality that he was all alone.

After that, the tears came harder.

Chapter Thirty-Three

He let himself have a good cry for a few minutes, but eventually Kurt decided that it was time to pull himself together and get a grip. Blaine was, after all, doing this for their family and especially for Michael. It may not have been an ideal Christmas, but he knew he had to suck it up and deal. What Blaine was doing would ultimately benefit their son and ensure him an official, legal place in their family.

Deciding to make the best of a bad situation, he headed out to the kitchen and got started on the Christmas dinner he'd been planning to make. He wasn't sure when Blaine was going to be home – if he would even be home to eat at all – but even if Blaine was still at the office around dinnertime, Kurt could still eat with Ellie and Michael. He wasn't looking forward to explaining the new development in the case to Michael, but he knew it had to happen eventually. Until then, he would busy himself with preparing the most cheerful holiday meal that he could under the circumstances.

He had just put the large ham in the oven and was about to start whipping up a batch of mashed potatoes when Michael sauntered out into the kitchen. Suddenly Kurt froze in place as it hit him that he had absolutely no idea how he was going to explain everything to his son.

"Hey." Michael pulled open the refrigerator and grabbed a cookie from the tray that was inside. Kurt tried not to think about how much fun he and Blaine had had baking those cookies earlier in the week. "So...I kinda gave in and just asked Jake if he wanted to be my boyfriend, and he said yes."

His smile was so infectious that Kurt just had to smile, too. Despite the tension of the afternoon, he couldn't help but be genuinely happy for Michael. After everything that kid had been through, he deserved to have someone who made him happy.

"That's amazing," Kurt told him sincerely. "I'm so happy for you, Michael. Your first real boyfriend."

Michael blushed and tried to hide a smile as he swallowed the cookie he'd been eating. "It's still hard to believe. Like...I actually have a boyfriend. I've wanted to say that for so long now."

"He seems like a great guy," Kurt told him. "I can't wait to meet him. And I promise I'm not just saying that because I'm trying to be an overprotective father or whatever."

"Nah, it's cool. He says he's excited to meet you and Blaine, too. He's heard about you guys and he thinks you're both awesome." Michael hesitated for a bit, and that's when Kurt knew that the dreaded question was coming. "Hey, where *is* Blaine, anyway?"

Kurt bit his lip and racked his brain for some suitable answer that would effectively explain the situation, but came up empty. He sighed and headed over to take a seat at the table. "Come here. You should probably sit down for this."

Michael looked confused, but all the same he took a seat at the kitchen table and looked expectantly at Kurt, who was nervously twirling his engagement ring around his finger.

"I'm not entirely sure how to tell you this," he began carefully. "Blaine had to go into work. They need to take your case back to court this Monday and he needed to work on some things for it."

He noticed the pain and confusion that overtook his son's face, and that broke his heart. He hated that it had to be this way, that he and Blaine couldn't just adopt the kid and get it over with. He hated the fact that Michael's biological dad had to be a homophobic asshole and make everything unnecessarily complicated.

"But why? I thought we were done arguing the case and now we just have to wait for a decision." Michael sounded understandably doubtful, which somehow managed to break Kurt's heart even more.

He tried to remain as calm as possible as he explained the situation. For some reason, rehashing it now just made him even more upset, but he knew he needed to be as strong as possible for his son. And, come to think of it, Kurt wasn't about to stop thinking of Michael as his and Blaine's son anytime soon. The three of them all knew that it was true, and no court decision could take away the bond they'd grown to share.

The whole time he was listening to Kurt, Michael tried to remain expressionless, but Kurt could see in his eyes that it was secretly killing him. They'd come so far and all of them had been extremely confident in their ability to win the custody battle, but this sudden setback was admittedly disheartening. When Kurt was finished relating the details to him, he immediately shut up and let Michael take everything in.

"No," Michael finally said after what had to have been a full minute of stunned silence. He shook his head in complete and utter disbelief. "No. He can't do this. Part of the reason I *started* playing baseball was so I could go out and get away from home. I hated living there with him. I don't want to go back."

"You won't go back," Kurt promised him, trying desperately to believe his own words. "Blaine won't let that happen. He's an amazing lawyer and he's so dedicated to winning this case for us that he even went into work today, on *Christmas*. He'll fight tooth and nail to make sure you don't have to go back there."

"I know," Michael mumbled, nodding a little bit, "but it just sucks that it has to be like this. How there has to be a big court case to determine whether or not I can come live with you guys and officially be part of your family."

"I know it sucks," Kurt agreed. "But we have to look on the bright side, even if that might seem kind of hard to do right now."

"Good idea," Michael admitted, shrugging one shoulder as he considered this. "I mean, as annoying as it is that we even have to do this, I'm glad we have someone like Blaine helping us out. He did a really good job the first time around, so I think he'll be good this time, too."

"I know he will," Kurt assured him. "It might not be an easy process, but it'll be worth it."

He tried to put on a brave face for Michael, but deep down inside, he somehow was still having trouble believing himself.

xxx

Blaine had known right away when he got the initial phone call that afternoon that he was going to be at the office late into the night. He hadn't told Kurt because he didn't want to make his fiancé even more upset, although it frustrated him that Kurt didn't seem to understand why he had to do this. Of course, his family meant more to him than his career did, but in this particular situation, something career-related was actually going to *help* his family.

He glanced up at the large floor-to-ceiling windows for the first time in what had to have been hours, only to notice that snow was falling heavily outside and the sky was fading to black. One look at the time display in the corner of his computer screen told him that it was already even later than he'd expected – almost a quarter til ten. He hadn't even eaten anything since he'd arrived at work and suddenly he was aware of the fact that he was starving.

Turning his attention back to the multitude of windows and documents open on his screen, he tried to ignore the growling in his stomach. He was almost, almost, *almost* finished and then he could leave and go

home. As annoyed as he'd been with the way that Kurt had acted earlier, he could understand his fiancé's frustration over the whole situation. The fact that Michael's biological father was even trying to push the case this far was unfair and unnecessary, but Blaine would do what he had to do to make sure everything was in their favor, no matter how exhausted he became. Truth be told, though, he was really looking forward to getting the hell out of there and cuddling up with Kurt in bed. He couldn't think of a more perfect way to spend a cold, snowy night.

It was almost ten thirty when he finally left the office. He purchased a small bag of chips from the vending machine in the hall and managed to scarf down the entire thing in the elevator. It didn't really fill him up, but he figured it would at least hold him over until he got home. When he stepped into the parking garage, he was unpleasantly surprised to notice that it felt about ten times colder than it had earlier in the day when he'd first arrived at the office. He hurried to his car, determined to get out of there and make it home before it got even worse.

For a moment, he considered calling Kurt to let him know he was on his way, but decided against it. The snow was falling harder and he had no time to spare. The second his car was reasonably warm, he maneuvered it onto the garage and out onto Wacker Drive, which was completely blanketed with snow. He turned on the radio only to hear the local weatherman telling him what he had already figured out: that a blizzard was coming through and that the greater Chicago area was under some kind of winter weather advisory. Blaine rolled his eyes when the man on the radio informed him and the rest of the listeners that it would be wise to get off the roads. *Thank you, Captain Obvious, but I need to get home before it gets any worse.*

It took some effort, but eventually he made it onto Lake Shore Drive. The traffic surprisingly wasn't too bad, and he was actually able to move along relatively quickly – well, as quickly as possible considering the fact that it was nearly impossible to see. He felt his phone buzz in his pocket but ignored it, even though he knew it had to be Kurt. He would be home soon enough, and talking on the phone while attempting to navigate the snowy street was probably one of the stupidest decisions he could have made.

The further along he drove, the better he started to feel. He was going to go home and have a peaceful Christmas night with his family, and in a few days he'd go into court and give one of the best damn arguments of his career – if not *the* best, which was saying a lot, because he'd already given an argument that was good enough to convince the Supreme Court to rule in his favor. He really felt as if things were starting to look up.

But of course, as he would learn in a matter of seconds, sometimes things were too good to be true.

xxx

As tired as he was, Kurt had to admit that he'd done a pretty fantastic job re-setting the table for two. There was more than enough food left over from dinner, and since Blaine hadn't been able to eat with them earlier that evening, Kurt thought it would be nice if the two of them could share their own meal together despite how late it was. He knew Blaine would probably be famished after working all day, and truth be told, Kurt hadn't had much of an appetite earlier when he'd had dinner with Ellie and Michael. This way, they would both be able to enjoy dinner together, and Kurt could apologize for the way he'd acted earlier in the afternoon.

It was almost ten thirty and he still hadn't heard from Blaine. He knew he shouldn't be too worried, because Blaine was probably engrossed in whatever it was he was doing at the office, but all the same Kurt thought it might be a good idea to call him and see what was going on.

Just as he expected, Blaine didn't answer. Kurt took that as a good sign. Blaine was probably on his way home, because he almost always answered the phone when he was at work. And one glance out the window told Kurt that it was probably a good idea that Blaine had ignored his call – answering the phone while driving in this snowy mess would have been the furthest thing from smart.

He made himself some hot chocolate and curled up on the couch to watch the weather forecast and find out exactly what they were in for. It didn't look good, and he could see that for himself whenever he happened to look out the window, but he tried not to worry about Blaine too much. Blaine was one of the most careful drivers Kurt had ever met, and the fact that he was taking so long to get home was probably a good sign, because it meant he was taking his time. Eventually he finished his hot chocolate and set the mug aside before pulling a blanket over himself and letting his eyes fall closed. It had been a long day, and he couldn't pass up the opportunity to take a little nap before Blaine got home. He smiled to himself as he fell asleep, knowing that Blaine would probably wake him up with a tender kiss on the forehead and Kurt would finally have his chance to apologize before surprising him with dinner.

He was rudely awakened, however, not by his fiancé or even by one of his children. Instead, it was the surprisingly loud buzzing of his phone as it vibrated on the coffee table. Kurt immediately threw the blanket off of himself and scrambled for the phone, not paying any attention to the number on the front screen as he answered with a breathless, "Hello?"

"May I please speak to Kurt Hummel?" the unfamiliar voice on the other end asked in response.

Kurt bit his lip, suddenly slightly worried. "Speaking."

"Mr. Hummel, I unfortunately have some bad news for you about your fiancé, Blaine Anderson."

And that was when Kurt went numb. He tried to stay strong as he listened to what the man on the other end was saying, but suddenly it was too much and he broke down in tears.

"I'll be there as soon as I can," he managed to choke out quietly when the man was finished talking. "Thank you for calling."

He hung up the phone and tossed it aside without paying any attention to where it went. He was too delirious to really notice what he was doing, but before he knew it he was in the hallway that led to the bedrooms, knocking frantically on both of his children's closed bedroom doors.

"Ellie? Michael?" His voice didn't even sound like it belonged to him. He was numb, completely detached from reality. "Please come here."

Moments later, both of them were in the hallway, Ellie rubbing sleep from her eyes and Michael shoving his phone into his pocket (probably texting Jake, Kurt thought).

"Daddy, what's going on?" Ellie asked, trying to smother a yawn.

"We need to go to the hospital," Kurt told them, trying to keep his voice even. He needed to be the strong one, no matter what it took. "Blaine was in a car accident."

xxx

Blaine was anxious, which probably wasn't the best state of mind considering that he was about to get ten stitches in his scalp to seal up the large gash there. He'd already been told that Kurt, Ellie and Michael were on their way, which appeased him a bit, but it was taking them forever to get there. He knew it would probably take them a while, considering that the weather was getting even worse than it had been when he'd been hit, but he also knew that he wouldn't *really* feel better until he could see them. And he had to admit, he was worried about them. He didn't want them to end up in an accident the way he had.

It had happened so slowly yet so quickly all at once, and now that Blaine looked back at it, he thought it seemed like a pretty pathetic excuse for a car accident. Lake Shore Drive had been so covered in snow that the lines on the road were virtually impossible to see, and somehow a car from the other lane of traffic, moving in the opposite direction, had lost control on the slippery road and had veered slowly into Blaine's lane of traffic, rolling only for about half a second before hitting the front bumper of Blaine's car. The other driver had been fine, and Blaine thought that he was, too, until he climbed out of his car and heard a stunned gasp from a concerned passerby who had called 911 and gotten out of her car to make sure everyone was okay. It was only then that he was made aware of the blood trickling down the left side of his face. He briefly recalled banging his head against something at the moment of impact, but didn't think it had been anything serious enough to cause this kind of injury. Both cars had a quite bit of damage along the front bumpers, but were far from totaled.

Blaine kept his eyes closed while they stitched him up, trying for once not to think about anything. His mind had been so overloaded lately with thoughts of the custody case and the wedding and now this new development, and strangely enough, it was the first time a while that he'd actually been able to clear his mind.

He'd been recovering after the relatively painless procedure for only about ten minutes when suddenly there was a knock on the door and one of the nurses poked her head in.

"Blaine?" Her voice was quiet. It seemed like she couldn't tell if he was asleep and was trying not to startle him. "Your kids are here."

That was enough to make his eyes fly open. He gave her an appreciative smile as she opened the door a little bit wider and Michael and Ellie stepped into the room. Neither of them looked like they knew what to say, and he could understand that because this was a tough situation, but seeing the two of them still made his heart feel instantly lighter.

"Oh my god, it's so nice to see you two," he told them with a sigh of relief. "Thanks so much for coming."

"Hi, Blaine," Ellie said quietly. Her voice sounded small. "Daddy's here, too. He said he had to get something and he'd be up in a few minutes."

Blaine had assumed that Kurt was probably just waiting so that the kids could have privacy, but even the thought of seeing him in just a few minutes immediately made Blaine smile. It was a tired smile, but a smile all the same. "Oh, good."

He paused, the tiny smile fading from his lips. "Sorry I couldn't be around much for Christmas today. Michael, I'm sorry all of these new developments are just now coming up."

"It's not your fault," Michael told him with a wry half-smile. "Thanks for working on this case for me. Not the best timing, but we gotta do what we gotta do."

"That's what I kept telling myself all afternoon," Blaine agreed. "I need to win this for our family."

"Will you be okay to go to court on Monday, or are they going to make you stay in the hospital?" Michael asked.

Blaine laughed a little bit. "I'll be fine. It's really not that bad, but because it *is* a head injury, they want me to stay here overnight just so they can keep an eye on me and make sure nothing happens. Wanna see it?"

Ellie turned away, but Michael leaned in to get a closer look as Blaine pushed back his hair to reveal the line of stitches just at the top of his scalp. A relatively minor injury, but he could still feel the dull throbbing of pain now that the anesthetic from the stitches had worn off.

Michael's eyes went wide. "Whoa. How bad did it hurt?"

"Not too much, actually. I didn't even know I'd gotten hurt until I got out of the car and this lady totally freaked out when she saw the blood on my face." His tone instantly became apologetic when he noticed the way Ellie winced, even though she still wasn't looking at him. "Sorry, sweetie."

"Blaine Hummel-Anderson, why are you scaring our daughter?"

The voice was lighthearted and contained a trace of a smile, so Blaine immediately knew he was joking, but that didn't stop his heart from skipping a beat when he glanced up and saw his fiancé standing in the doorway. "Oh, Kurt."

Kurt made his way across the room, and it was only then that Blaine noticed that he was carrying a bouquet of large red poinsettias, which he handed to Blaine with a smile when he reached the bed.

"These were the only flowers they had left in the gift shop downstairs," he said apologetically. He leaned over to give Blaine a gentle kiss on the lips, which Blaine gladly accepted. In that moment, he could feel the tension that had resonated between the two of them earlier completely melting away.

They broke away and shared a lingering smile before concern took over Kurt's face. "How are you feeling?"

Blaine felt his heart flutter as Kurt, his beautiful eyes still swimming in worry, pushed back his curls to see where the damage had been done. Very carefully, he moved closer and pressed his lips tenderly to the skin right next to the injury, not wanting to kiss the wound itself for fear of disrupting the stitches.

"Better," Blaine finally managed to say with a smile. Kurt was so beautifully affectionate and made him feel so completely loved that sometimes Blaine was struck speechless by even the smallest gestures. "Having the three of you here is the best thing I could have asked for right now."

He peeked around Kurt, looking for Michael and Ellie, only to notice that they were no longer standing there. A second later he noticed that they'd wandered over to some comfortable-looking chairs by the window. Both of them looked like they were making a valiant yet futile effort to fight the sleep from their eyes.

"They're tired," Kurt told him with a tiny smile. "Ellie was asleep when I woke her up, and Michael was kind of winding down."

"That's okay," Blaine said, shrugging it off. "I understand. It's just nice to see them and know that they're here. You too."

"I'm just so glad you're pretty much okay," Kurt said softly. "Blaine, when that guy called and told me you had been in an accident...I swear to God my heart broke. I...I don't know what I was expecting."

"You really think I'd let myself get hurt that badly?" Blaine teased jokingly. "When I'm marrying the man of my dreams in one hundred and five days? C'mon, Kurt, you gotta give me more credit."

Kurt couldn't help but giggle. "Oh my god, you're still counting."

"I have to. I told Ellie we could make a paper chain when we got to a reasonable number of days. She still wants to do that," Blaine explained with a playful roll of his eyes. "Besides, you and I both know that you're counting, too."

"Three months, two weeks, and one day," Kurt told him proudly.

He hesitated for a moment, then motioned for Blaine to scoot over. Blaine moved over as much as he could on the small hospital bed so that Kurt could have a little bit of room to climb up next to him. The two of them didn't exactly fit very well, so Kurt opted to keep both feet on the floor so that Blaine would have more room. It probably looked extremely awkward, but neither of them cared, because it was the closest they could possibly be in that moment.

"I'm sorry about the way I acted earlier today," Kurt told him sincerely, looking up into his fiancé's warm hazel eyes. "I completely just freaked out on you when you were trying to go and do something amazing for our family. I should have been more understanding."

Blaine kissed the top of his head. "Thank you."

"No, really, I feel awful." He didn't need to tell Blaine – it was obvious from his voice alone how distraught he was. "You don't deserve to be treated like that, Blaine. I need to accept that your career is also important."

"Nothing could ever be more important than my family, but in this case, my career is actually going to *help* our family," Blaine explained carefully. "I love you so much, Kurt, but I had no choice but to leave today."

"I know," Kurt told him, nodding as a tear slipped down his cheek. "But I guess what I'm trying to say is...you have an opportunity to help people in the most amazing way with your career. And that's something I'm going to have to deal with for the rest of my life after we get married, but...but I'm willing to do it. I guess I just needed to come to that realization instead of getting upset over things beyond my control."

"I forgive you," Blaine told him honestly. "I can understand how this whole situation can be frustrating, believe me, but I can't say I wasn't upset earlier."

Kurt gave him a tiny smile, secretly relieved beyond belief to have earned Blaine's forgiveness. "Still want to marry me?"

"Of course I do," Blaine told him, laughing a little bit. "I think I'll be able to put up with you for the rest of my life."

Kurt kissed the corner of his mouth. "Good. I plan on being around for a *long* time as long as it's okay with you."

"It's more than okay with me. Trust me." Blaine smiled and tilted his head up the rest of the way for a proper kiss that lingered longer than it probably should have.

"Get a room," Michael and Ellie called over in almost perfect unison from the chairs where Kurt had thought they'd been sleeping.

They broke the kiss and suddenly all four of them in the room dissolved into giggles. None of them would admit it, but it was exactly what they needed – a moment to just laugh and forget about all the tension that had developed over the course of the day. It was the most lighthearted any of them had felt ever since that morning when they'd all opened gifts together.

"Hey, what happened to being tired?" Kurt shot back jokingly after recovering from his laughter.

"Not tired," Michael told them both, not looking up from his phone. "Texting Jake."

"Jake?" Blaine asked, and the realization hit his face a moment later. "Oh, is that...?"

"My boyfriend," Michael said proudly. Blaine could tell he loved saying it.

"I may have told Blaine when you two were Skyping earlier," Kurt admitted sheepishly. "Sorry if I kind of ruined your big news."

Michael brushed it off. "No big deal. I wouldn't have been able to keep it a secret for much longer, anyway. He and I were planning on going to see a movie or something tomorrow, but I don't know if that will happen with the weather being this bad."

"As much as I hate to say it, I think you're right," Kurt agreed. "We might just have to crash here tonight, guys. I don't know if it's worth the risk to drive home. I brought some pillows and blankets just in case."

Blaine seemed to like this idea. "I'd much rather you guys stay here. I'd be too worried about you driving home. Plus, that way I won't have to sleep in this big empty hospital room all by myself."

"Aww, poor baby," Kurt teased, picking his head up and giving his fiancé a kiss on the forehead. "We wouldn't want *that* to happen, now would we?"

"We'll keep you company, Blaine!" Ellie, reasonably awake now after listening to everyone talk, got up and scurried across the room to his bedside. She stood on her tiptoes and kissed him gently on the cheek, instantly causing a smile to bloom across his face.

"You three are the best company I could ask for," he told her, leaning over to give her a hug and involuntarily yawning as he pulled away. "Oh, man. I don't know about you guys, but I'm exhausted."

"I am, too," Kurt admitted. It had been quite an emotionally draining day. "All right, I'm pretty sure these hospital beds weren't made for two people, so I'm just going to sleep in one of those chairs over there, okay?"

Blaine tried not to let his disappointment show on his face. Falling asleep in Kurt's arms would have been absolutely perfect after the emotional roller coaster they'd been riding all day, but it was obvious that both of them weren't going to fit on the bed. "That's fine. Thanks so much again for coming to see me."

"You say that as if we wouldn't have done it," Kurt teased. He leaned over to give Blaine a kiss; both of them smiled as their lips met. "I love you. Feel better."

"Love you too," Blaine told him with a tired smile. "Goodnight, Ellie and Michael. Sweet dreams."

They finished exchanging their goodnight-sweet-dreams-I-love-yous as Kurt got them situated with the pillows and blankets he'd brought in from the car. There were three relatively large and comfortable chairs, so they each had their own little space to sleep. Ellie dozed off almost immediately; Michael kept texting for a few more minutes before the light on his phone disappeared and he, too, presumably went to sleep. Kurt closed his eyes and pulled his blankets up around himself, but even though he was exhausted, sleep just wouldn't come.

After a few futile minutes of trying to fall asleep, he pulled his phone out of his pocket and plugged the headphones in. Maybe listening to music would help calm him down. He put his favorite playlist – the one Blaine had made for him – on shuffle and closed his eyes as the first song began to play.

He must have fallen asleep for at least a little bit, because when he opened his eyes again seemingly just a few minutes later, one glance at the screen on his phone told him that ten songs had already played and he couldn't recall hearing any of them. As the eleventh song on the shuffle began, a huge, involuntary smile immediately grew on Kurt's face as he listened for a moment and realized what it was.

After the song was over, he listened to it again, and then again, and again. He must have played it at least ten or fifteen times before pulling the earbuds out of his ears and setting his phone aside. He was pretty sure he'd just discovered the song that he and Blaine should dance to at their wedding.

xxx

When he woke up the next morning, Kurt was extremely tempted to go over and gently shake Blaine awake so he could have him listen to the song he'd happened upon the night before. He forced himself to stay put, though, because he knew yesterday had been a tough day for both of them and Blaine needed all the sleep he could get after everything he'd been through. Still, the second he saw his fiancé's hazel eyes flutter and start to open, he immediately threw the blankets off of himself and jumped up. He couldn't wait to see what Blaine thought.

"Happy to see me?" Blaine asked teasingly, only half joking as Kurt attempted to fit himself onto the bed as he had the previous evening. Blaine, feeling significantly better this morning than he had last night after the accident, wrapped his arms around Kurt and pulled him closer so this time he would fit entirely on the bed. It was a bit of a tight squeeze, but that only meant that they had to be closer, and neither of them would have preferred it any differently.

"Mmmm, you could say that," Kurt murmured with a smile before leaning in to give him a sweet kiss good morning.

Blaine wouldn't let him get very far after they broke the kiss and immediately pulled him in for another. Kurt giggled but kissed him back all the same, relishing the amazing feeling of knowing that he was just a few months away from officially being able to keep this incredible man forever.

"I'm always happy to see you," Kurt said softly with a glowing smile when they broke away the second time, "but I'm especially excited this morning because there's something I want you to hear."

Before Blaine could say anything else, Kurt was pulling his phone out of his pocket and plugging the headphones in. He offered one earbud to Blaine and kept the other for himself, then began thumbing through his playlist as he looked for the song. The realization hit Blaine's face just seconds after Kurt had pushed play.

"Hey, I totally remember this song," he recalled. "I haven't heard it in years, but I put it on your playlist."

"Shhh," Kurt hushed him gently. "Just listen and let me know what you think."

Blaine looked confused by Kurt's vague request – let him know what he thought about what? The song? – but all the same, he shut his mouth and began to listen. It had been a while since he'd heard this, but now that he was older and in a loving relationship of his own, he could finally truly understand and relate to the lyrics. Quite a few times, he was tempted to open his mouth and start singing along, but he forced himself to keep quiet because Michael and Ellie were still fast asleep. He settled for picking his head up and pressing soft, chaste kisses to Kurt's lips instead.

When it was over, he smiled up at his fiancé only to notice that Kurt was awaiting his response with an expectant smile of his own. Suddenly it was more than clear to Blaine why Kurt had wanted him to listen to this.

"That's our wedding song," Blaine declared, his voice quiet but still firm.

Kurt tried to stay cool, but secretly he was thrilled that Blaine seemed to think so, too. He hadn't even told Blaine that he wanted him to listen to the song subjectively, thinking of it as a potential song for their wedding. The fact that they could connect on something like this absolutely blew his mind.

"Why do you think I wanted you to hear it?" Kurt asked in response, smiling as he kissed Blaine's cheek. "I thought it would be perfect and I wanted to know what you thought."

Blaine pulled his end of the headphones out of his ear and did the same to Kurt before wrapping the cord around the phone and setting the whole thing aside. "I loved it. I can't wait to dance to it with you."

The thought of sharing their first dance together, something Kurt hadn't really thought much about up to this point, was suddenly overwhelming. He buried his face in Blaine's shoulder and pulled his husband-to-be even closer against him.

"Oh, Blaine, that's going to be wonderful," he murmured. "I'm so glad you like the song. I really wanted you to hear it especially after the way I acted yesterday, so you know how sorry I am and how committed I am to you."

This put everything in a whole new perspective for Blaine, who felt so much better after Kurt's apology the previous evening. The fact that Kurt was willing to work with him through any situation they may have encountered over the course of the rest of their life together meant more to him than he could find the words to say.

"Thank you for saying that. And thank you for apologizing," Blaine said sincerely, then offered him a wry smile. "Are you sure you're ready to put up with being married to a crazy lawyer for the rest of your life?"

Kurt ran his fingers through Blaine's hair, twisting them gently around the messy curls. "I think so."

"Good." Blaine picked his head up and inched his face closer to Kurt's. "Kiss?"

Kurt, as usual, was more than happy to give him exactly what he wanted. After a brief but passionate kiss, he broke away and stood up from the bed.

"All right, I'm going to find someone and see what I can do about getting you discharged." He pressed one more kiss to the top of Blaine's head. "I'll be right back."

Once he was gone, Blaine tried but failed to go back to sleep. He was relatively awake from their brief conversation and Michael and Ellie were still asleep, so he reached for Kurt's phone on the small nightstand, thinking he would check his email to see if there were any new messages about the court case or about what in the world happened to his car, which had been towed and taken in for repairs.

He logged out of Kurt's account on the email app and typed in his own information. He wasn't even sure where his own phone was – it had been in his pocket at the time of the accident, and upon being admitted to the hospital he'd had to change from his normal clothes into a tacky hospital gown for reasons unbeknownst to him. It was probably still with his clothes and the rest of his things, but he made a mental note to ask someone about it just in case.

His email consisted of the usual – updates from some of the associates about the cases they were working on, the latest issue of some online legal newsletter he'd subscribed to a few months ago – along with several get-well wishes from relatives and friends who had heard about the accident. He logged out of his

email account and set Kurt's phone aside. As much as he appreciated the sympathy from his loved ones, he didn't quite feel up to responding to all their emails just then. Once he got home, he would take some time to email everyone back and let them know that he was just fine.

Less than a minute after he'd set it down, though, Kurt's phone began to buzz. Confused, Blaine picked it up and slid his thumb across the screen to answer it when he recognized the number of his insurance company on the screen.

"Hello, may I speak to Blaine Anderson?" the insurance representative asked once Blaine had answered.

"Speaking," Blaine responded politely. He shot a quick glance over toward Michael and Ellie to make sure he wasn't waking them up. His daughter stirred a little bit, but other than that, neither of them moved.

"Hello, Mr. Anderson. I couldn't get an answer at your primary phone number, so I had to try the next one that was listed with your information."

"Sorry about that. I'm on my fiancé's phone; I'm not exactly sure where mine is," Blaine admitted. "How can I help you?"

The man talked for about five minutes straight, not even letting Blaine get a word in edgewise, about the details of the accident and gave him an estimated cost for the repairs. He also gave Blaine some rather unsettling news – that even if Blaine himself had been sure that the other driver had caused the accident, the weather conditions were so bad that it was extremely difficult to be one hundred percent sure who was at fault.

"So you're saying...we're going to have to pay a little more out-of-pocket than we would have if it were proven that the other driver was at fault?" Blaine asked with uncertainty, trying to ignore the sinking feeling in his stomach.

"Well, not exactly a *little* more," the insurance representative admitted before giving Blaine a rough estimate of what he would have to pay.

The conversation continued for a few more minutes after that. Blaine hung up with a heavy heart, numbly reaching over to set Kurt's phone aside and squeezing his eyes shut. Maybe when he opened them again, he would be in his bed at home and his head would magically be healed. Maybe this was just all a dream.

Ellie woke up a few minutes later, followed by Michael about five minutes after her, and he managed to put on a brave face and converse with them as they sleepily tried to get themselves up and moving. He didn't want them to have to worry about what was going on, and he thought keeping it from them would be pretty easy – especially in Michael's case, because he had to go back to Hummel House the following day and stay there until a decision was reached in his case. Blaine knew that he and Kurt had already been pushing the envelope by having him spend Thanksgiving and Christmas with their family, and as much as they wanted him to move in, they knew that that couldn't happen unless the judge ruled in their favor.

So Michael wasn't going to be a problem, but Blaine was especially worried about keeping this from Ellie. She was incredibly observant for a seven-year-old and Blaine knew that she'd probably pick up on the fact that something was wrong, especially after he explained to Kurt what the man from the insurance company had told him. God, he couldn't stand the thought of telling Kurt. Kurt would be heartbroken. He didn't have much of a choice, though, and thinking about all of this was making him extremely tired and all he wanted to do was go home.

"Get in, loser, we're going shopping."

The sudden familiar voice startled Blaine out of his numb trance. He glanced up toward the door to see Kurt waiting with an empty wheelchair, which Blaine presumed was for him. It was hard not to laugh when he noticed that even Kurt, obviously pleased with himself, was having trouble keeping a straight face.

Ellie, suddenly concerned, asked, "Daddy, why are you calling Blaine a loser?" at the same time Michael said, "We're going shopping?" Amused by their confusion, Kurt and Blaine looked at each other and simultaneously cracked up.

"Oh my god, I can't believe these two haven't seen *Mean Girls*," Kurt managed to gasp through his laughter.

"What's *Mean Girls*?" Ellie asked.

"Only *the* defining teen movie of our generation," Blaine explained, gesturing to himself and Kurt, who nodded in agreement. Deep down, he was suddenly extremely grateful to his fiancé for making him laugh and forget about his previous troubles for just a moment. Kurt might not have known it yet, but that was exactly what Blaine had needed.

"No, but seriously," Kurt said once he finally stopped laughing. "I should have said, 'Get in, my love, we're going home.'"

"Aww, how romantic," Blaine giggled, pretending to swoon. "Wait, why do I have to have a wheelchair? I'm pretty sure I can walk."

"It's just to get you out to the car," one of the nurses who had been treating him – Blaine hadn't even noticed her standing in the doorway – explained. "It stopped snowing, but it's still very icy. You managed to get relatively lucky with just a mild head injury, so we don't want to risk anything else happening."

Blaine still wasn't thrilled with the idea, but he really just wanted to get out of there, so he complied. Soon enough, the four of them were on their way out the door and off to brave the congested roads home.

xxx

Kurt was the definition of a doting husband (or husband-to-be, in Blaine's case, but still). From almost the exact moment they arrived back home, Blaine was on the couch, wrapped in a blanket, nursing a mug of hot chocolate. Kurt was fussing over him almost as if he were sick, instead of recovering from a small injury for which he'd required stitches. Blaine made a halfhearted effort to tell Kurt to relax and stop stressing himself out, but when Kurt insisted on bringing him a tray piled high with food for lunch, he was secretly thrilled. He hadn't realized how hungry he suddenly was, and if he was being completely honest, he loved the way Kurt was taking care of him. He felt so completely loved and it was times like this when he was so happy to think that he was marrying this man.

Since the weather was significantly better than it had been the previous evening, but the roads were still far from being clear, Michael asked if he could have Jake over so the two of them could spend time together. Kurt and Blaine agreed once Michael told them that Jake only lived about ten minutes away and his mom didn't mind driving him over. As happy as Blaine was for him, he still found it unbelievable that they'd come this far – far enough for a kid like Michael, who was only 14, to feel comfortable pursuing a relationship. Blaine thought back to his own early teenage years, unable to even imagine what it would have been like to have a boyfriend and join the ranks of his straight friends, who had started dating around that time.

When the knock finally came to the door, Blaine instinctively stood up to answer it only to be shooed away by Kurt, who insisted that he get back on the couch. Blaine complied reluctantly as Michael dashed out of

his room just in time to sprint to the door and beat Kurt there. Kurt turned around and smiled at Blaine, who returned his smile and shrugged noncommittally.

"Hey, I'm glad you could make it over." Michael sounded like he was smiling as he opened the door and greeted his boyfriend, who Blaine couldn't see from his position on the couch. "Come on in."

When Jake stepped into Blaine's view, he was already holding Michael's hand. He was just the slightest bit taller than Michael, with spiky blond hair and startling blue eyes that Blaine noticed from all the way across the room. He seemed a little nervous, but he still managed to keep a tiny smile of anticipation on his face. Blaine didn't think he'd ever seen Michael look more proud.

"Hello, Mr. Hummel and Mr. Anderson," Jake said politely, sounding just as nervous as he looked. "It's an honor to meet you both. I really, um...I really appreciate and admire all that you two have done."

"Oh, please, 'Mr. Hummel' makes me feel like I'm at school," Kurt told him with a warm smile. "Call me Kurt."

"I'm Blaine," Blaine called from his position on the couch, giving him a friendly wave. "His bedridden fiancé."

"Oh, yeah, Michael told me about what happened last night," Jake said apologetically. He didn't seem as nervous now. "How are you doing?"

Blaine shrugged a little bit. "Not too bad, actually. It doesn't hurt that much. Just a couple stitches. My better half is making it out to be worse than it is." He shot a smirk in Kurt's direction.

"We take care of our own around here," Kurt explained with a smile. "Guys, if you want anything to eat or drink, feel free to help yourselves. I promise we'll try not to be in your way."

"Thanks so much," Jake said appreciatively, and Michael gave Kurt a grateful smile before leading his boyfriend down the hall to his room. Kurt was about to call after them and tell them to keep the door open, but immediately decided against it. He trusted the two of them and wanted to give them as much privacy as possible.

"He seems nice," Blaine said once they'd heard the door close, referring to Jake. "I like him."

"I do, too. And they're so sweet together," Kurt agreed with a smile before turning and heading to the kitchen. "Hey, I'm about to get some coffee, do you want any?"

"What do you think?" Blaine called out to him. Kurt smiled as he reached for an extra mug and poured a cup for his fiancé.

He headed back out to the living room and handed Blaine his coffee; Blaine thanked him and immediately took a sip before setting the mug down and frowning.

Kurt quirked an eyebrow. "Is something wrong with the coffee?"

"No," Blaine said absently. "I was just wondering...do you think we should go tell them to keep the door open?"

"I thought the same thing, but I don't think we should," Kurt mused. "It's the first time either of them has been in a relationship. They're at that awkwardly sweet first-boyfriend-ever phase. They're probably just going to watch a movie or something."

"You're right. I doubt either of them would be ready to start doing anything too serious right off the bat," Blaine agreed, then sighed. "God, when we were in high school, did you ever think we'd be engaged and already the parents of a teenager within a decade?"

Kurt took a sip of his coffee. "I mean, no, but I can't say I'm complaining."

"This is so completely the opposite of how I envisioned my life ten years ago," Blaine admitted, letting a smile grow on his face. "I'm twenty-seven and already a partner at one of the best law firms in the state. I kind of got thrown into the whole gay rights thing earlier this year. I'm engaged to the man of my dreams and I have two amazing kids. And I've gotta say, I wouldn't have it any other way."

He closed his eyes for a moment as he remembered that he still had to talk to Kurt about the call he'd received at the hospital. Now that Michael was busy with Jake and Ellie was in Blaine's office playing a game on the computer, he had the perfect opportunity.

"But with that being said, I need to tell you something," he continued quietly after a brief hesitation. "I, um...I got a call this morning when you were out of the room. The insurance representative called with an estimate of how much we're probably going to have to pay."

Kurt immediately set his coffee mug down and shot him a confused look. "Wait, how much *we* are going to have to pay? I thought it was the other guy's fault."

"Due to the weather conditions, it's going to be difficult to prove that, so unless they can prove that it wasn't my fault, we're probably going to have to pay more out of pocket than I originally thought."

Now Kurt looked worried. "How much more?"

When Blaine told him the number, Kurt tried not to let his disappointment show on his face, but Blaine knew him and he could immediately tell Kurt was upset.

"I was thinking about how this would affect us after I hung up the phone with the guy," Blaine told him, absolutely dreading what he was going to have to say next. "I think we're going to have to..."

"Cut back on the wedding," Kurt finished solemnly. He wasn't looking at Blaine.

"Either that, or the honeymoon. We might be able to have our wedding as we've planned it, but we won't be able to go to Paris," Blaine admitted reluctantly. "It's most likely going to be one or the other."

Kurt ran one hand through his hair and closed his eyes. He inhaled deeply and let it out as a slow exhale before opening his eyes and looking at Blaine. "Okay."

"Okay what?"

"We'll do what we have to do," he said. "I'm sure we'll be able to cut some things out of the wedding budget. And if it ends up being that we can't go to Paris, then we'll find somewhere else to go, or maybe just postpone our honeymoon if we have to. We'll think of something."

"That's the thing, though. You've put so much work into this wedding, Kurt. I don't want any of that to go to waste. And I want to take you away on a romantic honeymoon. No matter what we get rid of, it's going to kill me."

"Oh, don't be dramatic," Kurt berated him teasingly with a smile to lighten the mood. "I'm sure you'll survive."

He moved in closer to Blaine on the couch, suddenly aware that they weren't even touching and overwhelmed with the need to hold Blaine close to him. Blaine settled comfortably into his arms and Kurt kissed his forehead.

"We'll figure something out," he murmured. "I promise."

Blaine closed his eyes and snuggled closer against him. As much as he wanted to believe Kurt, he wasn't sure if he could.

Chapter Thirty-Four

Blaine rolled his eyes and smiled wryly to himself as Kurt pulled into their designated parking space at the courthouse. He knew exactly what was going to happen next, so he made no move to get out of the car even after the vehicle was completely stopped. Sure enough, right after yanking the keys out of the ignition, Kurt got out and hurried around the front of the car so he could open Blaine's door for him and give him a hand.

"Just because I've got a couple stitches in my head doesn't mean I can't get out of the car by myself," Blaine teased as he took Kurt's hand and stepped out into the parking lot. As luck would have it, the second the words were out of his mouth, he slipped on a patch of black ice and instinctively clutched at Kurt to keep himself steady.

"Are you sure about that?" Michael joked with a smile as he got out of the backseat.

"I definitely wouldn't be too sure," Kurt agreed.

Blaine jerked his hand away with a fake hurt expression on his face. "Oh, thanks. It's not like I'm just about to go in here and win this case for us or anything."

"Aww, come on." Kurt reached out and grabbed Blaine's hand again. "You know I still love you, even if you're a klutz."

Michael watched as they interlaced their fingers and smiled at each other. Seeing the love that his dads had for each other gave him so much hope that maybe someday when he was an adult, he would have a relationship as strong as theirs. Maybe he would even get married someday. It blew his mind to think that when they had been his age, gay marriage was still illegal in most states, and now it was becoming more and more widespread. Plus, he thought, if he got married here in his home state of Illinois, he would be able to thank his dads for helping to make that happen.

Suddenly he found himself wishing even harder than he'd ever wished before that they would win this case. He was so lucky to have ended up with not one, but *two* fathers who loved him and accepted him exactly as he was. Not only that, but both of them were the exact role models he'd always needed in his life but had never really had up until now. It frustrated him beyond belief to think that his asshole of a

biological father was trying so hard to take all of this away just so he could try to change Michael into the straight son he'd expected to have.

"How are you feeling?" Blaine asked, turning to face Michael as they approached the large, imposing doors of the courthouse.

Michael shrugged noncommittally as they stepped into the building, the warm interior of which was a welcome change from the biting, blustery wind of the freezing parking lot outside. "I'm okay," he admitted. "I guess there's no getting out of this."

"I wish we didn't have to do this, either," Kurt admitted. "I wish it could be easier. But I promise you, all of this will be *so* worth it when we're all together as a family. I'm just glad we have the best lawyer in town on our side."

Blaine smiled sheepishly and blushed as Kurt squeezed his hand. "I'm not going to claim that title just yet. Not until I win this thing for us."

"You won the Supreme Court case," Michael reminded him. "I don't even know anything about being a lawyer and even *I* know that's pretty legit."

"That *is* pretty legit, Blaine," Kurt agreed with a nod. "We believe in you. Both of us do."

Blaine gave them both a genuinely appreciative smile. "Thank you. It means a lot."

He glanced at his watch, only to learn that it was even later than he expected. Kurt had to bite his lip to suppress a giggle when Blaine's distinctive eyebrows flew up in surprise when he noticed the time.

"Shit, I'm supposed to be in there by now. I'll meet you two right out here when it's over."

Kurt pulled him in for a quick kiss and Michael gave him a fist bump for good luck. Both of them called their goodbyes to him as he disappeared into the courtroom and the heavy wooden door fell shut behind him.

"You think we should head in there, too?" Michael asked, noticing that the courthouse lobby was gradually becoming empty.

"That's probably a good idea," Kurt agreed.

They headed into the courtroom through the same doors that Blaine had used and found the designated spot where they were supposed to sit – just a few feet away from the table where Blaine, looking ready for battle with his briefcase already on the table in front of him, was seated. Kurt wanted to lean over and say something to him, but Blaine was staring straight ahead, focusing on something that Kurt couldn't quite put his finger on. He looked incredibly focused and the last thing Kurt wanted to do was interrupt him when he appeared to be so in the zone.

But right as the judge entered the room and took his place, Blaine turned and shot Kurt and Michael a warm smile just before court was called to order. He couldn't be more grateful for their support, and their complete and utter trust in him left no doubt in his mind that he could do this. He could win this for their family.

When he noticed Blaine turned slightly in his seat toward them, Kurt immediately returned his smile and mouthed *Love you* right before Blaine turned back around to face the front of the courtroom. The timing hadn't been the best, so for a second Kurt wasn't even sure if his fiancé had even noticed what he'd tried to say.

But then Kurt saw a tiny smile fighting to appear at the corners of Blaine's mouth, despite his best efforts to keep a stoic, attorney-like face, and that was enough to tell Kurt that Blaine had gotten the message.

xxx

After all had been said and done in court that morning, Kurt, Michael, and especially Blaine couldn't wait to get the hell out of there. It wasn't necessarily that it had gone badly – Kurt and Michael both thought that Blaine had done an incredible job, and Blaine had to admit, he thought he'd done pretty swell himself – but none of them wanted to have to deal with any of this unnecessary legal drama anymore. They were all confident that the ruling would be in their favor and that sooner or later, Michael would officially and legally be a part of the family, but that didn't mean they weren't absolutely ecstatic to have the courtroom part of the whole procedure over and done with.

"We're done!" Blaine exclaimed cheerfully as the trio stepped into the freezing wind blowing across the parking lot on the side of the building. The bitter cold was admittedly annoying, but none of them minded.

It was a welcome alternative to dealing with the stress of the court case, and being out here in the cold meant that they were on their way home.

"I don't know, are we?" Kurt asked in response, smiling to let his fiancé know he was joking as they crossed the parking lot. "Are you sure that bastard won't find something else to challenge so he can take this back to court?"

"God, please no," Michael pleaded to nobody in particular.

Thankfully, Blaine seemed to be confident that they had nothing to worry about. "I honestly think we're in the clear now. Your old man has no clear argument for why he should retain custody of you, Michael. No matter what he tries to come up with, we're always going to have something to fight back with, and eventually he's going to run out of excuses."

"All the arguments they tried to make really sucked," Michael recalled. "I don't think the judge is going to take them too seriously."

They had reached the car, so Blaine stopped so that Kurt could open the passenger seat door for him and allowed himself to be ushered into the car. He didn't even roll his eyes or make any teasing comments, because even though it may have seemed like Kurt was doting just a little too much, Blaine knew he was doing it to show how much he loved and cared for him. He really was lucky to have someone like Kurt who always did his best to ensure his safety and well-being and who always put others before himself.

Instead, he turned to Kurt with a warm smile of appreciation once he was seated. "Thanks."

Kurt said nothing, simply returned Blaine's smile as he closed the door and stepped around the front of the car to slide into the driver's seat. He stuck the key in the ignition and glanced at the digital clock display on the dashboard as he clicked his seatbelt into place.

"All right, it's one thirty. I don't know about you two, but I'm pretty hungry. What do you say we go pick up Ellie and then the four of us can go out to lunch?"

Blaine expressed his agreement with an enthusiastic, "Sure!" right as Michael, suddenly appearing taken aback, said, "I don't know."

Kurt glanced back at him with one eyebrow raised in confusion. He was letting the car stall so it could warm up, so he wasn't worried about drifting off anywhere. "You don't want to come?"

"I, um...", Michael blushed and bit his lip as he glanced down at his phone. "I mean, I want to come, but Jake just texted me and asked if maybe I'd want to go ice skating at Millennium Park this afternoon."

Kurt glanced surreptitiously at Blaine out of the corner of his eye, only to be met with a look from his fiancé that said, *Let him go*. As excited as he'd been about the unexpected opportunity to spend time with the whole family for a little bit, he knew Blaine was right. He nodded to let Blaine know he'd gotten the message and turned his attention to the gear console so he could back out of the parking space now that the car was sufficiently warm.

"Yeah, Michael, that's fine," Blaine told him. "What time did he want to go?"

Michael looked at his phone again and thumbed down the screen, reading a message quickly before he replied to Blaine. "Right now?"

Blaine glanced at Kurt, since he was the one driving, to see if he had a problem with this. He did not.

"Yeah, no problem. I can drop you off there," Kurt told him. "Or does he need to be picked up? I can swing by and get him if you need."

"His mom's dropping him off. They're already on their way," Michael told him with an appreciative smile. It was clear to both Kurt and Blaine that their son was trying to hide his excitement at seeing his boyfriend again. "Thanks, though."

"Oh, anytime," Kurt assured him as he maneuvered carefully toward the exit of the parking lot. He was about to ask Blaine to call Emily, who had been babysitting Ellie while they were in court, and let her know they were on their way to pick up their daughter, but suddenly he decided against it. He had a much better idea in mind.

Once they'd made it to Millennium Park at the edge of downtown, he pulled up as close as he could to the entrance of the skating rink. Michael was out of the car in a flash with hardly a, "Bye, see ya!" called over his shoulder to Kurt and Blaine, who watched as he ran over to where Jake was standing and greeted him with a hug.

"Aww, how cute are they?" Blaine asked with a smile as Kurt shifted the car into drive again and began pulling away from the curb back out into traffic.

"They're pretty damn cute," Kurt agreed happily. Traffic was moving slowly, so he took advantage of the standstill to glance back toward where Michael and Jake were heading into the ice rink, hands intertwined. He looked at them and at all the other happy couples skating gleefully around the frozen rink and suddenly got an idea.

"Do me a favor," he told Blaine. "Call Emily and see if she would mind watching Ellie for a few more hours."

Blaine pulled his phone out of his pocket, but as he did, he followed Kurt's eye to the ice rink and immediately shook his head. "Kurt, no, we're not going ice skating. We don't want Michael to think we're *those* parents who are secretly trying to chaperone his date because we don't trust him."

"I never said anything about ice skating," Kurt shot back flirtatiously. "But seeing all the couples in there got me thinking that we haven't really done anything together in a while – I mean, just the two of us."

Blaine only had to stop and think for a second before he realized that Kurt wasn't kidding.

"You're absolutely right," he agreed. "When was the last time you and I went out on a real, proper date?"

"I don't know, but it's been way too long," Kurt declared. He turned to smile at his fiancé. "Blaine Hummel-Anderson, will you go out on a date with me?"

There was absolutely no way in hell Blaine could resist Kurt, especially not when he had that sweet, adorable little smile on his face that even lit up his eyes. He reached over and took Kurt's nearest hand, returning his smile as he responded.

"Kurt Hummel-Anderson, I would be honored."

xxx

Since they were already dressed up from court, they eventually decided to have lunch at an upscale waterfront restaurant so they could use the gift card to said restaurant that Emily and Savannah had given them for Christmas. It was too cold to eat outside, but both of them immediately found that they didn't

mind sitting in the cozy interior of the restaurant. They managed to score a private, intimate booth in the back, even though the place was relatively empty save for the two of them and a few dwindling lunch guests.

But old habits die hard, and in this case, Kurt's tendency to worry unnecessarily was no exception. The second the waiter had left after bringing their drinks and taking their orders, he was looking across the booth at Blaine with unwavering concern.

"Are you okay? How's your head feeling?"

Blaine looked at him for a moment longer, stunned that he was so worried even now when they were supposed to be having a good time, and immediately burst into a small little eruption of laughter.

Kurt didn't seem to think anything was funny, as was evident in the way his smile dissolved into a frown. "Why are you laughing at me?"

"Kurt, you are *so* cute." Blaine managed to stop laughing and reached across the table to hold his hand. "I think it's so sweet how you worry about me, but I think you're stressing yourself out and I don't want you to do that."

"I am not stressing myself out," Kurt countered, biting his lip and averting his eyes – both of which were two of his most prominent nervous habits – as he did so.

Blaine stared him down knowingly. "Kurt..."

"Oh, fine!" Kurt, unable to avoid the fact that Blaine tended to know him even better than he knew himself, buried his face in his arms on top of the table.

Blaine, unsure of what to say, stared at the stressed-out heap of his fiancé on the table for a second before warily reaching over and placing a tender hand on his shoulder. Kurt immediately picked his head up at the sensation of Blaine's touch and Blaine had the distinct pleasure of watching the tension in his face melt away just the slightest bit.

"You really do know me too well," Kurt admitted as Blaine rubbed soothingly up and down his arm. He soon found that he found the motion of Blaine's hand to be extremely calming.

"I know you like to think you do enough worrying for the both of us, but I worry about you, too, y'know," Blaine told him with a rueful smile. "Why don't you tell me what's been stressing you out?"

"Well, there's the whole thing with this stupid custody case which has really been pissing me off," Kurt said slowly. Blaine nodded; he completely understood where Kurt was coming from. "Aside from the obvious fact that Michael's biological dad is a homophobic asshole who is dragging this out for way too long...I guess I just feel bad because you've been doing so much work in pulling this all together for our family, and there's really nothing I can do. I know that's not anybody's fault, but I just feel bad that you've been working so hard and I'm just kind of...there."

"You're not just 'kind of there,'" Blaine assured him. "Trust me, just the fact that you're already so welcoming to Michael and making him feel like he's part of the family helps more than you think. Give yourself more credit."

He smiled and stopped talking as a cue to let Kurt know that he wanted him to continue, so Kurt did.

"And don't get me wrong when I say this, because I'm *so* excited to be marrying you, but planning this wedding is a lot of work. And now that we have to make some changes and some cuts to the budget, that just kind of adds to the stress because deciding what to get rid of is really hard."

He was trying not to cry, but his voice broke as he finished his sentence. He knew in the back of his mind what had to be done – more than likely, they would have to give up going to Paris, or at least postpone their honeymoon. Kurt wasn't upset because he knew he might not have a chance to go to the city of his dreams as soon as he would have liked – instead, what frustrated him about giving up their honeymoon was the fact that Blaine had already gotten so excited about doing this for him, and the last thing in the world he wanted to do was let Blaine down.

"I know we have to do it and I'm totally okay with that. We'll do whatever we have to do. It's just actually *deciding* what to cut out is a lot harder than it should be," he continued softly. He didn't want to mention anything about the possibility of giving up Paris just yet, so he tried to sound somewhat vague. "I want this to be an amazing wedding for you, Blaine."

"And it will be!" Blaine assured him, reaching for his hand and holding it affectionately as he met Kurt's reluctant gaze. "Kurt, there is absolutely no doubt in my mind that no matter what, this wedding is going to be everything I ever dreamed of. And you want to know why?"

Kurt didn't say anything, just shrugged limply.

"Because I'm marrying *you*," Blaine told him, unable to keep a smile off of his face as the thought of taking Kurt to have and to hold forever entered his mind. "I don't know if you've figured this out yet, but I'm pretty crazy about you."

Kurt had to smile at that. "Yeah, I did, but I'm pretty crazy about you, too."

Blaine giggled and squeezed Kurt's hand. "I'm glad we're on the same page with that." His face immediately became more serious as he continued. "Really, though, Kurt...just the fact that *you* are the one I'm going to be meeting at the end of the aisle is beyond my wildest dreams. I *still* don't believe I got so lucky. Sometime later on this week we'll sit down together and talk about it so we can make this decision together."

It was extremely reassuring to Kurt to know that Blaine was willing to work together with him on this. For whatever reason, it made him feel better about the whole possibility of changing or postponing their honeymoon plans. "That sounds good to me."

"Good," Blaine agreed with a smile. "The only thing I won't let you change about this wedding is my groom."

Kurt feigned a gasp and set his face to mock horror. "Blaine, I would *never*."

"Okay...," Blaine said, faking wariness and an uneasy expression. "I *guess* I trust you. It would be a little awkward if some other guy met me at the altar."

"Just a bit," Kurt agreed, smiling blissfully as he gave Blaine's hand a happy little squeeze. "God, I feel so much better now. I just had to get all of that off my chest. Thank you."

"I'm glad I could help," Blaine told him. He picked up his glass of water to take a sip and looked at Kurt again as he set it down. "Can you just promise me one thing?"

"Anything," Kurt told him.

"For the rest of our little date this afternoon, I want you to try not to worry about anything," Blaine told him. "Just let yourself enjoy this. We have two kids at home, so there's no telling how many more opportunities we'll have to spend time together, just the two of us, before the wedding."

Kurt nodded in agreement. "You're right," he said, then took a deep breath and exhaled slowly. "Okay. Stress is gone."

As they talked and ate and enjoyed the rest of their lunch together, all it took was Blaine's loving smile to put him at ease. Kurt realized that all his worrying had been silly, because there was no reason to stress himself out so much – not when he had such an incredible man on his side.

xxx

Michael had never been ice skating before. As it turned out, he actually wasn't too bad at it for a beginner, but getting used to the strange sensation of gliding over ice definitely took some getting used to. Thankfully Jake had a pretty good idea of what he was doing, so he patiently held Michael's hand as they slowly but surely circled the rink. He never let go the whole time, even if it meant that he was pulled down as well every time Michael lost his balance and slipped and fell. Before too long, though, Michael got more comfortable and even let go of Jake's hand at one point, both boys laughing as they flirtatiously chased each other around the rink.

When they got tired, they traded their rental skates for their regular shoes and bought hot chocolates from a nearby vending cart. It was starting to snow very lightly and as they walked hand-in-hand around Millennium Park, talking and simply enjoying each other's company, Michael found himself wondering if this was what people meant when they talked about complete and utter happiness.

Suddenly he caught sight of several majestic pillars rising up in the distance at the edge of the park and smiled as he began leading Jake over in that general direction. "Come here, there's something I want to show you."

Jake laughed as he allowed Michael to pull him through the park. They finally stopped at the foot of the monument, right in the center of Wrigley Square and in front of the large stone fountain that had been shut off for the winter.

Michael couldn't keep a smile off of his face as he glanced around his surroundings and finally looked back at Jake. "This is where my dads are getting married."

"That's awesome," Jake told him, taking a quick look around for himself. "It's a nice place for a wedding."

"Yeah," Michael agreed quietly. "I think so, too."

Neither of them said a word for a moment – it was quiet but peaceful as snow drifted down around them, and nowhere near awkward. It was the first moment in his life that Michael would have described as magical, and suddenly he knew what he had to do to make it even more perfect.

He carefully stepped closer to Jake and reached up to place one hand on the side of his face. Jake suddenly seemed to realize what was happening and tilted his face down so it was easier for Michael, the shorter of the two, to reach. Michael thought he could hear his heart pounding in his ears as he stood on his tiptoes and inched his face closer to Jake's, but all was suddenly perfect and still when their lips finally met.

The kiss itself was simple and sweet, only lasting for a second or two, but that didn't make it anything short of incredible. Michael found himself unable to hold back a smile as they broke away and his heart only started to race even faster when he noticed that Jake was smiling as well. As far as first kisses went, Michael thought deliriously, that had been pretty awesome.

They shared a lingering smile and, despite the cold, Michael thought he was about to melt from complete and utter happiness as he looked into Jake's piercing blue eyes. But they were teenage boys, after all, and before long they were both overwhelmed with the need to kiss again. So they did.

And for the first time all day, Michael was one hundred percent confident that everything was going to be okay.

xxx

Kurt held out his hand and pouted in a desperate attempt to look as cute as he possibly could. "Come on, Blaine, it's fun."

Blaine glanced at the glass ledge on which his fiancé was standing, 103 stories above the ground, then looked at Kurt's face. That was almost enough to convince him to get over his fear and just do it, but then he looked at the ledge again and shook his head fervently as he took a step back.

"No. No, no, no. I refuse."

"Aww, come on," Kurt pleaded. "You can't come up to the top of the tallest building in the country and *not* take the biggest risk of all."

"I have no problem with being up here," Blaine told him, and it was true – he'd been up here at the top of Sears Tower several times before. But every time, he refused to step onto the petrifying glass ledges that looked straight down onto the city from a height that Blaine did not care to know the exact distance of. His little-known fear of heights didn't really bother him as long as he was sure that he was in an enclosed, safe space. To Blaine, the ledges that hung directly out over the city from one hundred and three stories in the air constituted as being neither enclosed nor safe.

"Mmmm, I think you do," Kurt countered with a smirk. His eyes twinkled with mischief as he spoke up even louder. "Hey everyone, my fiancé is afraid of hei—"

"Shhhh!" Blaine, without even realizing what he was doing, lunged forward and wrapped his arms around Kurt, clamping a hand over his giggling mouth so that nobody could hear.

When he pulled his hand away and got a good look at Kurt's face, though, he couldn't help but notice that his fiancé looked extremely pleased with himself. One look at the ground and Blaine knew exactly why that was so – in stepping forward to grab Kurt, he'd inadvertently stepped right out onto the ledge.

"Ahhh!" He immediately let go of Kurt and jumped back onto the part of the observation deck floor that he knew was safe. "You tricked me!"

"I didn't do anything," Kurt told him with a teasing smile. "You were the one who stepped out on the ledge. Now come on, you were doing so well there for a second. Try it one more time?"

Blaine looked at him for a second. If he was being completely honest, the sight of the love of his life standing fearlessly on the ledge scared him even more than the thought of going on the ledge himself.

"Kurt, get off of there. I'm so scared you're going to fall."

Kurt couldn't help it – he burst into a fit of laughter. "Blaine, this is completely safe. Hundreds of people have been walking out onto these ledges every day for *years* now. They wouldn't be here if they weren't safe."

Blaine only stared at him for a second before Kurt spoke again. "Will it help if I put it in legal terms? If there was a risk of injury, they wouldn't have these here because there would be a constant threat of lawsuits if anything happened to anyone."

He made a good point, and Blaine considered this for a second before nodding. "You're actually right."

"That's something that even people without a law degree can figure out," Kurt told him. "C'mon, Blaine, just try it. It's actually really neat."

"What if some freak accident happens and the ledge breaks and we end up being the first people ever to fall?" Blaine asked, and Kurt couldn't even tell if he was joking.

"Then I'll hold onto you the whole time," Kurt reassured him. He didn't think now was a good time to mention that mathematically speaking, there was no way anyone would survive a fall from this height, but he also knew that the chances of anything like that happening were impossible. He held out his hand again and this time Blaine appeared to actually be considering taking it. "Come on. I've got you."

Blaine looked at his hand and then up at his face. In that moment, he realized that the trust he had for Kurt was stronger than it had ever been for anyone else in his life. He warily reached out and took Kurt's hand before stepping gingerly out onto the glass ledge.

"Look at that," Kurt said as Blaine moved into his arms. "Was that so bad?"

Blaine shrugged. "As long as I don't look down. I can look out, but not down."

"That's okay," Kurt said as he maneuvered the two of them as far out onto the ledge as possible and gestured out to the lightly falling snow over the city on the other side of the glass. "Look, isn't it pretty?"

"Yeah," Blaine admitted. He had to admit, there was something magical about being here with Kurt, suspended so far above the ground, almost as if they were floating in midair. He knew that if it were anyone else, there was no way in hell he'd be doing this right now.

Kurt smiled at him. "Did you know that for a while I was actually considering bringing you up here and proposing to you up here on this ledge?"

Blaine's eyes went wide. "Thank you for not doing that," he said with an undertone of fear in his voice. "If you'd ended up deciding to do it that way, we might not be engaged yet because I might not have actually gone out here."

"I'm not sure about that," Kurt said with the sweetest little smile as he reached up and placed one hand on the side of Blaine's face. Blaine leaned into his touch as Kurt lightly stroked his cheek. "I would have thought of something."

"The way you did it was absolutely perfect," Blaine told him. "I couldn't have asked for it to be more amazing."

"I'm glad you liked it," Kurt said softly as he pressed a tender kiss to his forehead. "And maybe this is just me being selfish, but I'm even *more* glad that you said yes."

"Kurt, there is absolutely no way in hell that I ever could have said no to you," Blaine promised him.

"Even if I *did* decide to propose to you up here, on a glass ledge over a thousand feet above the ground, instead of in Washington?" Kurt asked with a tiny smile. He wasn't even sure if he was kidding or not.

Blaine squeezed his eyes shut and winced, but couldn't hold back a smile when he looked at Kurt again. "Yes. I would have been paranoid and freaking out and pressuring you to get it over with so we could get the hell off this thing, but I still would have said yes."

"I'm glad," Kurt said softly. He ducked his head a bit and gently kissed Blaine's forehead as he pulled him close.

Blaine settled comfortably into Kurt's arms and looked out over the city. His apprehensions were slowly melting away and the more time he spent out here on the ledge, the more he realized how amazing it was. It felt like he and Kurt were on top of the world, and it felt extraordinary.

"This is actually pretty cool," he murmured as Kurt dropped another tender kiss to the top of his head. "I'm glad you convinced me to do this."

"Isn't the view gorgeous?" Kurt agreed with a smile.

Blaine was no longer looking at the sprawling expanse of the city and Lake Michigan below them. He had somehow ended up looking at Kurt, who always managed to capture his attention effortlessly no matter what Blaine was doing.

"Not as gorgeous as mine," Blaine murmured without taking his eyes off of Kurt.

Kurt looked at him, a questioning glimmer in his eye, before realization struck and he smiled bashfully as a blush colored his face. "You're so cheesy."

"You love it, though," Blaine countered with a smile. He leaned in and kissed the tip of Kurt's nose, eliciting a cute little giggle from his fiancé, before moving down just a few more inches and giving him a proper kiss on the lips.

Kurt had been smiling for the entire duration of the kiss, and that didn't change even after they broke away. "I do."

Blaine raised an eyebrow in confusion. "You do what?"

"I was just replying to what you said before you shut me up with your lips," Kurt said matter-of-factly, still smiling the tiniest bit. "I *do* love the fact that you're a silly, cheesy romantic."

"Oh." Blaine blushed and turned his face away, though not without a smile of his own. "I thought you were practicing for the wedding."

Kurt laughed and kissed his cheek. "You wish."

Blaine looked at him with a hopeful twinkle in his eye. "Just a few more months."

"A few more months until I officially become the luckiest man alive," Kurt murmured as he pulled Blaine even closer.

They stood there for a long time, just holding each other and reveling in their togetherness, before they realized that it was probably a good idea to get going. They shared a lingering smile and one more brief kiss before linking their hands together and stepping off the glass ledge onto the more solid floor of the skydeck.

"I'm glad we did this today," Blaine murmured as they made their way across the room to get in line for the elevator back down.

Kurt had to resist the urge to come back at him with something witty and sarcastic. It was hard to be anything but genuinely sweet when Blaine was in one of his romantic moods like this.

"I am, too." He gave Blaine's hand a squeeze and let his mind wander to thoughts of their eventual wedding, which he knew was even closer than he dreamed.

xxx

By the time they finally picked up Ellie and made it back to the apartment, it was eight o'clock and, being winter, it had been dark outside for quite a while. Neither Kurt nor Blaine had heard from Michael since they'd dropped him off at the ice rink earlier in the afternoon, and both were admittedly worried about him. Yes, they knew he was probably having a great time with Jake and there was no reason to worry, but the fact that he hadn't checked in once had them both a bit worried.

"Do you think we should call him?" Blaine asked Kurt under his breath as the two of them were settling in to watch some post-holiday TV special with Ellie. Their daughter was sitting in the middle of the floor, humming a little song to herself as she colored away in one of her coloring books, completely oblivious and paying no mind.

Kurt glanced at the digital time display on the DVD player next to the TV. "I don't know. We *did* say we'd have him back to Hummel House by ten, and I think we need to stick with that so we don't mess up our chances of winning the custody case."

Blaine resisted the urge to facepalm himself as the realization hit him. Since Michael still wasn't legally their son yet, there were strict court-mandated rules about how much time he was allowed to spend living with the Hummel-Andersons at their home. They'd already kept him for an extensive amount of time over the holidays, and both of them feared that if they didn't get him back to his temporary home at Hummel House by the time they'd agreed upon, it might jeopardize their chances of winning the case.

"You're right," Blaine agreed. "We have less than two hours now. I'm going to call him."

He stood up from the couch, pulling his phone out of his pocket as he made his way into the kitchen so as not to bother Kurt and Ellie while he talked on the phone. Once he was gone, Kurt got off the couch as well and moved to sit next to his daughter on the floor.

"I colored a Christmas tree," she said proudly before Kurt even said a word. She tilted the page in her holiday-themed coloring book towards him so that he could see.

Kurt looked at her picture and nodded with a smile on his face. She'd colored the tree green, but all of the ornaments and decorations were pink and purple. It was just so *Ellie*.

"Very pretty, sweetheart," he told her sincerely. "Can I color with you?"

"Yeah." She flipped through the book for a second before stopping on a page that caught her eye. She tore it out and handed it to him. "You can color the snowman."

Kurt adjusted his position slightly so he could put the picture on top of the coffee table, since he didn't have anything else to support the flimsy sheet of paper. He looked over his daughter's selection of crayons and finally picked out a red color for the snowman's scarf. They colored in peaceful silence for a few moments before Ellie asked something that Kurt honestly hadn't expected to hear.

"Daddy, when is Michael coming home?" she asked out of the blue.

He glanced at the clock again, silently panicking when he realized that it was already a quarter til nine. "Hopefully soon," he said. "Blaine's calling him right now to figure out what's going on. We need to get him back to Hummel House by ten and we're cutting it pretty close."

Ellie shook her head, not looking up from the picture she was coloring. "No, I meant to live with us forever."

"*Oh*." Kurt couldn't believe that he hadn't picked up on that the first time she'd asked. "Well, whenever the court decides we can have custody of him. That could take a couple weeks, or it could take months. There's really no way of knowing for sure. We just have to wait and see."

Ellie set down her crayon and looked at him, seemingly perplexed. "Why can't they just let us have him? His old dad didn't even want him, and we do."

Kurt sighed as he set down the red crayon he'd been using and exchanged it for an orange one. He began absentmindedly coloring the snowman's carrot nose, wishing he had a satisfactory answer for his daughter.

"I don't know," he sighed. "I wish it were that easy, believe me."

"Me too," Ellie agreed. "Can I tell you a secret?"

Kurt shrugged. "Go for it."

She scooted closer to him and knelt by his side so she could whisper in his ear, as if what she was about to tell him was top-secret confidential information. To her, an innocent little first grader who still had so much to learn about the world, it probably was.

"I've always wanted a brother."

Kurt decided to play along. He feigned shock and gave her a playful look of confusion as she sat down again and resumed coloring. "Really? I had no idea. How come you've never mentioned it?"

"Because boys are supposed to have cooties," she told him matter-of-factly, as if stating a medical fact that everyone knew to be true. "But I really don't think they're so bad."

"I hope you don't think that," Kurt told her teasingly. "I mean, I'm marrying one and we're adopting another."

"But I love Blaine," Ellie declared as she colored. "You and him are the best daddies ever. And Michael's a good brother."

"I think he's a great big brother to you," Kurt agreed with a smile. "Now we just need him to get home in time and everything will be even better."

At that exact moment, as if on cue, Blaine came back into the room with his phone in his hand.

"Michael's on his way," he told Kurt and Ellie. "Jake's mom came to pick them up and she's going to give him a ride back. He should be here shortly."

Kurt sighed with relief. "Good. I feel better now that we've heard from him."

"I do, too," Blaine remarked as he took a seat on the floor with them. "What are you guys coloring?"

"Daddy's coloring a snowman," Ellie told him. "I did a Christmas tree and now I'm working on this one." She held her coloring book up to show him the picture of Santa Claus she was in the process of coloring.

"Very nice," Blaine told both of them with a smile. He hadn't realized it until just now, but the day had actually turned out relatively well considering the stress he'd been put under that morning in court. He'd ended up spending a wonderful day with Kurt and now he had the rest of the evening to relax and unwind at home – or so he thought. Little did he know that things were about to get substantially more difficult.

About ten minutes after Blaine had returned to the living room after calling Michael, the apartment door opened and in he stepped. Michael looked unbelievably happy for just a second, but his blissful expression fell when he caught sight of the three of them sitting on the floor and looking at him with incomprehensible expressions.

"Hey," he said carefully, and it almost seemed to Kurt that he seemed nervous. "Sorry I kind of lost track of time."

"Michael, I'm glad you seem so happy, but this can't happen again," Kurt told him in his best gentle-but-firm Dad Voice. "We didn't hear from you, we had no idea when you were or when you'd be back...and now we only have less than an hour to get you back to Hummel House."

Michael looked like he was genuinely sorry, but the lawyer in Blaine knew that he was also desperate to make a point of his own. "Okay, I know I need to get back so that's my fault for not telling you. But do I honestly have to let you know where I am all the time? I got back here in time, right? That's all that matters. It won't take us *that* long to drive over there."

"We can't cut it this close," Blaine tried to explain calmly. "What if we get stuck in traffic and we don't make it back in time? If we can't even keep our word on something like this, it could affect our odds of winning the case and we can't take *any* chances."

"And we're not saying you have to check in all the time and constantly update us on where you are," Kurt chimed in, "but it would be nice to at least have an idea of how long you plan on staying out. I don't think that's too unreasonable."

He looked at Blaine to see what he thought; his fiancé nodded in agreement. Michael, on the other hand, seemed even more exasperated.

"You didn't tell me before I went out that you wanted me to do that," he snapped. It was the harshest tone either Kurt or Blaine had ever heard him use. "I would have been back by ten either way, but if you wanted me to give you a specific time, you should have told me."

"You know what? You're right," Kurt said as calmly as possible. "But I think you need to tone down your attitude a bit. I understand that you're upset, but you don't need to use that tone. We've done a *lot* for you."

Michael sighed, obviously annoyed, and turned toward the door. "Fine. Let's just go. We're already running late."

Kurt stood up and headed over to the closet to get his coat and shoes. He turned to face Blaine – Ellie had excused herself and gone to her room so as not to be caught in the awkward position of watching her older brother get in trouble – as he grabbed his keys and pulled the door open.

"I'll be back soon. Do you need anything while I'm out?"

Blaine shook his head. "See you in a little bit. Bye, Michael, I'll see you soon."

"See ya." Michael didn't seem quite as annoyed as he responded to Blaine, but it was clear that he was still somewhat upset. He didn't say a word as he and Kurt headed down the hall, took the elevator downstairs, and finally made it out to Kurt's car. Kurt started the engine as they clicked their seatbelts into place and, attempting to ease the tension, turned the radio to a sports station that he knew Michael liked.

Michael turned to face him as Kurt moved toward the edge of the parking lot. "You didn't have to put this on."

"It's okay," Kurt said with a shrug, knowing full well that neither of them was going to pay any attention to the Bulls game that was currently being broadcast. "I don't mind."

"You don't even like basketball," Michael pointed out matter-of-factly as he reached forward and shut the radio off.

Kurt made no effort to turn the radio back on. If Michael would rather sit in silence for the rest of the drive, that's what he would do, and the first few minutes of their trip passed in exactly that way.

"Sorry about what happened earlier," Michael mumbled all of a sudden. Kurt honestly hadn't expected him to say anything and had to resist the urge to slam on the brakes in shock. "Probably shouldn't have said some of that stuff, not with everything you guys have done for me."

Kurt nodded as he stared ahead at the road. "I'm sorry, too," he said quietly. "You were absolutely right. We should have been more clear about what we wanted you to do."

"I'd have no problem letting you know how long I planned on being out, but I can't do that if you don't tell me," Michael explained, sounding wise beyond his fourteen years. "And maybe I shouldn't have had such an attitude, but I *was* pretty upset that you kind of got on my case the second I walked in the door. I was so happy for a second and then everyone just started freaking out on me right away."

Kurt sighed as he slowed down to stop at a red light. He really didn't know what to say, but he knew he had to say something.

"I'm sorry," he said again, his voice quieter this time. "You have to remember that this is all new to us. Believe it or not, Blaine and I were teenagers, too, not that long ago." He laughed humorlessly before continuing. "Both of us are only twenty-seven, for crying out loud. And even though it hasn't been that long since we were teenagers – less than a decade, actually – a lot has changed since then. Becoming a father changes your whole perspective on life, and now we're suddenly being thrust into this whole new role of being parents of a teenager. I think we all have a lot to learn."

"Me too," Michael agreed. He stopped to think for a second before responding. "Wow, you're right. You guys really aren't that much older than me."

"Neither of us is actually old enough to be your father, if you think about it," Kurt pointed out. "But we still consider you to be our son, even though it's not legally set in stone yet. Both of us love you and care about you and want nothing but the best for you, but we have to set rules and boundaries, too."

"I know," Michael acknowledged quietly. "I mean, I can respect that. It shows you two care. My old man didn't give a shit about where I went or what I did. I could have disappeared for a week straight and I

doubt he would have noticed. The only rule he had was 'don't do anything that might make people think you're gay.'"

"I'll tell you right now, Blaine and I won't make any rules like that," Kurt assured him with a laugh. "All I ask is that you try to stay patient with us. Like I said, we've got a lot to learn about raising a teenager. It's totally different than raising a seven-year-old, and so far that's all I know how to do."

He was quiet for a moment, hesitating to think before he continued speaking. "But I promise you that even though this *is* a learning experience for all of us, you will *always* have our full support. We're going to set rules and we're going to use discipline when necessary because we *are* your parents, but that doesn't mean we don't care about you."

Michael nodded slowly. "Okay."

"We're good?" Kurt asked, just to be sure, and Michael nodded again. "All right."

He smiled as he slowed down and flipped on his blinker to make a turn. "So I never got a chance to ask you. How was your date this afternoon?"

"It was amazing," Michael gushed immediately without hesitation. "*He's* amazing. I had such a good time."

"Good," Kurt said sincerely. "I'm so happy for you, Michael. Nobody deserves this more than you do."

He was looking ahead and paying attention to the road as he drove, but he could still hear the smile in Michael's voice. "After we got tired of ice skating, we walked around Millennium Park and I showed him Wrigley Square where you and Blaine are getting married."

There was a short pause, as if he'd suddenly had an idea, and sure enough there was a hopeful edge to his voice when he continued speaking. "Can I bring him to the wedding? Please?"

Kurt had been teaching at Buckley for quite some time now, which meant that he'd seen for himself what relationships were like among kids Michael's age. Most of them were just starting to enter the dating scene, as was the case with Michael, and Kurt knew that most relationships at that age usually didn't last more than a couple months at the most. He knew there was a chance that Michael and Jake might not even be together by the time he and Blaine got married in the spring. But as a supportive father, this was, of course, the last thing he wanted to say. His job was to be nothing but fully supportive of his son.

"Absolutely," he said after letting all of this flash through his mind in a split second. "If he's important to you, then he's more than welcome to be there."

"Awesome. Thanks so much." Out of the corner of his eye, Kurt saw Michael reaching to pull his phone out of his pocket, but immediately stopped himself after a second. "Actually, I think I should ask him in person. I don't want him to think I'm the type of boyfriend who only asks him important questions over text or Skype or whatever."

"I would ask him in person if I were you," Kurt agreed. "Are you going to see him again soon?"

The elated smile was once again present in Michael's voice as he responded. "Tomorrow, I think. That's what we're planning, anyway."

"That's great," Kurt told him. His tone changed and became slightly more wary as he continued. "But maybe it would be a good idea to wait until you ask him to the wedding. It's still pretty early...Blaine and I haven't even sent out the official invitations yet."

"Yeah, that's actually not a bad idea," Michael agreed after he thought about what Kurt had said for a second. "I'll wait until you guys do that."

Kurt had just pulled up along the curb in front of Hummel House, so Michael unclicked his seatbelt and opened the door. He turned and gave Kurt a genuinely appreciative smile as he stepped out of the car.

"Thanks for everything, Dad. And tell Blaine I said I'm sorry about before. You guys really have done so much for me, and I don't always show it as much as I could."

"I will," Kurt promised. "Have a good night, Michael. I'll see you soon."

He made sure Michael had gotten inside the building safely before pulling away from the curb. Once he was back out on the main road, he turned on the radio and listened to the basketball game for the entire duration of the drive back home.

xxx

Ellie was already asleep and Blaine was reading in bed by the time Kurt returned to the apartment. He was still wearing his coat and trying to keep his teeth from chattering when he stepped into the master bedroom.

Blaine looked up from his book and gave Kurt a pitiful smile the second he appeared in the doorway. "Aww, is it cold out?"

"Freezing," Kurt told him, pulling his coat even tighter around himself. "I'm still shivering just from walking through the parking lot."

"I can see that," Blaine acknowledged. "Why don't you go take a nice, hot shower and then come here and cuddle with me?"

"That sounds fantastic," Kurt admitted breathlessly. He took his coat off and draped it over the doorknob before stripping down completely and tossing his clothes in the laundry basket in their closet. Both of them were completely beyond the point of being uncomfortable when it came to changing clothes in the same room or being naked in front of the other, obviously, and Blaine unconsciously licked his lips as he watched Kurt from over the pages of his book.

Kurt, aware of the fact that Blaine was watching him, turned and gave him a coquettish pout over his shoulder as he was about to step into their bathroom. "Are you enjoying the view?"

"Very much so," Blaine said in a flat monotone, not even trying to hide the fact that he was staring gratuitously at Kurt's ass. "Sex later?"

Kurt had already stepped into the bathroom and was in the process of pulling the door shut behind him, but he stopped cold and turned around after Blaine had made his sudden request. "You are *shameless*, Blaine Hummel-Anderson."

Blaine shrugged as he turned a page in his book to make it look like he was pretending to read. In reality, he was inconspicuously looking at Kurt over the pages yet again.

"Shameless," he repeated. "Says the beautiful man standing there naked and looking like fucking Adonis without a care in the world."

Kurt rolled his eyes and bit his lip to hide a smile as he turned and stepped into the bathroom again.

"Don't act like you don't like it," he called over his shoulder as he shut the door behind him, leaving Blaine speechless and stuck with a quite substantial erection.

By the time Kurt returned several minutes later, Blaine had just been able to start ignoring the tightness that strained the front of his flannel pajama pants. The fact that Kurt came out of the bathroom fully clothed didn't make it any better or worse, but it *did* draw Blaine's attention to his situation again and he tried to hold back a groan as Kurt crawled into bed beside him.

Kurt, of course, did not let his fiancé's sexual frustration go unnoticed. "Be patient, okay?" he said softly as he snuggled against Blaine and rested his head on his chest. "I want to talk to you."

As turned on as Blaine had been, he figured he could at least try to ignore his overwhelming sex drive for just a few minutes longer. He wrapped his arms around Kurt, holding him close, and kissed the top of his head. "Okay."

"First of all, Michael said to tell you he's sorry about the way he acted before I took him home," Kurt said, picking his head up slightly so he could look at his fiancé.

"That was nice of him," Blaine acknowledged. "I love the kid, don't get me wrong, and I'm going to be the best father I could possibly be for him...but I didn't think it was right for him to speak to us like that."

"He feels really bad," Kurt told him. "I told him that the three of us all have a lot to learn. You and I have never raised a teenager before, and he's never had parents who cared enough about him to set rules and boundaries."

Blaine nodded as Kurt was saying all this. "That's understandable," he said. "Although I think you're doing an amazing job at being a father."

"So are you," Kurt reassured him with a tender smile. "Michael and Ellie adore you. You're a fantastic father."

Blaine frowned the slightest bit in disagreement. He had never admitted it, but from time to time he was still unsure about how he'd been doing as a father. "I'm not sure about 'fantastic.' You've had a lot more practice than I have. You raised Ellie for six and a half years before I really came into the picture as a father figure for her."

"But considering the circumstances that you suddenly found yourself in...I think you've been doing a wonderful job," Kurt countered gently, running his hand absentmindedly up and down Blaine's chest. "I kind of just showed up here and you all of a sudden learned what it was like to have a child, with almost no prior expectation because everything happened so suddenly, but I couldn't ask for anyone better than you to raise her with. Michael, too, although with him it's different because neither of us really knows what it's like to have a teenage son."

"We've both *been* teenage sons, but now I think we're both realizing that actually raising one is completely different," Blaine admitted. "Plus, when we hopefully win custody of him and he actually comes to live with us, that's when we're really going to start learning what we have to do in order to take care of *two* kids. We can start planning and discussing it now, but we're really not gonna know what that's like until we actually start experiencing it."

He caught Kurt's hand as it traveled up his chest and kissed his fingertips, his knuckles, his engagement ring. His lips never left Kurt's skin as he spoke, looking straight into those exquisite glasz eyes as he continued.

"I'm up for the challenge if you are," he said softly but firmly. "Are you in this with me?"

Before he responded, Kurt linked their fingers together and gave him the sweetest, most confident little smile.

"Absolutely," he promised. "I'm going to stand with you through everything for the rest of my life. I swear to you, Blaine, I will never leave you to face anything alone."

He paused for a second and smiled again. "Those would be good wedding vows, huh?"

Blaine faked a wince. "No, don't tell me! We're keeping our vows a secret from each other, remember?"

"I know," Kurt laughed, giving him a kiss. "I haven't even written mine yet, but when I do, you won't see or hear them until it's absolutely necessary."

He placed his head back on Blaine's chest but kept their eyes locked, because he now realized that he had the perfect opportunity to bring up the other little dilemma that had been stuck in the back of his mind all day.

"And speaking of the wedding, I, um...there's something else I wanted to tell you," he said slowly. "I probably should have brought it up at the restaurant, but I couldn't think of the right way to say it."

Blaine nodded in understanding. "Okay."

"So, obviously we need to make some adjustments to the wedding budget," Kurt said. "And...as much as I hate to say this, because I know you were really looking forward to this...I think we should give up our honeymoon. At the very least, postpone it for a few months or maybe even years. I think that would probably be the easiest thing to do."

Deep down, Blaine was slightly upset that he wouldn't get to give Kurt the honeymoon of his dreams right away. He remembered the beautiful smile and tears of joy that had touched Kurt's face when he'd surprised him with the news of their honeymoon destination on Christmas Eve, and he would have loved to be able to follow through on his plans, but he knew that Kurt was right. And the fact that Kurt was willing to give something like this up, even if it was only temporarily, just proved how strong and willing to make sacrifices he was.

"You're right," Blaine agreed, nodding slowly. "I'm still going to take you to Paris someday, Kurt. I promise you that. But right now, we have to do what needs to be done if we want to get these bills paid. This is honestly the best decision."

"I think so, too," Kurt agreed. "Besides, this means that when we *do* get to go, it'll be even more worth the wait."

"You're right." Blaine pulled him up a bit and kissed his forehead. "Okay. I'll call the travel agent tomorrow and tell him the trip is off."

Kurt nodded against Blaine's chest. As much as it killed him to have to get rid of the romantic honeymoon Blaine had spent so much time planning, he knew that they were doing the right thing. He only hoped that this meant things would be somewhat easier and less stressful from here on out.

Chapter Thirty-Five

The next time Kurt, Blaine and Michael returned to the downtown courthouse, it was a biting cold, blustery February morning. Blaine was turning twenty-eight the very next day, and all he wanted for his birthday was a victory in the custody case and reassurance that Michael would legally be their son.

Michael himself seemed strangely calm as they entered the courtroom, especially considering the fact that his whole future was on the line. The judge's ruling this morning would determine if he got to keep the loving home and family he'd found with the Hummel-Andersons, or if he'd have to return to his father's home where he was clearly unwelcome. He didn't even appear the slightest bit nervous until the judge entered the chambers and all were told to rise. As he stood up, Kurt noticed out of the corner of his eye that Michael was practically shaking.

"Don't be nervous," he mumbled under his breath, inconspicuously wiping his own sweaty palm on his dress slacks. "I think we've got this."

Michael didn't say anything, just took a deep breath and nodded slightly to let Kurt know he'd understood as the judge ordered everyone to be seated. His hands were starting to shake and he wished more than anything that Jake could be here to hold them and reassure Michael that everything was going to be okay. He knew they were both very young and this was the first real relationship that either boy had had, but he really, really liked Jake. He was even starting to think that he just might love him.

But there was no time to think about that now. Not when the judge was clearing his throat and getting ready to say something that was probably going to be important.

"All right, now I know you're all eager to get this over with. Especially you, young man," the judge began, glancing at Michael.

He paused. Kurt, sensing that Michael was starting to tense up again, gave his shoulder a reassuring squeeze to remind him that everything was going to be okay.

"After reviewing the details of the case, I have decided that the worst thing I could possibly do would be to return Michael to the care of his biological father. Therefore, I hereby declare that Kurt Hummel and Blaine Anderson shall have legal custody of him and are free to legally adopt him whenever they wish. Case closed."

One more ceremonial bang of the gavel sealed the deal. Kurt and Michael glanced at each other, and Blaine turned around from his customary attorney's seat to return their looks of stunned disbelief, but it wasn't long before the realization set in. Blaine stood up and eagerly pulled the other two to their feet as well before enveloping his fiancé and son into the tightest hug imaginable.

"He's coming," Blaine murmured after a few seconds, and Kurt and Michael immediately turned around just in time to see Mr. Horowitz headed their way. He didn't look happy. "Do you have anything to say to him?"

"No," Michael said immediately, his brown eyes wide with legitimate fear for the first time since they entered the courtroom.

Blaine took Kurt's hand and grabbed ahold of Michael's arm, maneuvering the three of them toward the door as quickly as possible. "Let's go, then."

Once outside, it seemed that they couldn't get to the car fast enough without someone occasionally slipping on a patch of black ice, which was admittedly hilarious. By the time they finally piled into the warm vehicle, the three of them were shaking with much-needed laughter as well as shivering as a result of the bitter cold. It was almost too much to take in at once, but at least the tension was completely gone.

"Michael James Hummel-Anderson," Michael declared proudly once he could catch his breath. "Yeah, that's got a nice ring to it. I like it."

"You sure you want to change your last name?" Blaine asked. They'd had this discussion already, but he just wanted to be sure his son was confident about this.

Michael nodded. "Definitely. Horowitz is my old man's last name. I don't want any connection with him anymore. I have a new family and I'm starting a new life with you guys, so I want it to be Hummel-Anderson."

"Well, we're glad to officially have custody of you and we can't wait until we can get the whole legal adoption thing going," Kurt told him with a smile as he drove toward the edge of the parking lot. "I don't know anything about how we would go about doing that. Blaine?"

"We can do that anytime we want, now that we have custody," Blaine confirmed. "I just have to get all the paperwork done, which will take no time at all, and we could go have it done maybe even as early as tomorrow."

"You'd basically be getting a new son for your birthday," Kurt told him, laughing. "Which is a pretty cool present, actually. Especially after all we've had to go through to get this far."

Michael hadn't been able to stop smiling since they'd gotten in the car, and his overwhelming elation was still present in his voice as he spoke.

"Thanks so much for doing this for me," he told Blaine, giving him a grateful fist bump before sitting back and pulling his phone out of his pocket. "Is it okay if I call Jake and tell him now?"

"Isn't he in school?" Kurt asked warily, even as Michael began thumbing through his contact list.

"I'll leave a voicemail," Michael told him as he pressed the phone to his ear. "I just have to tell him."

He pressed the phone to his ear and was relatively unsurprised when it went straight to voicemail. Jake probably had his phone off. That didn't stop Michael from letting an even bigger smile grow on his face as he began to leave a message.

"Hey, Jake, it's me," he said breathlessly. "I just wanted to let you know that I have two awesome dads now."

xxx

By the next afternoon, Blaine was twenty-eight and Michael Hummel-Anderson was officially a member of their family. After the adoption hearing, the whole family – even Ellie, who Kurt and Blaine had allowed to miss school for this special occasion – had gone out to lunch to celebrate both Blaine's birthday and Michael's official inclusion into the Hummel-Anderson clan. It was a fantastic day all around, and as Blaine walked into his office (he'd decided to go into work and get a few things done for the rest of the afternoon, despite Kurt's insistence that he take the rest of the day off and relax) he found himself smiling as he realized that he would have many more occasions to celebrate with his family over the years to come.

He returned to the apartment around the time he usually did, but this time he immediately noticed the scent of something amazing wafting under the door as he turned his key in the lock. By this time, he knew

his fiancé well enough to figure out that Kurt was probably making dinner for him. Whatever it was, it smelled fantastic. He pulled open the door with a touched smile on his face, an impromptu *oh, Kurt, you shouldn't have* speech already forming in his brain, but he stopped cold once he'd opened the door.

The entire apartment was bathed in a sultry glow of candlelight. It took Blaine a few seconds to realize that the lights in the kitchen and dining area actually *were* on, but Kurt had adjusted the dimmer switch to such a level that the electrical lighting in the room was almost unnoticeable. Soft, seductive music was playing over the speaker system, turned down to the level of background noise. The delicious aroma of food was obviously much stronger here than it had been in the hallway, and the longer Blaine stood there, taking all of this in, he noticed that the familiar scent of Kurt's favorite cologne curiously seemed to be getting closer and closer, until...

"There's the birthday boy."

Blaine gasped at the sudden realization that he was being embraced from behind, but there was already a smile on his face as he turned to greet his fiancé. Kurt was elegantly dressed in a sleek suit and tie and looked so exquisite that Blaine could have sworn his heart stopped for a second upon seeing him. His hair was perfectly coiffed, as was usually the case, but Blaine had every intention of running his fingers through Kurt's hair and deliberately ravaging the hairstyle he'd probably spent half an hour perfecting.

But that would be later. Right now, he really just wanted to figure out what this was all about. He wrapped his arms around Kurt's waist and lifted him up; Kurt bent his knees back and giggled as Blaine playfully spun him around for a second before setting him back on his feet.

"Kurt, this is incredible. I can't even imagine how long it must have taken you to set all this up...," Blaine trailed off incredulously, gesturing vaguely to the candles that had been strategically placed on seemingly every flat surface in the room.

"I wanted to do something special for you," Kurt murmured with a smile as he inched his face closer to Blaine's. "Now can I give the birthday boy a kiss?"

"Such a gentleman, asking for a kiss," Blaine giggled quietly, his lips brushing Kurt's just the slightest bit even as he spoke. "I would be delighted."

Kurt kissed him sweetly but passionately, breaking away too soon only to whisper, "Happy birthday, love," against Blaine's lips.

As much as Blaine wanted this to continue, his concerned paternal instinct eventually surfaced and managed to beat out his craving for Kurt and sex and sex with Kurt just for a moment.

"Where's Ellie and Michael?" he asked, because it would certainly be awkward if either of the kids had stuck around to see this.

"Ellie's sleeping over at a friend's house. She'll be gone all night," Kurt explained. "Michael went out to dinner with Jake, and I bought them tickets to the late showing of that new Anne Hathaway movie they both wanted to see, so they'll be going to that when they're done eating. He won't be back for a while."

Blaine looked around the room for a moment, then looked back at Kurt, who met his gaze with a sweet little smile on his face. He looked so innocent and adorable and so positively smoldering and sexy at the same time that Blaine couldn't help leaning in and stealing another kiss.

"I love you, Kurt. This is unbelievable." He laughed a little bit. "I think it's safe to say that this is the most romantic thing anyone has ever done for me."

He paused and glanced down at his work clothes – a blazer, button-down shirt and tie all over khakis. He looked presentable, but suddenly he felt considerably underdressed compared to Kurt.

"You look stunning, by the way. Should I go get changed into something a little nicer than my work clothes? I have a suit that I—"

"Shhh." Kurt silenced him with a press of his index finger to Blaine's lips. "You look amazing just like that. Besides, it's not like I'm going to be staying in this suit all night, either."

Blaine's mouth watered, and Kurt must have noticed that he suddenly looked hungry – though not for food – because he laughed and took Blaine's hand to lead him to the table.

"Come on, let's get you fed. I promise I'll strip for you later." He threw a saucy wink over his shoulder as he sauntered out to the kitchen to get the food ready. Blaine was stunned into blank silence for a second before snapping himself out of it and taking his usual seat at the table.

Kurt reappeared moments later holding two large dinner plates, one of which he set in front of Blaine.

"Fettuccine Alfredo with homemade sauce, steamed vegetables, and dinner rolls made from scratch," he explained, pressing a kiss to the top of Blaine's head before sitting down across from him.

Blaine smiled, completely touched, and reached across the table to take Kurt's hand. He must have worked all afternoon on this. "Oh, *Kurt*..."

"Don't 'oh, Kurt' me just yet. Wait til you see the bedroom," Kurt commanded him gently before picking up a large bottle that Blaine hadn't even noticed on the table. "Champagne?"

Blaine picked up the empty glass at his place and held it out so Kurt could pour some of the bubbly into it. "Yes, sir. Please."

Something on the bottle caught his eye as Kurt poured each of them a glass, and Blaine immediately reached for it to get a better look at the label once Kurt had set it down. After studying it for a second, the realization hit him like lightning and he smiled at his fiancé from across the table.

"Kurt, I can't even believe you. You actually went and found the same type of champagne we had on the night we got engaged."

"What can I say?" Kurt asked blithely with a casual shrug. "I've always been rather thorough, if you couldn't tell."

He picked up his glass and raised it over the middle of the table. "To Blaine Anderson, the most amazing man I've ever had the privilege to know and who I love beyond all words."

Blaine smiled bashfully as he raised his own glass. "And to Kurt Hummel, about whom I can say the same exact thing. To us and the life we're going to share together."

"I'll drink to that," Kurt agreed as he clinked his glass against Blaine's. "Cheers."

After they each took a sip, Blaine was all too eager to try the delicious-smelling food Kurt had made, so he immediately picked up his fork and dug right in. Kurt watched him expectantly and smiled the tiniest bit in satisfaction when Blaine practically moaned after tasting the food.

"Good?" he asked warily just to double check as he picked up his own fork and twirled it lazily through his pasta.

"Better than good," Blaine mumbled with his mouth still full. Thankfully, he swallowed before continuing. "This is delicious, Kurt. Thank you so much. I still can't believe you went to all this trouble..."

"I've said it before, and I'll say it again," Kurt reminded him. "You're worth all the trouble in the world, Blaine."

They finished their meal in comfortable silence – not because they didn't have anything to talk about, but rather because Blaine was so preoccupied with devouring the rest of his food that conversation was nearly impossible. Kurt ate at a much slower pace but smiled to himself when Blaine, having finished his entire meal in the time it had taken Kurt to eat half of his own, stood up and headed out to the kitchen to get seconds.

The second Kurt was finished eating, Blaine reached over and took his empty plate and stacked it up along with his own. "I'll do the dishes. You've already put so much time and effort into making this evening special and I want you to be able to relax for a little bit."

Kurt shook his head as he stood up from the table. "No."

"No, what?" Blaine asked, confused.

"Nobody's doing the dishes." Kurt promptly snatched the plates out of Blaine's hands and set them in the kitchen sink. "We'll get to them tomorrow. I have one more part to your surprise."

Blaine's heart started to race as he considered the fact that he hadn't even seen what Kurt had done to the bedroom yet. He didn't have much time to think about it, because before he knew it, Kurt had scooped him up in his arms and was cradling Blaine lovingly against his chest with a smile on his face.

"God, you're strong." Blaine wrapped his arms around Kurt's neck to help support himself, smiling when he realized he was close enough to hear the gentle rhythm of Kurt's heart beating on the other side of his chest.

Kurt smiled beautifully and kissed his forehead. "You ready?"

"Yes," Blaine assured him, nodding furiously – as if he would ever *not* be ready to make love with Kurt. He closed his eyes as Kurt carried him through the silent apartment to their bedroom, opening them only when he heard his fiancé gently kick open the door.

Another gasp escaped Blaine's lungs when he opened his eyes and got his first look at how Kurt had transformed their bedroom. The room was lit only by candlelight – and there were a *lot* of candles, probably more in here than in the rest of the apartment put together. Scattered rose petals blanketed the carpet surrounding the bed – speaking of the bed, were those silk sheets brand new? Blaine wasn't sure, but he wouldn't have put it past Kurt if they were – and on the bed itself was a pile of full-stemmed dark red roses. Blaine heard himself make some tiny, broken-sounding noise of shock as he looked around the room and buried his face in Kurt's chest, melting closer against him because it was almost too much to take in all at once.

Kurt giggled and kissed the side of Blaine's face. "You like it?"

"I love it," was Blaine's muffled response. "I love *you*."

"I love you, too," Kurt murmured. "And I have physical proof of that right here in this room."

Blaine picked his head up as Kurt carried him across the room and placed him gently on the bed beside the large pile of roses. Kurt picked up one of the flowers at random and handed it to Blaine, who noticed for the first time that there was a small piece of white paper tied around each of the stems.

"There are twenty-eight roses. One for each year of your life. On each little piece of paper, I wrote something that I love about you," Kurt explained with a tiny half-smile. He kissed Blaine gently before standing up from the bed. "I'll leave you alone so you can read them. I need to go finish getting ready and I'll be back when you're finished."

Blaine pouted, not wanting to be away from Kurt for even a second on a night as special as this. "Promise?"

"I promise." Kurt smiled sweetly at him before disappearing into the bathroom to do God-knows-what. Blaine studied the pile of roses beside him for a moment and looked over the one in his hand before he unrolled the tiny piece of paper and read the first little message.

I love your voice and the way you can completely mesmerize me whether you're speaking or singing. I've never loved the sound of my own name more than when you say it.

He smiled as he set that one aside, starting a separate pile for the roses with notes he'd already read, and chose another flower.

I love your passion and spirit and the way you speak so strongly about the things you believe in. I see that everywhere – whether I'm watching you give an argument in court or even if we're out to dinner with friends and someone casually mentions something you're particularly passionate about. You throw your heart and soul into everything that you do, and that inspires me more than you could ever imagine.

Blaine found himself tearing up with the more notes he read. He could tell that every word came straight from Kurt's heart; that there was love in every inked line Kurt's scrawled handwriting had formed on the tiny pieces of paper.

I love kissing you and I love the way you make me feel when your lips touch any part of my body.

I love the fact that I love you so much, it's hard to think of just twenty-eight things to write on these roses. I could easily come up with so many more, but it would take forever to write them all down.

I love the way my name sounds with yours, and I can't wait to marry you and be able to call you my husband. I'd be lying if I said that I hadn't been secretly dreaming of being Kurt Hummel-Anderson since I was a teenager.

I LOVE watching you be the most incredible father in the world to Michael and Ellie. They are so unbelievably lucky to have you in their lives, and I can't wait to continue raising both of them with you over the next several years. Seeing the way you care for them just makes me fall in love with you all over again.

I love your smile and the way it lights up your whole face when you talk about something you're passionate about. I love how it reaches all the way up to your gorgeous eyes and you just start to

glow. *And maybe this is just me being conceited, but I love the fact that you always seem to smile like that for me.*

And on, and on, and on. Each little note seemed to touch Blaine's heart even more than the last. He had been completely reduced to tears by the time he'd finally read all of them.

"Kurt?" he called out weakly through his tears. Kurt was still in the bathroom with the door closed and if Blaine had been more focused on anything besides his overwhelming love, he would have wondered what in the world was taking so long for him to do in there.

The door swung open and Kurt stepped out into the bedroom, looking exactly the same as he had when he'd originally left the room. Blaine could not, for the life of him, come up with anything that Kurt could have possibly been doing that would have kept him in the bathroom for as long as he'd been. But there was no time to think about that, because right now he really just needed Kurt to be close to him.

"Did you like them?" Kurt murmured as he crawled onto the bed beside Blaine. He tucked his chin over Blaine's shoulder and wrapped his arms around his waist.

Blaine turned to wrap Kurt in his arms; Kurt immediately began kissing his tears away. "You're the most perfect man in the world and I love you more than I can explain."

"I love you, too," Kurt told him softly, as if Blaine needed any reminding after what he'd just read. He kissed him gently before moving aside to pick up the roses and move them out of the way.

Blaine laughed as he watched Kurt begin to place the roses in two water-filled vases that he hadn't even noticed on the nightstand. Each slip of paper was pushed up high enough on the stem that it didn't get wet and ruined. "You really are thorough. I was just thinking we should probably get water for these."

"I had them in these vases up until right before you got home, then I put them on the bed," Kurt explained. "I'm glad you enjoyed everything tonight."

"This is the most romantic night of my life," Blaine told him as he lay down and pulled Kurt on top of him. "Which is saying a lot, especially considering that the night at the hotel after we got engaged pretty much blew my mind."

Kurt straddled his waist and leaned down to begin sucking and nipping at his neck, but he pulled away after a few seconds so he could speak.

"That was more impromptu and spur-of-the-moment, though. I've been planning this for weeks," he whispered. "And now that you say that, it just makes me all the more determined to make our wedding night even *more* romantic." As he finished speaking, he leaned in and sealed the short distance between them with a kiss.

Blaine's eyes flew open as the thought of spending their wedding night together – just about two short months from now – entered his mind. He smiled as he put his hand on the back of Kurt's neck and pulled him even closer to deepen the kiss; Kurt smiled back against his lips and Blaine liked that a lot, so he gently slipped his tongue into Kurt's mouth to intensify the kiss even further.

But Kurt only sucked on his tongue for a moment before breaking the kiss and looking deep into Blaine's eyes. He placed his hand on the side of Blaine's face and stroked his cheek; Blaine sighed and surrendered to Kurt, unable to look anywhere but straight into those beautiful eyes.

"This is *your* night, okay?" Kurt murmured, keeping his eyes locked on Blaine's. "Whatever you want to do. I'm open to anything."

Blaine could only think of one thing he wanted tonight, as simple as it was. "Make love to me?" he asked, pouting a little bit, doing his best to look as irresistible as possible. "I want to feel you inside me tonight."

Kurt smiled and laughed a little bit, the motion rumbling through his body and making him quiver even closer to Blaine.

"Jesus, you're so fucking cute," he said, his voice low and saturated with lust. "It's almost too easy to give you exactly what you want."

Blaine smiled up at him as he remembered the promise Kurt had made him earlier, before they'd eaten dinner. "So does this mean you'll strip for me now?"

Kurt moved to stand up from the bed, but hadn't even gotten to his feet yet before he changed his mind and sat down beside a suddenly disappointed-looking Blaine.

"Actually, I think it's a better idea that you undress me yourself," he said, almost as an afterthought. "You'll see why."

It didn't matter to Blaine either way, just as long as Kurt was naked sometime within the next few minutes – and with how aroused Blaine currently was, it would take him no time at all to strip Kurt down. He gently but forcefully pushed the suit jacket off of Kurt's shoulders and made good use of the tie, using it to pull Kurt closer for a sexy little kiss before he broke away, smirked a little bit, and kept his eyes locked with Kurt's as he began unbuttoning his long-sleeved white shirt.

Kurt was suddenly biting his lip and smiling like he had a secret, and it wasn't long until Blaine figured out why – once Kurt's shirt was out of the way and he was naked from the waist up, Blaine caught the unmistakable scent of chocolate syrup and his eyes, naturally, were drawn to Kurt's chest. There, in sticky sweet chocolate letters, Kurt had somehow managed to write a message for Blaine on his own skin: *Happy bday, sexy man* followed by a line of *xoxo*'s down near his waist, peeking out from the waistband of his dress slacks. He looked so delectable that Blaine choked back a slight gasp before he could speak.

"Oh my god, Kurt. As delicious as you look right now, I've gotta ask...how in the world did you do this?"

"Very carefully," Kurt explained. "And I had to make it very thin, otherwise it would run or smear. Why do you think I was in the bathroom so long just a few minutes ago?"

"I definitely didn't think you were writing on your body with chocolate syrup, but holy *shit*," Blaine moaned as he pushed Kurt back on the bed. He hovered over him, mouth already parted and ready to start licking the chocolate away, but Kurt stopped him with a finger to his lips.

"Not yet," he commanded gently. "Take the rest of my clothes off, first."

Blaine, surprisingly, didn't have a problem with that. He'd seen Kurt naked plenty of times by now, but the sheer perfection of the other man's body never failed to take his breath away. It took him no time at all to slip Kurt out of his dress pants and boxer briefs – which were Blaine's favorite pair that Kurt owned, by the way; Kurt had probably chosen them on purpose – and he was practically salivating by the time said pants and underwear had been unceremoniously tossed to the floor.

But before he could begin treating himself to the scrumptious chocolate words on Kurt's skin, he caught sight of one more part to the message that he'd missed.

"Aww, how sweet. You even signed your artistic masterpiece," he noticed with a smile. Along his upper thigh, Kurt had drawn a small heart with the chocolate before signing his name as *Kurt H-A*.

"Of course I did," Kurt said blithely, as if he weren't completely naked and partially covered in chocolate syrup. "If anything, it's more chocolate for you to lick."

Blaine knew there was no such thing as an unselfish act, and in that moment he realized that Kurt had had another motive in doing this – it wasn't only something sexy and sweet for Blaine, but it would also give Kurt himself a chance to indulge in his weirdest and most vulnerable little kink. Blaine wanted to call him

out on that and started thinking of a few snarky little comebacks, but he also couldn't put off licking that tasty chocolate off of his even tastier fiancé any longer.

He decided that while he was at it, he should go out of his way to make Kurt feel as good as possible – after all, Kurt had spent so much time making Blaine feel special tonight, and it was the least Blaine could do to return the favor. He took his time, letting his tongue drag over the pale contours of Kurt's chest as he licked the chocolate up line by line. Every so often, Kurt would let out a little whimper or a moan and the *sound* alone was enough to turn Blaine on even more than he already was.

By the time he reached Kurt's little signature at the top of his thigh, he could tell he'd done more than enough for him already. There was no way Kurt was going to last much longer, so as soon as the last of the chocolate out of the way, Blaine decided to just put him out of his misery and give him his release. He closed his mouth around Kurt's erection and swallowed him down, and he'd barely even started sucking before Kurt was wailing and coming straight down Blaine's throat.

Blaine graciously swallowed everything Kurt gave him, and pulled off of his spent cock with a wet *plop* before kissing his way back up Kurt's body again. Kurt's world had admittedly been rocked just then, but he was trying so hard to retain his composure – even when his hair was disheveled beyond belief, his lips were swollen from kissing, a blush was coloring his cheeks and he was wearing nothing at all while Blaine was still completely clothed.

He cleared his throat and attempted to keep his voice even as he addressed Blaine, who certainly looked pleased with himself. "It's your birthday, and *I* got the surprise blow job?"

"You said I could have anything I wanted," Blaine reminded him. "Are you *really* upset that what I wanted happened to be your dick in my mouth?"

"No," Kurt conceded before finally allowing his face to break into the smile he'd been holding back. "Okay, that was wonderful. Thank you."

"I wanted to make *you* feel good, too," Blaine told him, looking into his eyes as he absentmindedly stroked the soft, pale skin of Kurt's angelic face. His thumb traveled over the curve of Kurt's lips and Kurt immediately reached up to grab Blaine's hand and hold it in place so he could press a lingering kiss to his fingertips.

"And I want to continue making *you* feel good," Kurt told him. "But in order for that to happen, something needs to be done about these clothes of yours."

"I'm wearing way too many," Blaine agreed, but Kurt had already sat up and started to undress him.

After a little bit of foreplay to get Kurt nice and hard again – it didn't take much, not with his desperation and utter *need* for Blaine - the lube was popped open and Blaine helped Kurt slick himself up before Kurt positioned himself and began to make love to him. He moved slowly and tenderly at first, taking his time and savoring how lovely it always felt to become *one* with Blaine in this way. But they were men, after all, and eventually Kurt's testosterone-driven craving to go harder and faster overpowered his need for emotional closeness. He began thrusting in and out with such intensity that eventually he lost any sense of rhythm at all, and Blaine eagerly rolled his hips up to meet each thrust.

When they finished, both were so worn out from the intensity that it took them a while to move away from each other. Kurt lay draped on top of Blaine for what felt like a perfect eternity, spent cock still inside him, breathing raggedly in unison and sweat-soaked skin clinging both of them together. Kurt picked up his head and looked into Blaine's eyes, and they held their gaze just like that for a long time.

After a while, Kurt noticed a solitary tear slipping out of Blaine's eye and immediately ducked his head to kiss it away, as if it were his natural instinct. He looked into Blaine's hazel eyes with loving concern and gently stroked his cheek to soothe him.

"You okay? I'm not hurting you, am I?" He was, after all, still inside Blaine despite the fact that both of them were spent. He'd been relishing their closeness too much to pull out just yet.

"No." Blaine's response came almost immediately after Kurt had finished speaking and he placed both hands on Kurt's waist to hold him in place. "I just...never mind, it's stupid." He shook his head, brushing aside whatever he'd been about to say, but Kurt would have none of that.

"Nothing you say is stupid. C'mon, just tell me what you're thinking."

Blaine sighed, completely defeated, because he knew there was no way he could ever refuse Kurt. "It's really nothing. I was just thinking...I was thinking how much I love being with you like this. Looking into your eyes after we've made love and seeing the way you look back at me like you can't see anything else in the world. Like you don't *want* to see anything else in the world. And it just blows me away when you look

at me like that, because you're so beautiful and I still can't believe how I got so lucky to have you...and it just hit me that I'm going to get to share moments like this with you for the rest of my *life*, Kurt."

He sniffed back another sob and reached up to rub his eyes before returning his hand to Kurt's skin, rubbing it gently up and down his side. "I know that sounds really cheesy and really dumb, but it's how I feel and I'm not ashamed of that. And I guess the fact that you spent so much time making this evening special for me was just a little reminder that you love me just as much as I love you. It's still hard for me to believe that someone like you could love someone like me so much."

Kurt smiled and giggled a little bit. He could feel his face turning warm. "Oh, Blaine, I'm nothing special..."

"Don't even say that," Blaine cut him off. "I could talk for hours about how special you are. And amazing, and beautiful, and perfect. You don't get to argue with me about that, okay?"

He smiled up at Kurt, looking so completely adorable that Kurt just had to give him a quick little kiss on the lips before he replied.

"Okay." He kissed him again, pulling away with a bashful little smile. "Not to ruin the romance, but is it okay if I move? My arm's kinda falling asleep at this angle."

Blaine laughed. "As much as I love having you inside me, that's fine. On one condition, though."

Kurt, who hadn't made any move to pull out just yet, raised one eyebrow. "What's the condition?"

Blaine smiled sweetly, looking so innocent and adorable that Kurt's heart positively melted. "We get out of bed right now and go take a bubble bath."

"You and your bubble baths, I swear to god." Kurt playfully rolled his eyes and gave Blaine a kiss as he pulled out.

Blaine pouted. "They're cozy and romantic...and don't *even* pretend you don't enjoy them, too."

"I never said I don't," Kurt teased as he sashayed past Blaine into the bathroom. Blaine stayed right where he was for a second, for the sheer purpose of staring at Kurt's ass, before standing up and heading into the bathroom where his fiancé was perched on the lip of the already-filling bathtub.

"Oh, there you are. I thought you would never come," Kurt commented with faux monotony as Blaine sat on his lap.

Blaine smirked and pinched one of Kurt's nipples. "Baby, you make me come *all the time*."

"Ow! I didn't mean it like that, you perv." Kurt playfully slapped Blaine's hand away. "I guess I should have said, 'I thought you would never *join me in here*.' Is that a better choice of word?"

"Nope. I still like 'come,'" Blaine said with a proud smirk, pretending not to hear Kurt's muttered *Of course you do* under his breath. "And I'm sorry you have a fantastic ass that I wanted to stare at for a couple seconds. Actually, no, I'm not sorry about that at all."

"Blaine?" Kurt asked, sounding suddenly impatient.

"Yeah?"

"Shut the fuck up and kiss me."

Blaine was more than happy to do just that as they waited for the tub to finish filling. Once the water had reached a respectable height and was practically overflowing with bubbles, Blaine stood up from Kurt's lap and lowered himself into the tub, opening his arms as an invitation to Kurt.

"Get in here. I want to hold you."

Before he'd even finished speaking, Kurt had already slipped into the tub and settled comfortably in Blaine's arms. Blaine exhaled a sigh of content, closing his eyes and smiling as he gently tightened his arms and pulled Kurt even closer against his chest. Nothing in the world could compare to the way it felt to hold Kurt in his arms. Nothing would ever come close.

"Thank you so much," Blaine murmured, his lips brushing the shell of Kurt's ear just the slightest bit as he spoke. "For *everything* you did tonight. You're amazing, Kurt."

"You are, too, and that's why I did what I did," Kurt told him, turning his head a bit to look Blaine in the eyes as best as he could. "I thought you deserved a birthday that was slightly better than nursing a glass of red wine while having a *Harry Potter* movie marathon all by yourself."

Blaine had to think for a moment before it hit him – that was the exact way he'd spent his birthday last year. He couldn't believe Kurt remembered.

"This was a million times better than last year," he promised. "Thank you."

He laughed a little bit as he pondered on something else. "God, if someone had told me while I was on the phone with you last year that this was all going to happen for my next birthday, I would have laughed in their face."

"Best birthday ever?" Kurt asked just to double-check. "Because if it's not, then I haven't done my job tonight."

"Best by far. Thank you." Blaine pulled him closer and gave him a kiss that turned extremely passionate before too long.

They spent most of the remainder of their time in the bathtub making out in much the same way, with one of them occasionally breaking away to whisper sweet professions of love to the other before securing their lips together again. After they finally decided to get out, they dried off and made their way back to the bedroom, where they made love one more time – this time, Kurt took Blaine inside – before curling up in each other's arms to go to sleep.

Blaine, who had had a long but incredible day, was the first of the two to fall asleep. Kurt had always been a bit of an insomniac, and he had the feeling it would be a while before he'd be getting any sleep, so once he was sure that Blaine was happily dreaming he carefully stood up from the bed and slipped on his robe. Michael would be getting home soon, and if Kurt could help it, he wanted all the candles to be extinguished by then so his son wouldn't question him about the fairly obvious.

He quietly padded out to the living room and began blowing out all of the individual candles, most of which had melted significantly by now. Once those had all been put out, he moved over to the dining area and did the same. It wasn't long before the apartment was pitch black, a stark contrast to the romantic glow that had illuminated it just minutes ago.

After the last candle had been blown out, Kurt stood there for a second debating whether or not to put all of them away just yet. He'd gotten them out of the box in the hall closet, and it had taken him quite a bit of time to set them all up. In all honesty, he was too tired to really fathom the idea of pacing back and forth

across the apartment, picking up candle after candle and returning them to the box. That could wait until the morning.

He was just about to turn and head back to the bedroom when suddenly the doorknob began to turn. Panic overtook him for a few seconds – who the hell was trying to get into their apartment? – before he realized that it was probably just Michael getting home from his date with Jake. He breathed a sigh of relief and silently cursed himself for being so paranoid.

Michael had a totally blissed-out smile on his face when he stepped through the door, as always seemed to be the case after he'd gotten back from spending time with his boyfriend. He seemed to be in such a lovedrunk trance that he didn't even realize he wasn't alone until Kurt cleared his throat.

Kurt had to try not to giggle as Michael flinched noticeably and whirled around toward him, relaxing significantly when he realized who it was. "Oh. Hey, dad."

"Hey yourself, kid. I swear I didn't stay up just to wait and lecture you this time. I just happened to come out here a few minutes ago to pick up all these...oh." He didn't realize until it was too late that it had probably been a bad idea to point out the candles to his son.

"The candles?" Michael asked flatly, raising an eyebrow. "I can still see them even though it's dark and they're all out, y'know. Plus it's kinda hard to ignore the smell."

"Yeah. I came out here to put the candles away," Kurt admitted.

"Let me guess," Michael replied with joking eagerness. "Something romantic for Blaine's birthday. And then I bet you guys had—"

"Hey now, that's none of your business," Kurt told him with a smirk. This was exactly what he'd been afraid of – he knew Michael was going to associate the candles with something romantic and possibly sexual, and he really didn't want to plant those ideas in his son's brain just yet. The kid was only fourteen, after all. He knew Michael and Jake cared about each other very much, but he also didn't want them to rush into anything physical that they, at their young ages, weren't really ready for just yet.

"I know, I know, I'm kidding," Michael told him. "Seriously, though, can I borrow all these if I ever want to do something like this for Jake? Something about having so many candles just seems really romantic and cool."

"If you don't mind the fact that it's a pain in the ass to light all of them, then sure," Kurt said hastily, determined to change the subject. "Speaking of Jake, how was your date?"

"Amazing," Michael said right away, and there was that super-happy just-for-Jake smile again. "He said he wanted to take me out to celebrate me officially becoming a part of my new family, and he just made it really romantic and special. Thanks for the movie tickets, by the way. We both loved it."

Kurt gave him a genuine smile. "Good, I'm glad to hear that. I'm so happy that you're happy, Michael."

"Gotta admit, I never thought I'd hear *those* words from someone I considered to be my father," Michael told him with a roll of his eyes. "It's nice to know that for once in my life I have a parent – *two* parents – that actually give a shit about my happiness."

"Blaine and I will always give a shit about you," Kurt reassured him with a smile. "I can promise you that."

Michael smiled graciously. "Thanks."

He paused while glancing around the room at all the darkened candles. "Do you need help putting all these away? I feel like it's gonna take you a while."

"It is, and that's exactly why I decided to put it off until the morning," Kurt told him. "I'm exhausted. Thanks anyway, though."

"No problem." Michael slipped out of his shoes and tossed them in the closet before turning to head down the hallway that led to the bedrooms. "I'm pretty tired too, actually. G'night."

"Night, Michael. See you tomorrow," Kurt called after him.

He stood in the middle of the room for a few seconds longer, glancing around to make sure there was nothing else he needed to do besides put the candles away, before heading back down the hall to the bedroom. After closing the door behind him, he made his way over to the bed and sat down on the edge, about to slip under the covers, but one look at Blaine sleeping peacefully made him stop and stare for a little bit.

Blaine was out cold, breathing slowly and deeply, and his face was so beautifully serene that Kurt lost his breath for a second. This was the man who had sacrificed so much just to save him, and in a few months,

Kurt was actually going to marry him. It was so hard to believe that just a year ago, the two of them were the best of friends, and here they were getting ready to spend the rest of their lives together as husband and husband.

Thinking about that gave Kurt an idea. He quietly stood up and left the bedroom, pacing quickly down the hall to the study. After taking a seat in Blaine's large, comfortable office chair, he picked up a pen and turned to the first clean sheet of paper in a nearby notebook and began to write.

He wrote for a long time, going on to fill up several sheets of paper, and there were tears streaming down his face as he signed his first name at the bottom of the final page. After reading through the whole thing one more time, he tore the pages he'd written on out of the notebook, folded them, and stuffed them in an appropriately sized envelope. He sealed the envelope, wrote *Blaine Hummel-Anderson* on the front, and turned out the light before standing up and heading back to the bedroom.

He hid the envelope at the back of one of his dresser drawers and stripped off his bathrobe before crawling into bed beside his still-sleeping husband-to-be. Blaine stirred a little bit and snuggled closer to Kurt, but didn't wake up. Kurt thought that was pretty much the cutest thing ever, so he tightened his arms and brought Blaine even closer against his chest. He brushed Blaine's unruly curls back and placed a tender, lingering kiss right in the center of his forehead.

"Two months and four days," he whispered. "I love you so much, Blaine."

It felt like it was going to be the longest two months and four days of his life, but he knew their wedding day would arrive in the blink of an eye.

xxx

Later in the week, Michael had put himself on a mission. Valentine's Day was rapidly approaching, and it was the first time he'd actually have a boyfriend with whom he could celebrate. He wanted to do something special for Jake, and he had the perfect idea of just what that something special could be.

One relatively quiet evening when he'd finished his homework, he wandered out to the kitchen and pulled Liz Hummel's old, timeworn cookbook off the shelf above the stove where his dad kept it. Despite the fact that one of his adoptive grandmothers had died years before he'd been born, he knew she must have been a damn good cook. Every once in a while his dad would cook one of the recipes from this very book, and

Michael had yet to taste something he didn't like. He knew there had to be something in here he could make for Jake, and sure enough, there was – within just a few seconds of flipping through the book, he came across a cookie recipe that looked perfect. For as long as he'd known Jake, he'd been well aware of the fact that his boyfriend had the world's biggest sweet tooth, so this would be perfect. He bit back a smile as he moved the cookbook over to the island in the center of the kitchen, keeping it open to the page with the recipe, and began pulling all the ingredients he would need out of the refrigerator and cabinets.

He'd just preheated the oven and was about to glance at the recipe to see what he needed to start mixing together, when Ellie wandered out into the kitchen and pulled the refrigerator open. She gave Michael a curious look as she took a juice box out and closed the door.

"Hi, Michael," she said as she unwrapped the plastic straw and stuck it through the top of the box. "Why do you have Grandma Liz's cookbook out?"

"I'm making cookies for Jake for Valentine's Day," he told her. "Wanna help me out?"

Ellie seemed to like this idea, judging from the excited smile that brightened her face and the way she quickly abandoned her juice box on the counter. She stood on her tiptoes in order to see better as she peered at the cookbook and began reading through the steps of the recipe.

"We need a stick of butter and one cup of sugar," she announced after looking over the recipe for a few seconds. After noticing that Michael already had taken the butter out of the fridge and had it sitting on the counter, she picked up the stick and began unwrapping it before she stopped and looked at him. "Can I put this in?"

"I think we should put it in the microwave first, just to get it soft. It'll be easier to mix that way," he explained. "I can do that, so how about you measure out one cup of sugar and put it in there?"

"Okay!" Ellie seemed perfectly content to help in any way she could. While Michael unwrapped the stick of butter and placed it in a dish so he could microwave it for a couple seconds, Ellie found the one-cup measuring cup and filled it with sugar before dumping it into the bowl.

"You should cut these in the shape of hearts for Valentine's Day," she suggested. "Daddy has some cookie cutters in the cabinet by the fridge and I think there's a heart one in there."

"That's a great idea," Michael told her with a smile. "I can't believe I didn't think of that. Thanks."

He dumped the softened butter into the bowl and glanced at the recipe to see what they needed to add next. "Two large eggs. You ever cracked an egg before?"

Ellie shook her head as Michael took two eggs out of the carton, so he continued. "Wanna learn how?" It took a couple tries for her to get one of the eggs perfectly cracked, with no shell in the yolk, but eventually she managed to do it. Michael was quickly growing to love his new role as a big brother, especially to a little girl like Ellie. There was just something about her that was so utterly charming and Michael couldn't think of anyone else he'd rather call his sister. For the rest of the time that they spent making the cookies, he couldn't help but notice that this was what having a sibling and being part of a family was supposed to feel like.

He let her press the heart-shaped cookie cutter into the flattened-out dough while he started to wash the bowl and measuring devices they'd used. By the time he was done, she had already started carefully arranging the cut-out cookies onto the two cookie trays he'd already prepared, so he dried his hands on a paper towel and helped her place the rest of the cookies.

Once the cookies were in the oven, they both turned to look at the small pile of leftover dough that remained on the floury counter. There wasn't much left – they would *maybe* be able to get two or three more cookies out of it, but that wouldn't even be worth it. Michael and Ellie glanced at each other, then glanced at the dough, and it was only a matter of seconds before they were devouring it with mischievous smirks on both of their faces.

"God, we're probably gonna get sick from that," Michael lamented once the last of the dough was gone. "And it'll totally be worth it."

"Daddy let me have a little bit of the dough last time I helped him make cookies," Ellie told him. "I didn't get sick that time."

"If you say so," Michael said warily before giving her a gracious smile. "Thanks so much for helping me out. If you want, you can help me frost them once they're out of the oven and cooled down."

"Okay!" She began sauntering out of the kitchen. "I'm gonna play on the computer til then."

Once she was gone, Michael got out the multi-surface cleaner from under the sink and began wiping down the counter to clean up the flour that he'd sprinkled to prevent the dough from sticking, smiling to himself

the whole time. This was one of those moments when he realized just how lucky he was to be in the position he was in now. Just a year ago, he never would have been able to imagine being out, having a boyfriend, and living with a family who truly loved him.

Come to think of it, not one person in the Hummel-Anderson household would have been able to imagine their lives turning out like this just one short year ago. And now, with the wedding coming up that would officially legitimize their family, not a single one of them would have had it any other way.

Chapter Thirty-Six

Kurt was packing. Or trying to, anyway. He knew he didn't need much – just an old t-shirt and pajama pants to wear to bed that night; his toothbrush and other toiletries; and his tuxedo for the big day tomorrow, of course. Still, though, it was taking him an unnecessarily long time to get all his things together, and he knew it. He thought that his reluctance to pack up the things he would need for that night and the next day might have something to do with the fact that tonight was his last night as Kurt Hummel. Tomorrow, he would be a married man with a husband and a new part to his last name. He was beyond thrilled to be marrying Blaine, but suddenly it seemed the reality that his *wedding* was tomorrow had come out of nowhere and slapped him in the face.

"Have you heard from your dad and Carole yet?"

Kurt practically jumped out of his skin at the sudden, unexpected sound of Blaine's voice that suddenly filled the silent room. His hand flew to his chest over his heart as he whirled around to see his soon-to-be-husband standing in the doorway of their bedroom.

He exhaled deeply. "Oh my god, Blaine, you scared the crap out of me."

"Sorry," Blaine told him with a sheepish smile as he stepped into the room, closing the door behind him. "Though I'm not gonna lie, you're cute when you're all startled like that."

"Shut up." Kurt playfully stuck his tongue out as Blaine perched on the edge of the bed next to the small duffel bag into which Kurt was putting his things. "And no, I haven't. I think they should be here shortly, though."

It was the eve of their wedding, and in order to avoid seeing each other at all before the ceremony the next day, Kurt had opted to share a hotel room with his father and Carole for the night while Blaine stayed at the apartment with Michael and Ellie. Kurt and Blaine had been spending as much time together as possible over the past week, and that morning, before getting out of bed and going to work, they'd made love for the last time as a non-married couple. Blaine gazed thoughtfully at Kurt as he ducked into the bathroom to grab his toothbrush and a few bottles of hair product and realized that this was the last time he'd see him before they were married.

Kurt glanced at Blaine out of the corner of his eye as he finished putting his things into the bag and zipped it up.

"You look like you have something you want to say," he observed, moving to stand in front of Blaine and reaching forward to rub his shoulders. "What's on your mind?"

"Mmmm, nothing. Don't worry about it." Blaine had the tiniest smile on his face as he wrapped his arms around Kurt's waist and pulled him forward over him, so that Kurt was kneeling on the bed and straddling his lap. "Just that you'll be my husband by this time tomorrow."

Kurt smiled softly. "And you'll be mine," he whispered, kissing Blaine gently on the forehead and running his fingers lovingly through his dark curls. "God, would you have ever imagined that our lives would turn out like this?"

"Not for a second," Blaine admitted. He reached up and carefully took Kurt's face between both of his hands, knowing full well that he was quite literally holding the rest of his life. "But I wouldn't have it any other way."

Their lips met, and they kissed deeply and slowly. Time could have stopped and neither man would have noticed or cared. It felt as if they were the only two left in the world as their lips moved softly together in a passionate caress, and they only broke away when it was completely necessary that they stop and take a breath.

They shared a lingering smile for a second, then, when both of them had managed to catch their breath, they kissed again. Both of them had so much to say, so much that they wanted to tell the other on this poignant night before they were married, but neither could find adequate words. As it turned out, they didn't need to speak at all. Smiles and kisses were all they needed to communicate the significance of their feelings on this special evening.

After what seemed like a wonderful eternity, they were interrupted by a sudden knock and broke the kiss with a wet smack of their lips just in time to hear Ellie's muffled voice calling through the closed door.

"Daddy! Grandma and Grandpa are here!"

"I'll be right there!" Kurt called back to her before returning his attention to Blaine and speaking more softly. "I guess we should go greet my parents and your soon-to-be in-laws, huh?"

He moved off of Blaine and stood up to head over to the door, but he didn't get very far before Blaine called after him. "Wait."

Kurt stopped and was about to turn around, but before he could ask what Blaine wanted, he was startled when a pair of all-too-familiar hands suddenly grabbed his ass and gave it a firm squeeze. He bit back a yelp and whirled around only to see Blaine standing there looking rather proud of himself.

"I had to," Blaine informed him. "One more time before we get married."

Two could play at that game. Kurt licked his lips and smirked as he stepped closer to Blaine. "Well, while we're at it..."

He plunged his hand down the front of Blaine's pants and stroked him briefly for a second, just enough to tease. Blaine gave a soft groan of disappointment when Kurt withdrew his hand and crossed his arms over his chest.

"Last time before we get married," he explained coolly when Blaine scowled at him.

"Now I see what I've started," Blaine admitted. Then, without warning, he pulled Kurt into a sudden, fierce kiss while simultaneously trying to undo the button and zipper of the other man's jeans. Kurt let Blaine kiss him for a few seconds before breaking abruptly away and quickly zipping his pants back up as he felt his face turning warm with a blush.

"Blaine, *no*," he giggled when Blaine immediately tried to kiss him again. He stepped deftly away and grabbed the duffel and the garment bag that contained his tux before heading over to the door. "I don't want to keep my dad and Carole waiting any—"

He pulled the bedroom door open, only to have a horrified expression of shock take over his face when he saw that not only his father and Carole, but Michael and Ellie as well, were all waiting on the other side. Kurt knew and Blaine knew that nothing *too* risqué had happened between them just now, but that's not what everyone else was going to think as the two of them emerged from the bedroom, where they'd been alone with the door closed.

"Oh. Uh, hey." Blaine greeted them with an awkward little wave, then started gesturing vaguely with his hands as he scrambled to explain. "I was, um, I was helping Kurt..."

"He was helping me pack," Kurt finished quickly, jumping in to save Blaine as he stammered through his explanation, and Blaine nodded as if to confirm that this was exactly what had been happening.

"I'm sure that's exactly what was happening," Burt deadpanned, and Kurt could have sworn his face was burning with an even deeper blush (if that were possible). "Michael and Ellie let us in. We were just coming to see if you needed any help getting your stuff together."

Kurt shrugged and lifted up the duffel and garment bag he was holding. "Thanks anyway, but this is pretty much it."

"All right, so you're good to go," Carole said. "Kurt, are you ready to leave? Would you two like a few minutes alone to say goodbye?"

"C'mon, Carole, what do you think they were doing in their room just now?" Burt shot back sarcastically. "Oh, wait, sorry. They were 'packing.'"

Blaine tried not to laugh, knowing he'd get an evil eye from Kurt, and instead pretended to look reluctant.

"I *guess* you two can have him," he told Burt and Carole with false uneasiness in his voice before breaking into a smile. "I'll just have to live through tonight by knowing that the next time I see you, we'll be getting married."

"Definitely," Kurt agreed. He inhaled deeply, let it out slowly, and stepped closer to give Blaine a hug. "I love you so much."

"I love you so much more," Blaine countered with a proud little smirk.

"Oh, stop it, I don't have time to argue," Kurt protested with faux exasperation in his voice. "Especially not with someone whose *job* it is to argue with people. You have an unfair advantage."

He was smiling once again as he gave Blaine a quick but tender kiss on the lips. "I'll see you tomorrow."

"I'll meet you at the altar," Blaine promised him before turning to acknowledge his almost-father and mother-in-law. "Take care of my boy tonight."

"He was my boy first," Burt reminded him, laughing as he pulled Blaine into a hug. "But I couldn't ask for anyone better for him to spend the rest of his life with."

Kurt, meanwhile, was hugging Michael and giving Ellie a kiss on the top of her head and wishing them both a good night. He gave Blaine one last lingering kiss and they shared one more set of *I love you's* before the future Mr. Kurt Hummel-Anderson was out the door and gone.

Blaine stood there for a long time, deep in thought, even after they left. Reality was quickly catching up to him – by this time tomorrow, he would be *married*. To *Kurt*. He thought of the last glimpse he'd caught of Kurt before he'd disappeared out the door with his father and Carole: eyes sparkling with excitement, beautiful lips spread wide in a smile, platinum engagement ring glistening on his left hand. Tomorrow, that ring would be replaced with another, as would Blaine's. He had obviously been well aware for months that this was inevitably going to happen, that his wedding day was actually going to arrive, but now everything was catching up to him all at once and it was difficult not to be overwhelmed.

"Hey, you okay?"

It was Michael. Blaine wasn't sure where Ellie had gone – probably to her room to admire her flower girl dress; she'd been in awe of it all day. He nodded and sniffed back a sob that he hadn't realized he'd been restraining as he answered his son.

"I'm fine. It's just...it's just all catching up with me now," Blaine admitted, reaching up to wipe a single lonely tear off his face. "I've been dreaming of marrying him for so long, and now it's actually going to happen in less than twenty-four hours. Sorry for getting all weepy, but I'm only going to be crying even more tomorrow." He smiled through a few more tears that had trickled down his face.

"You don't have to be sorry," Michael told him. "I mean...you obviously love him a lot."

Blaine nodded as he thought of Kurt's smile, Kurt's eyes, Kurt's voice, Kurt's heart and the unbelievable amount of love it contained.

"He is everything," Blaine said simply, sniffing back another sob.

He was silent for a moment before continuing. "Look, Michael, I know you're only fourteen and you've got your whole life ahead of you, but I'll just tell you this right now. When you find that one amazing, beautiful boy who you love with everything that you have, and who you know that you want to spend every single

second of the rest of your life with...there's nothing like it. There's nothing like loving someone so completely and knowing that you're just as loved by him in return. It's the best feeling in the world."

"I'll take your word for it until it happens to me," Michael told him. His voice was slower, more hesitant as he continued. "But...until that happens, I'm glad I've got two people to look up to who can set a really good example of what it means to love someone."

"I can promise you right now that Kurt and I will always be here to set that example for you," Blaine assured him. And in his heart, he knew it was true. He was beyond proud of the love that he and Kurt shared, and he was thrilled to know that their love could inspire people, starting with their own son.

And tomorrow, he thought happily, that love would be legally and officially legitimized on what was going to be the most beautiful day of his life.

xxx

Blaine couldn't sleep that night. He was pretty sure it was just a side effect of the cold feet syndrome, but knowing the cause of his insomnia didn't make it any easier to deal with. He also thought it might have something to do with the fact that Kurt wasn't there to share their bed that night. For whatever reason, Blaine concluded, he never seemed to sleep as well on the off chance that Kurt wasn't snuggled up against him.

He lay there for a long time with his eyes wide open before giving up the notion of sleep for the time being and pushing the covers aside. He stood up and stepped into his slippers, making a point not to look at the glowing numbers on the alarm clock next to his bed – the last thing he wanted to do was know what time it was and thus be able to figure out how much sleep he wasn't getting. Seeing as it was early April in Chicago and currently nighttime, he knew it would be cold, so he quickly pulled a hoodie over his head before padding across the bedroom and pulling open the balcony doors.

The nighttime air was quiet when he stepped out onto the balcony – it always was; the noise from the city was all but impossible to hear on this side of the building that faced over Lake Michigan. At this time of night, the only noise he could hear, other than the sound of the waves kissing the shore, was the occasional car passing by below on Lake Shore Drive. Blaine leaned against the railing and stared out over the peaceful water. He thought about how this was the place where he and Kurt had shared their first *real* kiss and confessed their love to each other. The memory of that night – that kiss – seemed like it had been

forever ago, but at the same time, Blaine recalled it like it had been just yesterday. He remembered how beautiful Kurt had looked under the moonlight and how soft and pliant his lips had been when Blaine kissed them – *really* kissed them – for the first time. They'd both been so vulnerable, and yet each of them had bared his heart and soul so completely to the other right here on this same balcony.

He stood there deep in thought for a while, listening to the faint sounds of the waves gently lapping up onto the shore, when a slight sudden breeze floated through the air and he realized just how chilly it really was. That was probably a sign that he should head back inside and really try and get some sleep. After taking one last glimpse at the tranquil lake, he stepped back into the warm bedroom and slid the balcony door shut behind him.

He was about to pull his hoodie off and crawl back into bed, but something stopped him. He glanced down at what he was wearing and realized that the sweatshirt he'd blindly grabbed out of the dresser wasn't even his – it was Kurt's. Blaine couldn't believe he hadn't realized that sooner. It even smelled like Kurt.

Blaine smiled to himself as he got back into bed, still wearing the sweatshirt, and pulled the covers up around himself. Wearing Kurt's hoodie to bed wasn't the same as sleeping in his arms, and Blaine knew that, but it was an acceptable alternative. He was still smiling as he closed his eyes and slowly drifted into unconsciousness. This time, sleep came much easier.

xxx

"Where's Kurt? Is he up yet?"

The question, posed by Carole to her husband as he stepped up beside her at the small hotel room bathroom sink, was a good one. The two of them had already been up for the better part of an hour, running the shower water and using the hair dryer and turning on the TV to a low volume and generally making quite a bit of noise. Kurt, though, was still fast asleep in one of their room's two queen beds, next to the one Burt and Carole had shared.

"Surprisingly, no," Burt told her as he picked up his toothbrush and squirted a turquoise blob of minty fresh Crest onto it. "Should we get him up, or give him a few more minutes to sleep? It's already after nine."

"Let him sleep in for a few more minutes," Carole, who was curling her hair, suggested. "We don't have to be there til twelve thirty."

To anyone else, it would have seemed that they still had a decent amount of time, but Burt knew his son. He was well aware of the fact that Kurt liked to take his time getting ready for important events, so he could only imagine how long it would take the kid to get ready for his *wedding*. After he finished brushing his teeth, he stepped out of the bathroom and headed over to wake Kurt up – but before he could do that, he took one look at his son sleeping peacefully and stopped in his tracks.

When Burt looked at Kurt, he couldn't see the handsome young man who would be getting married later that afternoon. Instead, he saw the precious, lively little boy who, in a typical day, would go from helping Burt fix cars at the shop to parading around the house in his mother's best heels when he got home. He saw the little boy who took great pride in telling everyone that he'd been named after Kurt von Trapp from *The Sound of Music* (Liz's favorite movie) and who could often be heard singing "Do-Re-Mi," at the top of his lungs in the shower. Burt knew that Kurt had grown up into a wonderful man, but as he slept serenely on the morning of his wedding day, he suddenly looked so young. Burt wondered for a moment where the time had gone.

Carole, apparently having sensed that something was the matter, set her curling iron down on the sink and stepped out of the bathroom. "Is everything okay?"

"It's fine," Burt told her, not taking his eyes off of his still-sleeping son. "I guess I just realized that my little boy is all grown up."

Carole smiled tenderly and curled an arm around Burt's waist. "He'll always be your little boy. Just because he's going to be someone's husband by the end of the day doesn't change that."

She stepped forward and placed a motherly hand on Kurt's shoulder, speaking softly but loud enough so that he would (hopefully) wake up.

"Kurt, honey, wake up. It's your big day."

Kurt's eyes slowly lifted open. When he spoke, his voice was small and he sounded just as young as he looked. "It's today?"

"It's today," Burt told him. "Let's get a move on, kid. You're getting married in a couple hours."

That certainly seemed to do the trick. Within seconds, Kurt was up and out of bed with a giddy smile on his face. Burt knew that Kurt had always been happy with Blaine, but this was a whole new kind of happiness even for him. This was the happiness that came with knowing that Kurt was officially going to be able to call Blaine *his* for the rest of his life.

Kurt, meanwhile, thought that he was doing a pretty good job at remaining calm, cool and collected as he began getting ready for the day. He was completely unaware of the involuntary smile that had grown across his face the second he'd gotten out of bed; it was this smile that was giving him away.

And it only grew wider after he turned on his phone and read a simple but sweet text from his husband-to-be:

Good morning, Kurt Hummel-Anderson. :)

Kurt felt like a lovesick teenager as he quickly texted Blaine back. It was amazing how even a few words on a screen from the love of his life could unleash a flurry of butterflies in his stomach.

Well hello there, Blaine Hummel-Anderson ;) ready to do this thing?

He abandoned his phone on the nightstand for a few minutes while he took a shower and changed into his tux. He stepped out of the bathroom only to be greeted with a hug and a clap on the back from his dad, and a gushing multitude of you-look-so-handsome proclamations from Carole. His final look was nowhere near complete – he still had to do his hair, after all, and *that* was going to take quite a bit of time – but he slapped a sincere smile on his face because it was honestly hard to be anything but genuinely happy.

Before he finished getting ready, though, he needed to see if Blaine had written back to him yet. Sure enough, he had.

You mean this whole getting-married-and-being-your-husband thing? Absolutely.

The message, and the little less-than-three heart he'd added to the end of it, was enough to make Kurt melt. He couldn't even describe what he was starting to feel. Part of him was nervous and almost wanted to throw up, but the other part was thrilled beyond belief and just wanted to get to the park so the wedding could start already. Together, strangely enough, the two sensations made for the most incredible feeling in the world. They meant that he was starting on the path to the rest of his life with Blaine today, and he couldn't wait to get there.

xxx

Once both sides of the Hummel-Anderson equation had reached the venue, a whole new emotion was thrown into their mutual mixture of nervous excitement, and that was the unmistakable sensation of being overwhelmed. There was so much rushing around being done behind the scenes before the ceremony started. The closest family members of both men were everywhere. Blaine's parents came over to see Kurt and give him enthusiastic hugs, and Burt and Carole did the same for Blaine. Michael and Ellie, both of whom were in the ceremony, came over to spend some time with each of them individually and take some pre-wedding pictures while they were there. Blaine and Kurt, of course, didn't see each other at all. But that didn't mean that they weren't thinking about each other. Throughout the whole afternoon before the ceremony began, each of them had the other right at the front of his mind.

"He's nervous, he was the first to admit that," Burt told his son after returning from a brief visit with Blaine somewhere on the other side of the park. Kurt was pacing nervously around the rather spacious portable tent that had been set up to give him and his family privacy as they finished getting ready. He had immediately asked his father how Blaine was doing the second Burt had returned.

Burt was smiling as he continued recapping his conversation with Blaine to his son. "But he's *so* happy. God, you should have seen him. He couldn't be more excited to marry you. He was just chatting away, going on and on about how thrilled he was. I didn't think he was ever gonna shut up."

Kurt smiled sweetly. "He tends to ramble when he's excited. I think it's adorable," he told his father. "How does he look?"

"Very handsome," Burt confirmed. "Like someone I would be proud to call my son-in-law."

Kurt exhaled a wistful sigh. "God, I can't wait to see him."

He took a few cautious steps across the tent and stared at his reflection in the full-size mirror that had been set up there. The man staring back at him was a person Kurt never thought he'd be: a groom on his wedding day, about to marry the love of his life. When Kurt had been growing up, he'd never even dreamed that he would someday be able to get married. Thankfully, though, society had done some growing up of its own along the way, and now here he was.

Burt stepped up behind him and placed a hand on his shoulder. Kurt met his father's eyes through their reflection in the mirror and realized that he had never looked more proud.

"This is your moment, kid," Burt told him confidently. "Twenty-seven years in the making."

"Almost twenty-eight," Kurt joked in an effort to ease his own nerves. He was pleased when Burt chuckled a little bit. "My birthday's next month."

"Oh, well...twenty-seven, twenty-eight, it's not too much of a difference," Burt said casually. "What matters is that you did it. You've overcome so much shit in your life, Kurt. And now here you are. I'm proud of you, son."

Kurt watched something else come over Burt's face in the mirror as he hesitated for a moment.

"And I know your mom would be, too," he finished after a few silent seconds.

"I wish she were here," Kurt whispered without thinking.

Suddenly Burt stepped aside and reached into the pocket of his tuxedo jacket. He pulled out a small box and handed it to his son.

"She is here," he explained, "in spirit. These are for you."

Kurt opened the box and drew back a quiet gasp when he saw what it contained. Sitting inside was a pair of shimmering diamond cufflinks. But it wasn't the fact that they were made out of the most precious stone on earth that caused him to lose his breath – it was the knowledge that he'd seen these somewhere before.

"I had them made out of your mother's favorite pair of diamond earrings," Burt explained, and suddenly it all made sense to Kurt why they looked so familiar. "They were the earrings she wore on *our* wedding day. I thought it might be nice if you could have a little piece of her with you here today."

"Dad...," Kurt whispered brokenly. He could feel wet tears on his face, but he wasn't completely aware of the fact that he was crying. He wasn't exactly sure what was happening to his heart; all he knew was that this was the absolute best wedding gift he could have asked for.

He turned to Burt with a teary smile. "Thank you so much."

"You're welcome," Burt said humbly. He pulled Kurt into a hug before letting go so his son could attach the cufflinks to his sleeves with trembling fingers. He had one more thing that he needed to give to Kurt, and this last item just might have been the most important thing Kurt would ever see.

Without saying a word, he pulled his wallet out of his pocket and took out a folded-up business-size envelope. When his father handed it to him, Kurt almost burst into tears yet again when he saw to whom it was addressed. There, on the front of the envelope, his first name was written in the same flowing cursive-print combination that he'd grown so familiar with reading back in elementary school. It had been so long since he'd seen that handwriting, and he knew it could only mean one thing.

"This letter was given to me nineteen years ago," Burt told him. "All I was told was that I was supposed to give it to you on your wedding day. So...here you are."

Kurt stood there for a moment, completely frozen in time as he looked at the front of the envelope. He never thought he'd love the sight of his own name so much, but there it was, sealed with nineteen-year-old ink in *her* penmanship.

He couldn't read it. Not yet. He had a letter of his own to deliver. It was sitting on his makeshift dressing table, the front of the envelope graced with Blaine's soon-to-be married name in Kurt's own handwriting. But before he could reach for it and hand it to his father with instructions to please take it to Blaine, there was a sudden voice from outside his tent.

"Hello, Kurt? May I come in?"

It was Lisa Anderson. Just the person he needed, actually. Burt stepped over to pull the entrance curtain aside and let her in, then he stepped out into the bright sunlight to give his son some privacy.

"Oh, my goodness, Kurt!" Lisa exclaimed the second she laid eyes on him. "You look so handsome. Blaine's going to cry when he sees you."

"Thank you," he told her sincerely as he gave her a hug. He smiled at her as he pulled back. "And I'm actually really glad you showed up here right now. I need you to give something to my husband."

He reached over and grabbed the envelope containing the letter he'd written off the dressing table. Lisa accepted it graciously, and Kurt could have sworn he saw her smiling a bit when she noticed the way he'd written *Blaine Hummel-Anderson* across the front.

As he handed her the letter for Blaine, he was suddenly made hyperaware of the letter *he'd* received just a few minutes ago. The paper envelope was practically clinging to his sweaty palm, and he wasn't exactly sure what compelled him to say what he said next; he just knew that for some reason, it seemed right.

"And, um, please bring him over here so he can read it. I know we're trying not to see each other, but maybe he could stand right outside and I'll be in here. I, um...I just want to know he's close."

"Okay." Lisa nodded before glancing at the envelope in Kurt's hand. "You have a letter, too?"

"My dad just gave this to me a few minutes ago," he explained. "My mom wrote it for me before she died. I...I know this might sound weird, but I truly believe that she was the one who brought Blaine into my life. It would mean a lot if I could have him near me while I read what she wrote."

He was looking at the ground by the time he finished, completely unable to meet his eyes as a blush colored his face. He knew that what he'd said – what he'd been feeling all this time – was true, but it sounded ridiculous when he said it out loud.

Lisa, thankfully, didn't seem to think there was anything strange about what he'd just said. In fact, his words had the opposite effect on her. She looked at her almost-son-in-law for a second before stepping forward and wrapping him up in a hug.

"Kurt, just from what I've heard you and your father say, I know your mother was a wonderful woman. And she certainly raised a wonderful son," she told him soothingly without letting him go. He was significantly taller than her, so her words were partially muffled by his shoulder. "I think she definitely had something to do with bringing the two of you together, that's for sure."

She smiled at him and held up the envelope as she finally pulled away. "I'm going to go give this to Blaine and I'll bring him right back here, okay?"

"Okay," Kurt said. He gave her a tiny smile of his own. "Thanks so much, Lisa."

"It's not a problem," she said before pulling back the curtain to exit the tent. "I'll be right back with your husband."

xxx

Posing for wedding pictures was easy. Blaine didn't even have to try to smile – not when he was already so ridiculously happy about the fact that he was going to marry Kurt. He'd started smiling the moment he woke up and hadn't stopped yet.

Savannah, who had been an obvious choice for their wedding photographer, was just as happy as he was, though in her case it was due to the fact that her job today was so easy (okay, and maybe it was also because two of her best friends were getting married today as well). She hardly had to give any directions to Blaine as he posed for a few pre-ceremony shots with Ellie and Michael. The three of them were all so genuinely happy to be there. Their smiles were as natural as they come, and before long she wasn't even saying a word to them as she snapped picture after picture.

They were posing for some shots in a less-crowded area of the park when Blaine caught sight of his mother approaching. Even from a distance, he could tell that she had something important to say. He pointed her out to Savannah during a quick break in between photos and asked if he could excuse himself from the pictures for a few minutes while he talked to his mom and figured out what was going on.

Savannah, always understanding, waved him on. "Go ahead. I think I've got all the shots I need of you three, anyway. These are coming out really nice."

He thanked her with an appreciative smile before heading over to where his mom was standing, a few yards out of the way. "Hey, Mom, what's going on?"

She could hardly keep a smile off her face as she responded. "I just went over to see Kurt."

A huge grin instinctively spread across Blaine's face, which was what usually happened whenever someone mentioned Kurt. "Oh my god, how is he? How does he look?"

"He's doing very well. He couldn't stop smiling. I could tell just from looking at him that this is the happiest day of his life," Lisa told him. "And...oh, Blaine, he looks divine. He's so handsome. Just wait until you see him."

Blaine's heart fluttered with anticipation as he tried to imagine how stunning Kurt must have looked, but he knew that his mental images wouldn't be able to do justice to the real thing.

Lisa wasn't finished yet. For the first time, he noticed that she was holding a long white envelope, which she promptly held out to him as he continued. "And he gave me this. He asked if I could please give it to his husband."

She smiled as Blaine accepted the letter with trembling hands. He was already weak in the knees just from seeing his married name written across the front in Kurt's cramped scrawl; he couldn't imagine how he was going to react when he actually read what was written inside. He'd be crying like a baby, there was no doubt about that.

"One more thing. He says he wants you to be close when you read it, so I'll show you where his little dressing area is and you can stand right outside," Lisa was saying. Blaine had been so stunned for a second that he hadn't even realized she was still talking.

"Oh, god, is he sure?" he asked warily in response. "I feel bad. I didn't write a letter for him."

"He's got a different one. Burt gave him a letter that his mom wrote for him before she passed away, so he's going to be reading that one."

Blaine needed to hear no more. "Let's go."

His mother linked her arm through Blaine's and walked him back to where Kurt was waiting. He had his own portable privacy shelter, similar to the one where Blaine had been getting ready before leaving to pose for pictures. For some reason, his heart started pounding as they approached. *My husband is in there.*

Blaine stopped right outside the entrance curtain but didn't pull it aside. He couldn't see Kurt at all, but he knew he was there; his presence on the other side of the fabric was so obvious to Blaine. Neither of them said a word and it was somehow understood that they weren't going to speak – not until they met at the altar.

"Kurt, your husband is here," Lisa called through the tent with a smile on her face. She gave Blaine's hand a squeeze, holding on for a second before leaving to give them privacy – well, as much privacy as was possible considering that they were separated from one another by a sheet of fabric.

Blaine heard the distinct sound of paper being torn coming from the other side. Kurt was opening his envelope. Without wasting another second, Blaine immediately tore into his own.

xxx

Kurt knew he probably should have waited a few seconds longer, but he didn't. Rather than stop and take a few seconds to collect himself before reading the words that his mother had written for him almost two decades ago, he began tearing the envelope open without hesitation once he heard Lisa Anderson's voice. He couldn't see Blaine, but he could see his shadow, and the knowledge that his husband-to-be was so close did unimaginable things to his heart. His fingers tripped over each other as he fumbled to get the envelope open.

He was vaguely aware of the sound of Blaine starting to open his own envelope on the other side of the tent, but for the first time all day, Kurt wasn't thinking about the man he was about to marry. His heart was nineteen years in the past, and he was eight years old again.

Dear Kurt, the letter began,

Your dad will be the first to tell you that I've never been a good liar, so I won't even try to sugar coat anything. I'll just be blunt and say that I'm not going to be here much longer. You know that, your father knows that, and I know that. Dying this way, being in pain every minute of every day, is obviously not something that I would wish on anyone. I'm upset, but not because my life is ending – it's because yours is just beginning, and I know I won't be around to watch you live it.

You are such a wonderful, special boy and the greatest joy in my life is watching you grow. Even after eight years, you continue to surprise me and teach me something new every single day. Whether you're fixing cars with Daddy at the shop or helping me bake your favorite peanut butter brownies, you put your entire little heart into everything that you do, and you do it all with that beautiful smile of yours that can light up an entire room. I never want you to lose your infectious joy and love for life, and something tells me that you won't.

But with all this being said, I think one of the things I love the most about you is the way you care so intensely for other people. Even at eight years old, you are already one of the sweetest, kindest, and most compassionate people I've ever met. You are truly a good person through and through, and I know there is

not a single mean bone in your body. You love with everything that you have, and I am so proud to be your mom.

I know that when the time comes, you're going to meet someone extraordinary and you'll want to share all your love with that person for the rest of your life. And this kind of brings me to the real point of my writing this letter. Your wedding day is going to be one of the biggest – if not THE biggest – days of your life, and odds are that I won't be around to see it. But there are some things I feel I need to say to you before you make that crucial, life-changing trip down the aisle years from now, which is why I'm writing this and asking Daddy to give it to you on your special day.

A few weeks ago on a boring, rainy day, you and I were watching some mindless romantic comedy which ended with the two main characters getting married in a big, extravagant wedding ceremony. As the happy couple was walking back down the aisle together after sealing the deal, I made some casual comment along the lines of, "Doesn't she (the bride in the movie) look pretty?" and you shook your head. You pointed to the groom and said, "HE'S pretty." You told me that when you get married, you wanted there to be another groom instead of a bride, and then you asked me if that was "allowed to happen." (After all, most kids your age have only seen weddings with a bride and a groom.) I told you that hopefully, by the time you were old enough to get married, you'd be allowed to marry whoever you wanted, whether it was a boy or a girl.

We ended up having a very interesting conversation that afternoon. You told me about the time that your friends dared you to kiss a girl at recess, and you didn't want to do it because you would rather kiss a boy instead. And, of course, you were completely adamant that there were going to be two grooms at your wedding and that you would be one of them.

I obviously don't know what's going to happen by the time you read this on your wedding day. Maybe you're getting ready to marry your handsome groom like the eight-year-old version of you wanted. Or maybe you're standing there rolling your eyes as you read this and thinking, "God, Mom, this is embarrassing. I'm about to marry the most beautiful girl in the world." Either way, I want you to know that I will always love and support you even after I'm not with you here on earth anymore. You have so much love to give, Kurt, and I know that you're going to make some lucky boy or girl very, very happy someday. The way you love so completely inspires me every day, and I know that when the time comes, your passion and love for that one special person will turn into something incredible.

All right, this is getting long and you're probably anxious to go get hitched, so I'll wrap things up by reminding you once again how much I love you and how special you are. At a time when there is so much

darkness in my life, you are my constant little light. Even though I'm not there as you read this, I just know that you've grown up into an incredible young man. I will always be proud of you and I will love you forever.

*Love,
Mom*

xxx

Less than a foot away, on the other side of the curtain, Blaine was reading a letter of his own.

Dear Blaine,

I'm going to try my best to keep this short, but I know that's probably not going to happen. At the time I'm writing this, we still have a little bit more than two months to go until we can officially be husband and husband. Today is your birthday, and I think it's safe to say that I pretty much just rocked your world (although I'll let you be the judge of that). I was watching you sleep, and I was so overwhelmed with emotion and the love I feel for you that I knew I had to try to get these feelings down on paper somehow. It seems like an impossible task considering just how much I love you and how much you mean to me, but I'm going to try my best. Here goes nothing.

I still find it impossible to believe that the stunningly gorgeous boy I met at Dalton Academy all those years ago is actually going to be my husband here in just a couple of months. When I woke up that morning, I had absolutely no idea – no way of knowing that I'd be meeting the love of my life that day. But my life changed forever when you turned around on those stairs. And as frustrated as I was with myself over the course of the past decade, I'm almost glad that I waited for so long to confess my true feelings for you. Our friendship had been growing beautifully for ten years and, since we both knew how we felt, declaring our love just seemed like a natural step to take. I'm glad we didn't rush things, because it made everything that much sweeter, knowing that we'd both been waiting SO long for this to happen between us.

As cliché as it sounds, today I can proudly say that I am marrying my very best friend in the entire world. We've already been sharing our lives together for so many years and I think it's safe to say that sometimes it seems like you know me even better than I know myself. You have truly been there for me through everything, from my most triumphant successes to the scariest and darkest days of my life. At times like that, when I thought that I wasn't going to make it, you were the one helping me through the darkness. You have changed

my life for the better in more ways than I can count, and I love you more than I will ever be able to completely express in words.

Today I will pledge my everlasting love for you, but before everything gets set in stone, I want to take this final opportunity to say thank you. Thank you for always being my constant inspiration. Thank you for loving me more than I deserve. Thank you for standing by me through thick and thin for all these years. Thank you for believing in me. You truly are the most beautiful person I've ever met, inside and out. I absolutely cannot wait until I can officially call you my husband.

With all the love in my heart,

Kurt

Blaine was in a lovestruck trance the entire time he'd been reading. He'd been so overcome with awe that when the words stopped at the end of the letter, it almost felt like a shock to his heart. It was an emotional start to what was sure to be a highly poignant ceremony. He knew things were only going to get more emotional from here, and he hadn't even seen his groom yet.

Speaking of Kurt, he must have been pretty moved by his own letter, because suddenly Blaine heard the unmistakable sound of him gasping back a sob from the other side of the curtain. The sudden noise shocked him back into reality, and suddenly Blaine wanted nothing more than to push the fabric aside so he could see his man. He wanted to hold Kurt in his arms and let him cry into his shoulder, not even caring when his tears inevitably soaked into the fabric of his expensive Armani tuxedo. He had no idea what words Liz Hummel had written nineteen years ago that were making her son break down in tears just minutes before he walked down the aisle, but he knew that this final communication from mother to son had to have touched Kurt's heart in a way he never could have imagined.

But something held him back, and he found that he couldn't pull back the curtain. They'd already made it this far without seeing each other, and he still wanted to savor the magic of that first look when they met at the end of the aisle. Still, he couldn't just let Kurt be completely alone with his tears. He knew he had to connect with him somehow to remind him that he was still here, so without hesitation he carefully slipped his hand around the curtain.

He didn't have to wait very long. Almost instantly, he felt the warmth of Kurt's hand closing around his own, holding onto Blaine's as if it were a lifeline. For the first time, Blaine realized that he was crying, too – and if the wet tracks that he felt on his cheeks were any indication, the tears had been flowing for quite a

while. Neither of them said a word as they held onto each other's hands, unable to see each other at all from the wrist up.

They held hands and cried for a few minutes until Blaine was interrupted by a sudden tap on his shoulder from behind. He somehow managed to hold his tongue and not say anything as he turned around only to find himself looking at the one and only Burt Hummel.

"Hate to interrupt, but I need to get ready to walk my son down the aisle so he can marry you," Burt told him with a smile. "Ten minutes til showtime."

Blaine gave Kurt's hand a long squeeze before he finally broke away. He turned to face Burt, gave his father-in-law a wordless hug, and headed back over to his family's area to find his own father.

xxx

The ceremony was about to start, and Kurt was the picture of calm, cool and collected. Burt didn't think he'd ever seen his son so put together. The members of the wedding party were making their way down the center aisle, and Kurt was watching him from his position next to his father at the top of their side aisle. Burt couldn't believe that he wasn't freaking out. Both times Burt had gotten married, he recalled, he'd been a nervous wreck.

Once the final pair of attendants had made its way down the main aisle, Kurt spoke up. "Dad?"

Burt turned to look at him. "Yeah?"

A new song began to play – this was *the* song. Instead of the traditional bridal march (since there wasn't a bride in this wedding, obviously), Kurt and Blaine had decided to use another pretty orchestral piece that they both liked to accompany their trip down the aisle. *This is it.*

"Thanks," Kurt said.

Burt was confused. "You're welcome...but for what?"

Kurt was looking straight down the aisle ahead as he responded. "Just...thanks."

They began to walk.

xxx

Blaine was surprised his knees weren't quivering as he took that first fateful step and began making his way down the aisle. His father was right there beside him the whole time, holding onto Blaine's arm as a reminder that he was there for support. It was clear that Bill Anderson had never expected that one day he'd be walking one of his sons down the aisle in order to give him away to another man, but Blaine had to give his father credit for how far he'd come. A year ago, he thought, this wouldn't be happening. His father wouldn't even be *at* this wedding, and neither would his mother, for that matter.

When Blaine caught his first glimpse of Kurt, walking down the aisle on the other side, he was so overwhelmed that he actually stopped walking for a full second. His hand flew to his heart as if he were trying to restrain it from pounding straight through his chest, and more tears started spilling out of his eyes. Kurt looked even more amazing than Blaine had expected. Thankfully, Kurt seemed just as happy to see Blaine, if the immense smile that instantaneously brightened his face when their eyes met for the first time said anything. His face was lit up with the most beautiful smile Blaine had ever seen him wear, which was saying a lot, and his eyes had a certain brand-new twinkle of excitement that Blaine had never seen before. Time seemed to stop for a moment as they shared tearful smiles across the aisle.

Suddenly the rest of the walk down the aisle seemed interminable to Blaine, even though in reality there were only a couple of yards to go. He tried his best to look ahead, but that was much more difficult than it should have been considering that he kept turning to look at Kurt every few steps. When they finally made it to the end, Bill took Blaine's hand and Burt took Kurt's, and together both fathers joined their sons' hands together. The second Blaine's hand was placed in Kurt's, he knew he was home.

Seeing Blaine up close was almost enough to knock Kurt off his feet. He couldn't break his gaze away from those warm, hazel eyes that looked so unbelievably happy to see him. If Kurt hadn't been smiling already, Blaine's infectious grin definitely would have put a smile on his face. In all the years they'd known each other, Blaine had never looked so completely perfect.

"Oh my god, Blaine," he whispered brokenly as Bill and Burt both turned away to take their seats in the front row. "You take my breath away."

Blaine shook his head in disbelief as they turned to face each other and took Kurt's other hand. "You are perfect. You are *perfect*."

They cast their attention toward the officiant, who was just about to formally begin the ceremony. This was it.

"Greetings, friends. On this beautiful afternoon, we are joyfully gathered together to celebrate the marriage of Kurt Hummel and Blaine Anderson."

Kurt glanced at Blaine out of the corner of his eye. Blaine's eyes were on the officiant, but it was clear that he knew Kurt was looking at him, because he appeared to be fighting back a smile.

"Kurt and Blaine, this is the crown jewel of a relationship that has spanned more than a decade, beginning with the time that you spent together as friends, and eventually developing into passionate, romantic love. On this day, I ask that each of you never forgets the things about the other that made you fall in love with him. All marriages go through trouble, but real marriages *get* through trouble. May you always seek the best in each other rather than the worst, may you never forget to retain the beautiful friendship that formed the foundation for this love, and may you always keep in mind just how truly and deeply you love each other."

Following the opening remarks were the readings. Each of them had picked out one poem that he felt reflected his love for the other. First up was Emily, who confidently wheeled herself up to the front to read Pablo Neruda's "Sonnet XVII," which had been chosen by Kurt as a profession of love to Blaine. Next, Cooper Anderson stepped up, shedding his goofy persona and becoming completely serious for once in his life as he read "The Bargain" by Sir Philip Sidney as a declaration from his brother to Kurt.

After that, things got real. Kurt soon realized he was trembling as soon as the officiant stepped back up to the front in order to lead them in saying the magic words.

"Gentlemen, please turn to face one another and hold both hands." They did as they were told. "Kurt, do you take Blaine to be your husband, constant friend, faithful partner and true love from this day forward? In the presence of your family and friends, do you offer your solemn vow to be a faithful partner in sickness and in health, in good times and in bad, and in joy as well as in sorrow. Do you promise to love him unconditionally, to support him in his goals, to honor and respect him, to laugh with him and cry with him, and to cherish him for as long as you both shall live?"

Kurt smiled and looked straight into Blaine's eyes. "I do."

If Blaine hadn't been holding on tight to Kurt's hands, he probably would have melted right then and there. He did his best to listen carefully as the same words were repeated to him, and he said, "I do," with more truth behind the two simple words than anything he'd said before in his life.

"You are now about to promise your everlasting love to each other through the vows you personally have written," the officiant said. "This time, we'll start with Blaine."

Blaine took a deep breath and closed his eyes for a second. When he opened them again, Kurt was looking right back at him with nothing but the purest love reflected in his own gaze. His inhibitions melted away, and he opened his mouth to speak with all the confidence in the world.

"Kurt," he declared, his voice like a caress as he said the name, "for the better part of a decade, you were nothing more than my very best and closest friend in the entire world. But I've known that I love you ever since that fateful day on the stairs at Dalton Academy. The moment I heard your voice for the first time, before I even knew your name, something inside me *knew*. You stole my heart that day and you've never given it back, and for that I'm thankful, because that act of theft is what has brought us here today to be married."

There was a lilt of laughter from the audience and even Kurt broke into a quiet giggle, which set Blaine's mind at ease even more as he continued.

"Every moment that I spend with you is like a wonderful dream. You are the light of my life and the beat of my heart. I love you with everything that I am, and more than anyone thought that it was possible for one person to love another. On this day, Kurt, I promise you that this love will be everlasting. I will cherish you for all that you are. I will always encourage you and stand by your side through the good times and the bad. I will always be faithful to you and I will do my part to create and share a beautiful life with you. Kurt, I take you to be my husband and my partner for life. I swear to always love, respect, honor and adore you for as long as we both shall live."

Kurt had been holding up well so far, but by the time Blaine finished his vows, tears were cascading freely down his face. He wasn't sure how in the world he was supposed to follow that, but he would do his best. He pulled one hand away from Blaine's for a moment so he would wipe his tears, then clasped Blaine's hand again and smiled as he began to speak his own vows.

"Blaine, I know I've said this to you before, but it's worth repeating: you have literally saved my life in more ways than one. You raised me up from a very dark place and I will never be able to thank you enough for as long as I live. I can only hope that my everlasting love is thanks enough, and it is this love that I pledge to you today. I promise to give you the best of myself and to always be open and honest with you. I will grow with you and I will not be afraid to face any of life's challenges with you, because I know that you will always stand by me and I will stand by you. I promise to love you with my whole heart, for my whole life, completely and forever.

"You inspire me every single day in all that you do, and I can promise only to do my best to inspire you just as much. I promise that as your husband, I will also be your best friend, your lover, your soul mate, and your life companion. You made me the happiest man alive when you agreed to marry me, and I will never make you regret that decision. As time passes and life goes on, my love for you will only grow stronger. This is my solemn vow."

It was Blaine's turn to cry now as he listened to Kurt assert his love for him in such poignant vows. He still couldn't believe that this was happening, but all he had to do was look into Kurt's magnificent eyes and let himself be surrounded by the love they reflected.

Now came one of the most crucial parts of the ceremony. Neither of them was sure why, but both of their hearts had started to beat faster as the rings were presented.

"These rings are a symbol of your love for each other – without beginning or end. Your love for one another didn't begin on a certain day at a certain time. It has always been inside you, even if you did not realize it until you met, and likewise it will never come to an end. It is a perfect symbol of complete unity and wholeness."

Blaine's hands were trembling as he listened to the officiant's words. He was hoping Kurt wouldn't notice, but when he smiled tenderly and gave Blaine's hands a gentle squeeze, Blaine was glad that he had.

"Blaine," the officiant addressed him, "would you please take Kurt's ring, place it on his finger, and repeat after me: 'Kurt, all that I am, I give to you. Let this ring be a symbol of my promises to you and a reminder of my devotion to you. I am honored to call you my husband.'"

"Kurt, all that I am, I give to you," Blaine repeated as he slid Kurt's ring into place on his finger. He tried to speak strongly despite the tears that choked his voice. "Let this ring be a symbol of my promises to you and a reminder of my devotion to you. I am honored to call you my husband."

Kurt then repeated the same short vows as he placed Blaine's ring on his finger. When he was finished, they joined hands again and smiled at each other as they awaited the words that would make it official.

"Kurt and Blaine, I congratulate you both on behalf of all your loved ones gathered here today," the officiant said. "May you sincerely strive all your lives to honor the commitment that you pledged to one another as you were joined in matrimony today. And now, by the power given to me by the state of Illinois, I declare that you are husband and husband. Please seal your union with a kiss."

The feeling that overwhelmed both of them in that moment was indescribable. The moment the words "husband and husband" left the officiant's mouth, both of their faces broke into the biggest smiles they'd ever worn in their lives. They let their elated gaze linger for a second longer as each of them tried to grasp the fact that this man was his *husband*, then Blaine stood on his tiptoes and Kurt took his face tenderly between both of his hands to pull him into what was undoubtedly the sweetest and most electrifying kiss they'd ever shared. Neither of them could stop smiling as their lips moved softly together, and they broke away for a brief second only to go right back in for one more quick kiss.

They joined hands and turned to walk back down the main center aisle as the officiant spoke up behind them. "Ladies and gentlemen, it is my privilege to present to you, for the first time, Mr. and Mr. Hummel-Anderson."

Neither of them could stop smiling as they headed back down the aisle accompanied by an enthusiastic standing ovation from their families and friends. In that moment, both of them knew that they had never felt more loved.

xxx

The reception following the ceremony was essentially four hours of complete and utter blissful chaos. Kurt and Blaine made their grand entrance together to Katy Perry's original recording of "Teenage Dream" (the song choice had been Blaine's, obviously, but Kurt had loved the idea of incorporating the first song Blaine had sang for him into their wedding). From that moment, there was hardly a moment of

peace for them as they warmly accepted the congratulations and well-wishes of their loved ones with nearly every turn they made.

Their first real moment alone – or as close to it as possible – as husband and husband came when they stepped out onto the dance floor to share their first dance together. Blaine didn't think he felt nervous, but his hands were clammy as the slow opening beat of N'Sync's "This I Promise You" began to flow through the speakers. His husband, of course, was quick to notice.

"You make powerful speeches in front of tons of important people in court all the time, and you're nervous about slow dancing in front of a few hundred of our loved ones for four and a half minutes?" Kurt murmured with the tiniest little smirk as they began the steps they'd practiced.

Blaine's face turned warm. "You can tell I'm nervous?"

"I know you," was Kurt's simple response.

As a teenage Justin Timberlake's voice filled the room, Blaine did his best to overcome his shyness and look into Kurt's breathtaking eyes. It was hard to tell what color they were now that the lights in the room were down.

"It's my first dance with you as your husband," Blaine continued softly after a second. "I don't want to mess this up."

Kurt laughed and pulled him closer as they danced. "Blaine, there is absolutely nothing that can mess this up right now," he whispered. "I'm married to the most amazing man who ever lived. This is perfect."

It didn't take long for Blaine to realize that there was no way he could doubt Kurt, not when his eyes were lit up with that beautiful smile of his and he when he spoke with such tender, quiet affection. He relaxed considerably, earning a tiny smile from Kurt. Neither of them said a word for the rest of the song; they simply kept their eyes locked as they danced together and let the music surround them.

The whole time they danced, as he looked into Kurt's eyes, Blaine couldn't help but think about the words his husband had written in the letter Blaine had read before the ceremony as well as in his vows. Kurt had risen up from a very dark time in his life in order to be here sharing this moment with Blaine today, and although Blaine didn't think he should take *all* the credit from saving Kurt from the abuse he'd been suffering, he figured the least he could do was remind his husband that he'd always be there.

He was tempted to sing softly along with the *And I promise you never will you hurt anymore* line, but opted to stand on his tiptoes a bit and kiss Kurt's forehead lovingly during that line instead. Kurt understood the significance of the gesture and trembled closer into Blaine's arms; Blaine held him even tighter for the rest of the dance and smiled to reassure Kurt that he wasn't going anywhere.

When the music faded away, they shared a passionate kiss in the middle of the dance floor, earning a few whistles along with the standard round of applause. The DJ welcomed the rest of the guests out onto the dance floor, and the newlyweds shared a rueful smile as they realized that their blissful time alone was ending. They spent most of the rest of the time dancing with their family and friends, but the whole time, each of them was longing more and more desperately for the other.

After all, night was coming, and they had a brand new marriage to consummate.

xxx

The kissing started in the car that took them from the reception site back to the suite at the luxurious hotel where they would be spending their wedding night. The moment they'd gotten situated in the backseat, Kurt had immediately grabbed an unsuspecting (and subsequently, pleasantly surprised) Blaine and kissed him intensely. He would be lying if he'd said that he hadn't been eagerly anticipating this moment all day – the moment when all the excitement died down and they could finally, finally, *finally* be alone together. The driver of their car paid them no mind as they tangled together and made out fervently in the backseat. Neither of them wanted to go any further just yet – after all, they still didn't have *complete* privacy – but even so, their lips never parted for the entire duration of the trip to the hotel.

They broke away quickly enough to thank the driver as they exited the car at the hotel and headed inside. Thankfully, they had already arranged to have their things sent to the room in advance, so there was no heavy luggage to weigh them down. As soon as they were alone in the elevator, Blaine gently but forcefully pushed Kurt back against the wall and began to attack his lips again, but he didn't get very far before Kurt abruptly broke the kiss.

"What's wrong?" Blaine tried to sound concerned, he really did, but his libido had taken over everything at this point. "Why aren't we kissing?"

"We're in a glass elevator, Blaine." Kurt gestured out to the spacious interior of the grand hotel as they continued their ascent up.

Blaine had been well aware of that fact. "Exactly. This way, I get to show off my sexy husband to anyone who happens to glance up here at us."

Kurt couldn't help breaking into a smile when Blaine used that word. "I don't think I can ever get tired of hearing you say that. You're my *husband*."

"And you're *my* husband." Blaine returned his smile before pouting a little bit. "Now can we please kiss again?"

It was hard to resist Blaine when he was being so completely adorable like this, so Kurt instantly gave in and kissed him passionately again, glass elevator be damned. Unfortunately, their lips had only been locked for a fraction of a second before the doors slid open to empty the two of them out onto their floor.

Neither of them had had the time to drink enough champagne at the reception to get them anywhere near drunk, but heading down the hallway to their room still was much more difficult than it should have been. They couldn't make it more than a few steps without one of them leaning over and stealing a kiss, so as a result they stumbled and kissed their way down the hall until Blaine happened to catch their room number on one of the doors and blurted out, "This is it, this is it," right as they were about to walk past it. He fumbled for the keycard in his wallet – a simple task which, again, was made significantly more complicated due to the fact that Kurt was kissing his neck and letting his hands wander liberally below his waist.

Eventually they managed to get the door unlocked and opened, and they somehow ended up kissing again as they clumsily stepped into the room, refusing to untangle themselves from each other. Once the door was closed behind them, Kurt immediately pushed Blaine up against it and licked into his mouth, moaning deeply when their tongues met. He was getting more and more sexually frustrated with each passing second, and it didn't take much to turn him on. It was no surprise, then, that Blaine was the first to try and break the kiss.

"Kurt." He tried to break away and speak as best as he could, but Kurt didn't let him get very far, which made his voice sound muffled.

"Mmmm." His husband mistook Blaine's use of his name for some kind of acknowledgment of their current state of sexual deprivation, so he refused to pull away from Blaine's lips.

Blaine finally managed to break completely free from Kurt's lips, however reluctantly. "Wait just a second," he gasped.

Kurt's eyes widened and he pouted and looked so unfairly adorable that it was nearly impossible for Blaine not to kiss him again. "But...married-couple sex."

"I know. Oh, god, I know. I want it, too. And we'll get there," Blaine promised him, taking both of his hands. "But I think we should savor this, too. We only get one wedding night, after all."

Kurt considered this for a second before nodding in agreement. "You have a point."

Blaine smiled and took his hand. "C'mon."

They stepped away from the door and further into the extravagant honeymoon suite, which had been a gift that both of their families had chipped in to get for them since they had temporarily postponed their plans to go to Paris. Neither of them could believe how luxurious it was, and they took a few minutes to wander around, *oohing* and *ahhing* over whatever happened to catch their eye, like the spacious Jacuzzi bathtub, the large vase of red roses on the vanity table, and the gigantic king bed framed on all four sides by a flowing canopy.

"Oh my god, Blaine," Kurt whispered after they'd seen just about everything. "This is beautiful."

He stepped over and ran his hand lightly along the silk canopy before sitting gingerly on the edge of the bed. "I can't even believe this. It feels like a dream."

"I know it's hard to believe, but it's real," Blaine asserted with a smile as he came over to sit next to Kurt on the bed. He took one of his husband's hands and held it tenderly between both of his own. "We're married, Kurt."

Kurt nodded, and a single tear rolled off his cheek and fell softly onto the soft satin of the comforter. "I never thought this would happen to me. I never thought I'd ever be able to get married, let alone to the most perfect man in the world."

"I can say the same thing about myself," Blaine murmured, chuckling a little bit. "But we beat the odds, didn't we?"

Kurt gulped back another sob and nodded again. He smiled as he met Blaine's eyes with tears of joy shining in his own. "We really did, huh?"

Blaine simply smiled and placed one hand lovingly on Kurt's face. Kurt's eyes softened dreamily and he melted against Blaine's hand as he tenderly stroked the line of his cheekbone with his calloused musician's thumb.

"Perfection doesn't even begin to describe you," Blaine whispered as he looked straight into Kurt's eyes. "I love you so much, Kurt."

"I love you, too." Kurt's responding whisper was so soft that Blaine felt the words breathed against his lips more than he actually heard them.

He pulled Kurt into a slow, proper kiss that stole the breath right out of his lungs. Kurt kissed him back deeply, his talented lips pressing against Blaine's in all the ways he loved, before breaking just the slightest bit away after a while to whisper one request against Blaine's lips.

"I know you said we should try and savor this," he whispered, "but I really just want to have sex with you right now."

"Shameless," Blaine giggled, shaking his head a little bit in disbelief. "My husband is shameless."

He had to admit, though, that he was the complete opposite of opposed to Kurt's suggestion. They were both male, after all, and their craving for sex was starting to take precedence over everything, as it usually did.

Blaine kissed him again and continued speaking right into Kurt's lips. "Why don't you tell me exactly what it is you want?"

"I want you inside me," Kurt gasped breathlessly as Blaine moved his mouth to his neck and gently sunk his teeth into the soft, pale skin. "I want to ride you."

The thought of that alone was enough to make Blaine harder than he already was. He loved letting Kurt ride him. He loved feeling the tight heat of him from the inside while simultaneously feeling the full force of those hips in action.

"That sounds like a fantastic way to make love for the first time as a married couple," he agreed before standing up from the bed and pulling Kurt with him.

Kurt allowed Blaine to lead him to a standing position, but he was still confused. "What are you doing?"

Blaine responded by wordlessly slipping Kurt's tuxedo jacket off his shoulders and setting it aside. It didn't take Kurt long to catch on at all, and he immediately reciprocated the action and stripped Blaine of his own jacket. They began undressing each other rather quickly but started to slow down a bit when they each got to the last few layers. Hands lingered and wandered along skin as they each stripped the other out of their underwear, and when both were completely naked they merely stood there for a second, drinking the other in, before stepping closer and enveloping each other in an embrace.

"You're so beautiful," Kurt whispered, then gasped back a moan as his cock, which was just about as hard as it was going to get, pressed right up against Blaine's. "God, this feels amazing."

"This is what I've been waiting for all day," Blaine admitted, kissing the side of Kurt's neck as he spoke. "Just being with you like this."

Despite the tender nature of his words, he couldn't help grinding his hips right into Kurt's as he spoke. The sudden friction caused Kurt to cry out before he literally growled with need as he pushed Blaine to the bed, doing his best not to allow even one inch of space to come between them.

"Oh god, Blaine...I need you. I need you right now." Kurt was practically panting with desire and need as he writhed beneath Blaine. "Inside me. Just do it."

Blaine shook his head. "No, Kurt," he said softly. "I'm not going in dry. I'm not going to hurt you, especially not on our wedding night. I want to do this right."

Kurt, despite the orgasm that was already threatening to rip through his body at any second, was sincerely touched by his words and the affection with which he spoke them. It still astonished him how much Blaine loved and cared about him. A tiny smile touched his lips as Blaine slicked up his fingers with lube and began inserting them into Kurt one by one, preparing him lovingly just as he always did, causing Kurt to make all kinds of soft little noises as Blaine stretched him out.

When he was sufficiently loosened up, Kurt smiled as he kissed Blaine and rolled the two of them over so that he was on top. Blaine didn't protest as Kurt took the bottle of lube, squirted some into his hands, and

began slicking up Blaine's cock for him. When he was finished, he leaned down and gave Blaine another kiss, this one accompanied by a whispered, "I love you."

"Love you," Blaine whispered back. He placed his hands on Kurt's hips to help guide him into place as Kurt cupped his face and kissed him softly one more time. They broke away, shared a lingering smile for a second, and intertwined their fingers to lock their hands together as Kurt pushed himself the rest of the way down onto Blaine.

They tried to take it slowly at first, they really did, but it wasn't long before both of them were overwhelmed with the need to speed things up. Blaine knew that he'd never seen anything as beautiful as Kurt was in that moment, with his creamy pale skin glowing in the moonlight that was shining through the window, his once-perfect hair now completely disheveled, his eyes closed and his head thrown back in ecstasy as he whimpered and moaned and screamed, and his gorgeous cock bouncing up and down as he continued grinding down against Blaine's hips. And despite the physical passion that seemed to overwhelm all other sensations, both of them knew in the backs of their minds that there was something new in the way their bodies were coming together that night, even though it was far from being the first time they'd made love. For some reason, the knowledge that this was just the beginning of their lives together as a married couple made this the sweetest and most passionate sexual encounter they'd ever shared.

When they were both finished, Kurt lifted himself off of Blaine and pulled his husband up into a sitting position against the overabundance of pillows that had been piled onto the top of the bed. Kurt, still straddling Blaine's waist, leaned forward so that their foreheads were touching as both of them gasped for breath. Blaine smiled and placed one hand on Kurt's chest, feeling his heart beat under his touch.

"That was amazing," Blaine whispered as he pushed a stray strand of hair back from Kurt's forehead. *"You're amazing."*

"God, Blaine, I love you," Kurt murmured as he wrapped his arms around Blaine's neck and pulled him into a desperate kiss. "I love you so much."

They kissed for a long time, both of them knowing full well that they were nowhere near ready to simply go to sleep just yet. Before long, both of them were starting to get hard again and they rolled their hips together as they kissed, each moaning into the other's mouth as their erections pressed together.

Kurt was the first one to pull away from the kiss, a twinkle of mischief and desire sparkling in his eyes as he spoke.

"Y'know, there's nothing that says we *have* to stop now," he murmured, running one hand lazily down Blaine's chest. "You up for round two?"

Blaine smirked as he snaked his hands up and let them tangle through Kurt's already disheveled hair.

"Bring it on, Hummel-Anderson."

xxx

By the time Blaine woke up the next morning, the sun was already high in the sky and streaming in through the window. According to the digital clock on the bedside table, it was almost 11:30 – later than he'd allowed himself to sleep in what seemed like forever. Both sets of parents and Michael and Ellie were coming to meet them for brunch at the hotel at 1:30, so Blaine wasn't too worried about waking Kurt up just yet since they still had a couple of hours. Instead, he was perfectly content to lie there for a little while longer, drinking in just how beautiful his husband was as he slept.

Kurt was still out like a light, breathing deeply and slowly. Blaine put one hand tenderly on his chest, watching it rise and fall with the flow of his breath. In his sleep, Kurt must have sensed the touch, because one of his own hands slowly and unconsciously moved up to close over Blaine's and hold it in place. For whatever reason, Blaine felt like his heart was going to melt.

"Kurt?" he whispered, just to make sure he wasn't awake just yet.

His husband gave him no response other than stirring the slightest bit in his sleep.

"God, you're so beautiful," Blaine continued in a soft whisper. "Do you even *know* how much I love you?"

He wasn't expecting the still-sleeping Kurt to respond, but that was just fine with him. If anything, it gave Blaine more time to stare at his angelic face and try to make sense of the fact that this perfect man now belonged to him forever.

"I love you so much, Kurt," Blaine said softly with a tiny smile. "I love you more than life itself. You *are* my life. I'm so happy you're my husband now."

Kurt's full lips were parted slightly and suddenly Blaine was overwhelmed with the urge to close the small distance between the two of them with a kiss. So he did. He kissed him sweetly for a second before Kurt's eyes slowly fluttered open.

"Hi," Kurt murmured softly, his voice still drowsy from sleep. Blaine had always thought that Kurt's sleepy voice was pretty much the cutest thing ever, so he couldn't resist leaning in and kissing his lips again.

"Hi," Blaine whispered back in between kisses. "You can go back to sleep, but I want to kiss you."

Kurt shook his head. "No, no, I want to kiss you, too." He placed one hand on the back of Blaine's neck and pulled him down closer. "Let's just stay here and kiss all day."

"As much as I would love to do that, we're meeting everyone for brunch in a couple hours, remember?" Blaine reminded him, but reciprocated his kiss all the same.

"Yeah, but they all know we're newlyweds," Kurt gasped against Blaine's lips. "I'm sure they'll understand."

Blaine pulled away far enough to look him in the eyes as he spoke, pretending not to notice how Kurt lifted his head up and chased after his lips for the briefest of seconds.

"You have a point there," he agreed. "And ever since last night, we've been doing what newlyweds do best."

"Expressing their love for each other with lots and lots of fantastic post-wedding sex?" Kurt asked with a breathless smile. "Yeah. I could definitely get used to that."

"God, Kurt, last night was incredible," Blaine gushed as he attached his lips to Kurt's skin again. He began kissing down his neck, down over his chest and onto his stomach before looking up to meet his eyes. "Best night of my life for sure."

"Yesterday was the best *day* of my life, period," Kurt sighed as Blaine resumed planting soft little kisses all over his toned stomach. "I'm officially the luckiest man alive now." He grinned and fluttered his fingers to show off his wedding ring.

Blaine rested his head on Kurt's stomach and smiled up at him as he raised his own left hand and laced it together with Kurt's.

"I have to disagree with you on that," he murmured. "I would say that *I'm* the luckiest man alive."

Kurt quirked one eyebrow and smirked a little bit. "Y'know, we could argue about this some more, or we can make out some more and have sex again before we have to start getting ready. What do you think?"

Blaine considered this for a second before a knowing smile spread across his face. He crawled back up Kurt's body and kissed him quickly, letting his tongue flick lightly against the other man's lips as he pulled away.

"I think," he said softly, "that I married the smartest man alive."

xxx

Two hours later, Mr. and Mr. Hummel-Anderson forced themselves to leave the horny, sex-craved parts of themselves behind as they took the elevator downstairs to the lobby. They'd managed to do a pretty good job of cleaning themselves up after their wild sexual encounters of the past few hours, and to anyone else, they would have looked like nothing more than the picturesque newlywed same-sex couple.

But Burt Hummel knew his son better than anyone else in that hotel (save for maybe Blaine) and he could immediately tell upon greeting the couple that Kurt was biting back a guilty smile. After hugs were given all around and the group was seated around a large table in the corner of the spacious breakfast room, he couldn't help taking a dig.

"So, I'm guessing last night went well," Burt commented as nonchalantly as possible as he opened a tiny container of half-and-half and dumped all of it into his coffee.

Blaine practically choked on the sip of orange juice he'd just taken, and Kurt instinctively turned to rub his back even as he protested. "Dad, *please*."

"Look, kiddo, just because you're married now doesn't mean I get to stop embarrassing you," Burt told him.

"Not when you practically make my husband choke on his drink," Kurt muttered, even as the tiniest hint of a smile threatened to tug up the corners of his mouth.

"It's okay, I'm fine," Blaine reassured everyone before smiling innocently at his father-in-law. "And if you must know, it was incredible."

Ellie, who was sitting on the other side of Kurt, tugged on the sleeve of his jacket to get his attention. "Daddy, what are they talking about?"

"Nothing, sweetie," Kurt said out of the corner of his mouth. Nobody else seemed to have noticed that she'd spoken up, and he wanted to keep it that way, seeing how this conversation was going. "Grandpa's just joking around. He wants to know how Blaine and I spent our time back at the hotel after the wedding."

He realized that this had been the wrong thing to say when she followed up with yet another curious question, as seven-year-old girls tend to do. "What did you guys do? Were you kissing?"

Suddenly her face brightened up with an epiphany. Unfortunately for Kurt, this was the exact moment that everyone else at the table decided to turn in their general direction to see what was going on.

"Oh! I know! Were you guys doing that thing that I heard you doing that one time, Daddy? The one where Blaine was yelling your name and you were being really loud and—"

"Okay, Ellie, that's enough," Kurt blurted out. He couldn't even imagine how red his face must have been. "What Blaine and I forgot to tell you about that is that it's not something we usually talk about in public.

"And yet we've been talking about it ever since we sat down," Michael pointed out with a knowing smirk.

"Touché," Blaine admitted, then reached across the table to give him a high five. "See, Kurt, *someone* here is on our side."

"Sure," Bill cracked in response to his son. "A fourteen-year-old boy."

"Okay, now that you all probably think we're the most irresponsible parents in the world, let's change the subject," Kurt suggested.

"You're not irresponsible," Carole assured him quietly. "It happens more than you think, trust me. You're definitely not the first parents to have that happen."

Michael, meanwhile, was leaning over to mutter something to Ellie under his breath. "In a couple years, you'll look back on this and it will all make sense."

Mercifully for Kurt and Blaine, the conversation over the rest of the meal was relatively family-friendly and didn't warrant any embarrassing explanations. As much as they'd relished their time alone together after the wedding, they both had to admit that this time spent together with the people they loved most was the sweetest of all.

At one point, Blaine reached for something on the table and Kurt happened to catch a glimpse of the light in the room reflecting off his wedding ring as his hand moved. He knew it seemed so insignificant, but seeing the infinity band wrapped around Blaine's finger just made everything seem more real to Kurt. Those were the same hands that had comforted him when he'd been more vulnerable and scared than ever before in his life, and now they were adorned with a symbol that bound the two of them together forever.

Without even realizing what he was doing, Kurt reached for Blaine's hand and held on tight. As Blaine's eyes met his and they shared a smile, he knew that figuratively speaking, Blaine would never let go.

Epilogue

A lot can happen in a decade. I've learned that lesson twice over the past 20 years of my life. 20 years ago I was almost 18, about a month away from graduating from high school, and I'd unknowingly just entered a relationship with a man who would start to brutally abuse me a couple of years down the road. 20 years ago, Blaine Anderson was nothing more than my best friend in the entire world, and despite the fact that I'd hopelessly fallen head-over-heels in love with his beautiful hazel eyes and dreamy smile, I thought that was all he'd ever be.

If only the Kurt Hummel who existed two decades ago could meet the Kurt Hummel-Anderson who I am today. I think he'd be dumbstruck and highly impressed with the person he was destined to become.

I can honestly say that I've learned to love myself in the ten years I've been married to Blaine. But I know I will never be able to see myself through his eyes, just as he will also never be able to see his own perfection in the same way I do. Both of us are extremely busy (married life certainly isn't as fairy tale-like as it may seem, believe it or not) but that doesn't change the fact that I love him more and more with each passing second. And now that we are finally alone together in the most romantic city on earth, I couldn't be more thankful for that one day back in 2010, when I decided to pop into Dalton Academy for a visit.

"Qu'est-ce que tu écris, mon amour?"

Kurt immediately dropped his pen in between the pages of his journal and flipped the book shut when he heard his husband's voice. He looked up, and sure enough, there was Blaine – soaking wet from the shower he'd just taken, wearing nothing but a towel around his waist, and looking unfairly hot.

Kurt rolled his eyes but smiled as he turned to set the journal on the bedside table.

"That's the worst French accent I've ever heard," he pointed out with a giggle. "I was writing in my journal."

"Since when do you keep a journal?" Blaine asked in response. He sauntered over to the bed, dropped his towel casually to the floor, and crawled under the covers beside Kurt, who was also naked. They'd arrived in Paris late last night, and despite the fact that both of them were completely exhausted from traveling, neither could pass up the opportunity to make love just once when they first arrived at the hotel. They'd both fallen asleep almost immediately after they'd finished, but neither of them regretted the decision.

After all, it was their ten-year anniversary, they were both in their late thirties, and they were finally taking the honeymoon of their dreams. If that wasn't a cause for some kind of sexual celebration, nothing was.

"Since today," Kurt explained. "I thought it would be neat to keep something like a travel diary, but I kind of started writing about something...*someone* else instead." He turned to give Blaine a satisfied little smile.

Blaine played dumb. "And just who might that 'someone else' be?" he murmured, taking Kurt completely into his arms and holding him close. Ten years later, he still hadn't gotten used to how amazing it felt to hold Kurt in his arms. He would never, ever take this for granted.

"Oh, just this guy," Kurt answered, purposely nonchalant. He tried to keep his tone as casual as possible despite the fact that he was suddenly feeling all warm and tingly inside – an entire decade had passed, and Blaine could still make him feel like that. "His name is Blaine Hummel-Anderson and he's *perfect*."

Then, because he couldn't help himself, he tilted his head up and closed his eyes. Blaine immediately understood and was more than happy to close the small distance between them with a gentle kiss on his lips.

"Perfect, huh?" Blaine asked once they broke away. "I think you're giving this Blaine guy too much credit."

Kurt shook his head. "Oh, no, that's not true. He's the most amazing man who ever lived and somehow I got lucky enough to marry him."

He smiled up at Blaine and looked so adorable that Blaine couldn't help kissing him again.

"I don't know what's more incredible," Blaine commented after he'd successfully kissed an even bigger smile onto Kurt's mouth. "The fact that we've been married for ten years or the fact that we've known each other for twenty."

"Actually, that's just what I was writing about before you got out here," Kurt told him. He moved to rest his head on Blaine's chest and absentmindedly ran his fingers over his husband's tanned skin. "How I can't believe everything that's happened between us these past two decades. I don't know if I'll ever be able to believe it."

And a lot had happened indeed. A few years after getting married, they'd moved from their trendy waterfront apartment on Lake Shore Drive to a larger, cozier house in the suburbs – the better to accommodate their larger family. They'd had another child together – a little girl, eight years old now, who was biologically Blaine's and whose surrogate mother had been their friend Savannah. As for their other children, Ellie was now seventeen and just finishing up her junior year of high school, and Michael was twenty-four and living his dream of playing ball: he'd been drafted professionally right out of college and was just beginning his second season at shortstop for the White Sox. In doing so, he'd also assured himself a place in the history books as one of the first openly gay men ever to set foot on a major league field.

As Blaine took a few seconds to think back and reflect on all this, it suddenly seemed as if the past ten years had flown by, but his husband was absolutely right. Their lives had changed in so many ways after they'd gotten married, and he was grateful for each and every single one of those changes.

He turned and placed a soft kiss on the corner of Kurt's mouth. "You want to know how else we change our lives and kick off our second decade together as a married couple?"

"How's that?" Kurt asked in response.

"We can get up, get ready, and go explore the most romantic city on earth."

Kurt smiled up at him. "I like the way you think."

xxx

When Blaine had first started planning this honeymoon years ago, he'd envisioned bright springtime warmth and sunshine. And for the first twenty minutes or so that they spent exploring the city, that's exactly what he got. They managed to make it to the Love Bridge over the Seine and completed the tradition of attaching a padlock inscribed with both of their names to the chain-link sides before ceremoniously tossing the key into the river. After catching a ride on the metro to the Eiffel Tower, they stepped off the train and were just making their way toward the famous monument when suddenly Kurt felt a raindrop.

He glanced up at the sky, which was darkening with clouds, before turning to Blaine. "Is it...?"

Before he could finish his thought, he felt another drop. Then another. Suddenly it seemed as if the sky had completely opened up and let everything go. It wasn't completely pouring, but it was no light shower, either.

Blaine returned Kurt's gaze for a second longer before turning away and clamping a hand over his mouth. His shoulders were shaking and it took Kurt a few seconds to realize that he was trying to hold back a massive giggle fit.

"Why are you laughing?" Kurt asked, despite the fact that a huge smile was spreading across his own face. He had to admit, there was something humorous about the irony of the whole situation. They'd waited ten years to come here, and now that they'd finally arrived, the weather wasn't going to cooperate (and, of course, they hadn't thought to bring umbrellas). "We're getting soaked."

"Look on the bright side," Blaine pointed out, gesturing toward the tower. "At least now, we won't have to wait in such a long line. C'mon."

He grabbed Kurt's hand and began pulling his giggling husband across the Champ de Mars toward the line, happy to discover that he was right – in lieu of the rain, many of their fellow tourists were quickly deserting the line and running for cover. Sure enough, they didn't have to wait for very long at all before they had reached the front and were being escorted, along with a few other brave souls who had withstood the sudden precipitation, into the elevator to the top.

"Do you think we'll be able to see much?" Kurt asked Blaine quietly once the doors had slid shut and the elevator had begun its ascent.

Blaine grasped Kurt's hand and looked him in the eyes. "It doesn't even matter if we can't see a thing. Because even on a clear day, the view from up there could never even come close to being as beautiful as you are."

Suddenly, despite the fact that they were crammed into an enclosed space with several other people, most of whom were speaking other languages, Kurt couldn't help but feel like this moment was extremely intimate.

"Going to the top of the Eiffel Tower is on everyone's bucket list," Blaine continued in a low murmur, so that Kurt was the only person in the elevator who would have been able to hear him. "And not only do I get to cross this experience off mine, but I get to share it with you. That's the best part of all."

Kurt was so overwhelmed that he couldn't even think of a response before the elevator doors swooshed open and emptied them out onto the observation deck. The rain was just as persistent as it had been when they'd first arrived, and he resorted to accept the fact that he was going to have one of the most incredible experiences of his life while soaking wet from the rain.

Even so, he managed to grin and bear it – after all, he was here with Blaine, and that was the best part about this whole experience. He gave his husband a tiny smile before gently leading him to a more secluded section of the deck so they could have as much privacy as possible.

Blaine smiled apologetically. "Sorry the weather didn't work out. I know this probably isn't how you pictured it—"

He was about to say more, but Kurt silenced him with a gentle press of his index finger against Blaine's lips. Blaine obediently shut his mouth, but he couldn't resist puckering up just a little bit to give Kurt's finger a tiny kiss.

"Blaine, what were you just saying as we were taking the elevator up here?"

"That I didn't care what the weather was doing, as long as I got to experience this with you."

"The same goes for me," Kurt told him with a smile that looked beautifully radiant even in the gray, dismal weather. "This is everything I dreamed it would be, and it's all because of you."

After the words had left his mouth, Blaine quickly realized that he had no choice but to kiss him, so that's exactly what he did. He stood on his tiptoes and took Kurt's face between his hands before crashing their lips gently but forcefully together. It was as passionate as kisses come, and from some warily conscious corner of his mind Blaine thought that it just might have been one of his favorite kisses he'd shared with Kurt (which was saying a lot, because every single kiss with Kurt had been incredible in its own way). But as he kissed his husband in the pouring rain atop one of the most famous landmarks in the world, he realized that there was a completely new sensation present this time. He soon realized that it was a sense

of wholeness and satisfaction – they'd both been waiting to come here and share this moment together for so long, and now that it was finally happening, he finally felt complete.

xxx

When they returned to the base of the tower, the rain had intensified into a torrential downpour. The first crack of lightning struck across the sky just as they were approaching the metro station, and they clung to each other's hands as they waited impatiently for the train to arrive. Once inside the warm car, they stood as close together as possible, huddling for warmth.

The storm was in full swing when they finally arrived at their stop, about a block away from the hotel. Once they'd run through the rain and gotten safely inside the building, they stopped and looked at each other for a second before both of them started to laugh again.

"I can't even believe this," Kurt gasped through his laughter. "This whole day is crazy."

Blaine couldn't help but notice that he was shivering from the cold, so he wrapped an arm around Kurt's shoulder and guided him toward the elevator.

"Crazy indeed," he agreed. "Now c'mon, you're cold and I think I know the best way for us to warm up."

The second they made it to their suite, with the door shut and locked behind them, their sopping wet clothes were being peeled away and tossed unceremoniously to the floor. Once he was naked, Blaine realized he was even colder than he'd just been, and he was about to head straight for the bed and get under the covers when suddenly Kurt grabbed his wrist to stop him in his tracks.

He immediately turned to face his husband, who smiled before pulling Blaine into a kiss. Their nude bodies pressed together, slicked with rainwater and sharing warmth as they carefully made their way back through the room to the luxurious king-size bed.

When all was said and done some time later, Blaine rested his head on Kurt's chest and pulled the covers up closer around them, enveloping the two of them in pure warmth. Kurt tightened his arms around Blaine and kissed his forehead tenderly, and Blaine closed his eyes as he melted closer into the embrace. The storm was still raging outside, but he could hardly hear the rolling of the thunder and the soothing tap of the raindrops against the window over the rhythm of Kurt's heart.

"How is this possible?" Blaine asked after a while.

"How is what possible?" Kurt's responsive murmur was muffled slightly as he kissed the top of Blaine's head.

Blaine snuggled even closer into his husband's embrace. "How we've been married for ten years, and being with you like this still takes my breath away. At this point I don't think I'll ever get used to it."

Kurt smiled Blaine's favorite smile. "I adore you. Did you know that?"

Blaine picked his head up off of Kurt's chest and smiled as he inched closer to his face.

"I'm well aware," he said softly. "And I adore you as well."

Lightning crackled across the sky outside their window and both of them were still smiling as their lips fell together in a kiss.

xxx

The following day was significantly better weather-wise, so Mr. and Mr. Hummel-Anderson decided to take advantage of the beautiful spring day to continue their tour of the city that had been unexpectedly cut short by the rain the previous afternoon. They walked hand-in-hand through Montmartre; they spent a few hours marveling at the magnificent artwork inside the Louvre; they ate a romantic dinner at an upscale restaurant on an outdoor patio along the river. But no matter what they were doing, Blaine couldn't help but taking a few seconds every so often to admire the glow of joy that had brightened Kurt's face. He remembered the way Kurt had looked on that Christmas Eve so many years ago when Blaine had first mentioned the idea of honeymooning in Paris to him, and suddenly he realized that he'd never seen Kurt look quite this happy since that night. This was a completely different kind of happiness than usual – this was *I'm so thrilled to be sharing the experience of a lifetime with you*.

On the third day, though, they decided that they needed a private escape from the chaos that was Paris and made the somewhat last-minute decision to leave the city for a day or so. They booked a room at a quaint but beautiful little bed-and-breakfast in the mountains of southern France and caught the next train out of Paris.

The ride took a few hours, and Kurt fell asleep within the first forty-five minutes. Blaine tentatively touched his hand to see how he reacted; Kurt responded with nothing more than the deep, labored breaths he'd been taking. He was out cold. Blaine smiled tenderly, still holding Kurt's hand as he turned to look out the window at the French countryside racing by, but suddenly something else caught his eye.

In the front pocket of Kurt's messenger bag was a small hardback spiral notebook. Blaine immediately recognized it as the travel journal Kurt had been keeping over the course of their trip. He smiled as he recalled their first morning in Paris, when he'd gotten out of the shower and come back into the bedroom only to find his husband wide awake, sitting up in bed with the covers pulled up the naked lower half of his body, writing away in this same book. Kurt had been so engrossed in writing that he hadn't even noticed when Blaine had stepped into the room, so Blaine had taken advantage of that opportunity to simply watch him for a few glorious seconds. Kurt was as beautiful as ever at thirty-seven, and to this day he never failed to take Blaine's breath away even while engaged in the most ordinary of activities such as writing a journal entry.

As carefully and quietly as possible, Blaine slipped the small notebook out of its pocket and quickly flipped to the blank pages at the back. Part of him wanted to read what Kurt had written so far, but he knew he shouldn't. Instead, he took the pen that Kurt had hooked into the spiral binding of the notebook, clicked it, and began to write.

He wrote for a long time, and Kurt slept peacefully at his side for the entire time that his pen was flying across the pages. Blaine took periodic wary glances at him to make sure he was still fast asleep. When he was finished, he closed the book and slipped it right back into the pocket where it had been.

Kurt didn't wake up until the train rolled into their stop, and even then it took Blaine gently kissing his forehead and murmuring, "Kurt, *mon amour*, we're here," before he finally let his eyes flutter open.

"Did I sleep for the whole trip?" Kurt mumbled, sounding understandably confused.

Blaine nodded. "Yeah, you did, but you didn't miss much. Lots of scenery going by that was too fast to really see, and the conductor announcing things in French. That's about it." He smiled ruefully.

Kurt rolled his eyes playfully as he stood up from his seat to get off the train. "Oh, god, I missed *so* much. Why didn't you wake me up?"

But he turned and smiled at Blaine as they disembarked, and Blaine could see that there was more to his happiness than his teasing little remark. The sparkle of excitement in his beautiful eyes made it clear to Blaine that Kurt was ready to start the next part of their adventure together.

xxx

It was midafternoon by the time they finally got settled in their room, and both of them were eager to get up and moving after spending so much time sitting on the train. Once everything was situated, they put together a small picnic lunch with some of the food they'd brought with them and headed out into the mindblowingly gorgeous, postcard-like scenery that surrounded them. They walked a good distance away from the tiny little building and found a peaceful little clearing that overlooked a sprawling valley – a perfect spot for a little picnic.

Blaine started spreading out the blanket they'd brought with them, but Kurt had another idea. He helped his husband straighten out the blanket, but turned and started walking back in the direction they'd come as Blaine started getting all the food out of the basket.

Blaine called after him, sounding confused. "Wait, where are you going?"

"I'll be right back!" was Kurt's distant reply, echoing through the mountains. Blaine was a little bit nervous – as beautiful as the region was, neither of them was familiar with it, and Kurt *had* just wandered off alone – but he forced himself to push his worries aside and finish setting up the picnic. Kurt was a grown man, and Blaine trusted him enough to know that he would never deliberately put himself in a dangerous situation.

He had just finished getting all the food organized when suddenly the world went black. It took him a fraction of a second of pure panic before he realized that someone had put their hands over his eyes from behind, and all his inhibitions completely melted away when he heard an all-too-familiar voice softly whispering, "Guess who?"

"I have absolutely no idea who on earth it could possibly be," Blaine deadpanned with flat sarcasm before turning around to greet his husband with a smile. When he did, though, he was pleasantly touched to see that Kurt was holding a makeshift bouquet of wildflowers, which he presented to Blaine with a smile.

"For you," he said sweetly. "I saw them when we were on our way over here and I couldn't resist being spontaneously romantic."

Blaine graciously accepted the flowers and pulled Kurt into an embrace.

"Kurt, you're so sweet. These are beautiful," he told him. "Thank you. Y'know, your spontaneous romance has always been one of the things that I love the most about you."

Kurt giggled a little bit. "You mean you're not sick of it after ten whole years?"

"No." Blaine shook his head and smiled as he inched closer to give him a kiss. "I love it. I love *you*."

"I love you, too," Kurt told him, as if Blaine could ever forget, before taking a seat on the blanket and patting the spot next to him. "Now won't you come join me in this *delicious* picnic lunch?"

xxx

After a few days of what could quite possibly be classified as pure heaven on earth, it was time to pack up and head back to the reality of everyday life. Neither of them had wanted to take too much time off of work and away from their kids, so they'd decided to keep their belated honeymoon at no longer than a week. Still, it was almost reluctantly that they began to pack up their bags and head for the airport when it was time to do so. Over the course of their entire relationship, they'd never had the luxury of spending so much time alone together, and now that they knew what it was like, they had tried their best to make it last as long as possible.

Ellie, who had gotten her driver's license a few months earlier, came to pick them up at the airport along with Natalie, their youngest (Michael was on the road at an away game, but he'd texted both Kurt and Blaine wishing them a safe flight home and promising to come see them as soon as he was back in Chicago). Both of their daughters ran up to greet them with enthusiastic hugs the second they spotted each other. Suddenly, now that they'd been reunited with their family, neither Kurt nor Blaine could imagine how they ever could have wanted more time apart.

Blaine was almost tempted to collapse on the bed and fall asleep the second they finally arrived back home, but he forced himself to stay awake for the time being and help Kurt unpack. Thankfully, it didn't take too long, and by the time they were finished he was actually feeling a little bit energized while Kurt, who had been doing pretty well after initially arriving home, was suddenly exhausted. Blaine gave him a

kiss on the forehead and left him alone in case he wanted to take a nap before grabbing the gift bag he'd place on the dresser and heading out to find Ellie and Natalie so he could give them the souvenirs that he and Kurt had bought for them.

But despite how completely worn-out he was, Kurt couldn't fall asleep even after lying there with his eyes closed for several minutes. He rolled his eyes, annoyed at himself for not being able to fall asleep, and reached for his messenger bag which he'd tossed onto the floor at the foot of the bed. He decided he would read through his journal for a few minutes and relive the amazing memories of the trip before attempting to fall asleep again.

He flipped open to a random page and was suddenly taken aback when he realized that the handwriting scribbled across the paper was not his own. It took a moment for his tired brain to register exactly who the penmanship belonged to, and when he finally realized whose it was, his heart stopped and he eagerly began to read.

My dearest Kurt,

First of all, please don't be mad at me for opening your private notebook. I promise I didn't read anything you wrote; I just flipped to the back so that I could write this. We're on the train right now and you're fast asleep, and for whatever reason I was overwhelmed with the urge to capture my feelings in this exact moment and write them down. I'm not sure when you're going to read this, but that doesn't matter because I'm sure you will eventually. When you DO read this, please bear with me as I'm sure this is going to turn into a long-winded rambling jumble of words because I'm still not exactly sure how to explain the way I feel for you.

That's kind of funny, now that I think about it – we've been married for a decade and I still can't think of a way to express my love for you in words. Now that I've been trying unsuccessfully for ten years, I think it's time for me to accept the fact that I'll never be able to do it. I never thought I would ever feel this way for anyone, but you've proven me wrong, and I'm so thankful for that. I am eternally grateful that, by some miracle, you love me just as much as I love you and that we're sharing such a beautiful life together. To this day I still have no idea how I ever came to be so lucky.

A few nights before we left Chicago to fly to Paris, I woke up in the middle of the night after having a dream that I can't remember. I looked at you lying beside me, sleeping like an angel just like you are now, and I was so overwhelmed with love for you that I actually shed a few tears. I think it's remarkable how you can still do

that to me – how you still have that effect on me. I fall more and more in love with you every single day, and I still have moments like that where my love for you just completely overwhelms all my other senses.

Thank you for giving me the best ten years of my life as your husband, and thank you for continuing to be my very best friend for the past twenty. Marrying you and raising our three wonderful children with you has been incredible so far, and I can't wait to see what the rest of our lives together has in store for us. Never forget, though, that through everything that may come our way, my love for you will only continue to grow. I love you more and more with every single beat of my heart. I can't wait to grow old with you and share the remainder of our lives together.

But for now, let's take it one step at a time and enjoy our honeymoon together while we're here :) Even if you don't read this until we get home, I've had the most amazing time here with you so far, and I can't wait to see what awaits us during the rest of our trip.

Je t'aime, Kurt.

*Love,
Blaine*

-end-